



## ARTIGOS / ARTICLES

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### **THEOGASTRONOMY: A SUI GENERIS THEOLOGICAL AESTHETIC**

*A teogastronomia: uma estética teológica sui generis*

Francys Silvestrini Adão SJ \*

**ABSTRACT:** This article presents a new theological approach, called “theogastronomy”. This theological aesthetic argues that the relationship that an individual, a people and a civilization establish with their “gastro-nomy” – in the etymological sense of the term – has a *theophanic* value and holds a discreet pastoral and theoretical fecundity. To demonstrate this hypothesis, the present article proceeds in three stages. First, it reflects on the concept of theogastronomy as well as on the relationship between this approach and the religious knowledge of the biblical revelation. Then, it places this theological aesthetic in its own literary and spiritual “cradle”, namely, the sapiential writings. Finally, it shows how this sapiential branch of theology can lead us to revisit, in depth, the living core of the Christian faith: the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, the definitive expression of his free choice to give his life as food for the countless multitude of men and women seeking life in its fullness.

**KEYWORDS:** Theogastronomy. Wisdom. Theological Aesthetics. Paschal Mystery.

**RESUMO:** Neste artigo, o A. apresenta uma nova abordagem teológica, denominada “teogastronomia”. Esta estética teológica defende que a relação que uma pessoa, um povo e uma civilização estabelecem com sua “gastro-nomia” – no sentido etimológico do termo – tem um valor *teofânico* e é detentora de uma discreta fecundidade pastoral e teórica. Para demonstrar esta hipótese, o artigo procede em três momentos. Em primeiro lugar, reflete sobre o conceito de teogastronomia,

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\* Faculdade Jesuíta de Filosofia e Teologia, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brasil.

bem como sobre a relação entre esta abordagem e o saber religioso da revelação bíblica. Em seguida, situa esta estética teológica em seu “berço” literário e espiritual próprio, a saber, os escritos sapienciais. Por fim, mostra como este ramo sapiencial da teologia pode levar-nos a revisitar, em profundidade, o núcleo vivo da fé cristã: o mistério pascal de Jesus Cristo, expressão definitiva de sua livre decisão de dar a própria vida como alimento pela multidão incontável de homens e mulheres em busca de vida em plenitude.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Teogastronomia. Sabedoria. Estética Teológica. Mistério Pascal.

## *Introduction*

In order to fulfill her mission in the world, the Church recognizes her permanent duty “of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (*Gaudium et Spes* 4,1). These signs that must be investigated and discerned are manifested in various ways: in the history of peoples, in the life of Churches, in social movements, in people’s searches, etc. Some of these signs have already become words, projects and institutions. Others, however, are diffuse, hidden in the sensibility of the “flesh” and in the unspoken history of peoples, communities of faith, social dynamics and the life of individuals. Therefore, aiming to deepen this ecclesial task, in order to find new ways of accessing these unnoticed and unspoken elements, the theogastronomic investigation seeks to scrutinize, theologically, the “entrails” of the history of individuals and peoples, from some identifiable signs linked to the world of food<sup>1</sup>.

This new approach aims at mutual help: on the one hand, human flesh and “entrails” will be helped to name both the forces of nourishment and life as well as the forces of intoxication and death that they carry within themselves. On the other hand, theology will be helped to find new symbolic and cognitive mediations for the reflection of the faith and to rediscover the importance of its maieutic task in people’s lives and in

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the result of the doctoral thesis “La vie comme nourriture. Pour un discernement eucharistique de l’humain fragmenté” (The life as food. For an eucharistic discernment of the fragmented human being), defended in 2019, at the *Centre Sèvres – Facultés Jésuites de Paris*. The work was guided by Prof. Christoph Theobald SJ and is awaiting publication. To read some texts already published, from the perspective indicated in this article, see: ADÃO, F.S. “Da devoração à hospitalidade. Uma narrativa alimentar à moda antiga”. *Revista Ingesta*, v. 1, n. 1, 2019, p. 283-296. Available at: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/revistaingesta/article/view/151707>. Accessed on: Nov. 16th 2022; ADÃO, F. S. “Toda vida é pão. Uma abordagem eucarística do discernimento e acompanhamento de jovens”. *ITAICI – Revista de Espiritualidade Inaciana*, n. 121 (setembro 2020), p. 11ss; ADÃO, F. S. “Toute vie est pain. Une approche eucharistique du discernement et de l’accompagnement des jeunes”. *Lumen Vitae*, vol. LXXV, 2020.3, p. 279-290.

the development of cultures. All this becomes possible when we see in Jesus' unique Eucharistic gesture a universal existential proposal – life is always *received, transformed* and *given* as a food –. Thus, we consider the subtle and concrete knowledge transmitted by the culinary world as a privileged way of becoming aware of the salvific process and of spiritual access to the intrinsic link between the Trinitarian mystery of God, the mystery of the human being and the mystery of all creation.

The fundamental hypothesis of this *sui generis* theological aesthetic is as follows: sapiential attention to the relationship of an individual, a people or a civilization with food – their own ways of planting and harvesting, cooking and eating, being at the table and talking about food, in short, their “gastro-nomy” (in the etymological sense of the term, which we will explain later) – has *theophanic* value. For this subtle manifestation of God to be recognized, named and systematized, new and instigating knowledge should emerge from the respectful and fruitful dialogue between the modern food sciences and a biblical theology attentive to the connection between the food phenomenon and the divine revelation to the people of Israel. To better explain this hypothesis and to substantiate it methodologically, we structured our article in three parts: 1) first, we will reflect on the concept of theogastronomy, as well as on the relationship between this apparently new approach and the religious knowledge of ancient peoples, assumed and radicalized by biblical revelation; 2) then, we will situate this theological aesthetic in its own literary and spiritual “cradle”, namely, the sapiential writings; 3) finally, we will show how the perspective, apparently playful and peripheral, of this sapiential branch of theology leads us to revisit, in depth, the living and pulsating core of the Christian faith: the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, the definitive expression of his free decision to give his life as food for his disciples and, more broadly, for the countless crowd of men and women seeking life in its fullness.

## ***1 The investigation of human “entrails”: a gastronomic mediation***

Sociological, anthropological and theological attention to the food phenomenon is by no means a novelty in academic research.<sup>2</sup> There are many ways of dealing with this issue: some are of an historical type,

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<sup>2</sup> The social and anthropological sciences have been studying this subject for almost a century, since the heritage and eating habits of a people can be considered as “total social facts”. This relationship with repetitive and sensitive experiences reveals a set of symbolic notions related to these experiences. See, e.g., MAUSS, M. *Essai sur le don*. PUF: Paris, 2012; LEVI-STRAUSS, C. *Mythologiques*. Le cru et le cuit. Paris: Plon, 1964 (mainly the introduction). Moreover, the introduction of a culinary perspective in biblical and dogmatic studies is no

others more socio-dynamic, others even bring a more explicitly spiritual connotation. In fact, food is a universal fact of human experience and permeates, in various ways, the narratives and rites of the various world religions. The approach defended in this article is the legacy and partner of all these studies. However, it brings something specific as it proposes to articulate this diversity of perspectives and biblical faith, from an expansion of the concept of *gastronomy*, guiding the resulting knowledge not only to the development of a conceptual system, but to the realization of the uniqueness of people, understood constitutively as “unique in relation”<sup>3</sup>. Why does gastronomy reveal itself as a privileged interlocutor, when our goal is to help the full development of the relational uniqueness of a human person? A brief examination of the three levels of understanding – interrelated to each other – of the so-called gastronomic movement can shed more light on its hitherto hidden or little considered potentialities in the university environment, in general, and theological, in particular.

The first level is the most immediate and concerns the emergence of gastronomy in modern times in France. This original way of conceiving the relationship with food has a specificity: having already assured the human need to be nourished, the gastronomic task is related to the pursuit of pleasure at the table (DÓRIA, 2009, p. 125). In this way of dealing with food, a human group leaves, then, the primary relationship that arises

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stranger to contemporary theological reflection. See, e.g., BONNET, S. *La cuisine d'Emmaüs*. Paris: Cerf, 1979; BOURGEOIS, D. *La cuisine de la création: le régime alimentaire biblique comme thème théologique*. *Pierre d'angle*, v. 2, 1996; SCHUT, M. (Ed.). *Food & Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2002; CAMPBELL, C. C. *Stations of the Banquet: Faith Foundations for Food Justice*. Colleagueville: Liturgical Press, 2003; PAGAZZI, G. C.; MANZI, F. *Le regard du Fils*. *Christologie phénoménologique*. Namur: Lessius, 2006; MÉNDEZ MONTOYA, A. F. *The Theology of Food*. *Eating and the Eucharist*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009; BARRIOS TAO, H. *Comida, mesa y banquete: de la Primera a la Segunda Alianza*. *Theologica Xaveriana*, v. 58, n. 166, p. 347-380, jul./dic. 2008; SOZA, J. R. *Food and God: A Theological Approach to Eating, Diet, and Weight Control*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009; MÉNDEZ MONTOYA, A. F. *Festin del deseo: Hacia una teología alimentaria*. México: Jus, 2010; an issue of the journal *Interpretation*, dedicated to the theology of food: *The Theology of Food*. *Interpretation: a Journal of Bible and Theology*. v. 67, n. 4, Oct. 2013; PAGAZZI, G. C. *La cucina del Risorto*. *Gesù “cuoco” per l'umanità affamata*. Bologna: EMI, 2014. In Portuguese, we have the translation of the book: WIRZBA, N. *Alimentação e fé: uma teologia da alimentação*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2014; the doctoral thesis in Tourism, Leisure and Culture: LAVRADOR, J.L.P. *The table among men: commensality and gastronomy in biblical texts, a discourse for our times* (University of Coimbra, 2016); and the master's dissertation in Theology: BARROSO, A.S. *Food as theologicus locus: an itinerary of revelation embodied in commensality* (FAJE, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Here we borrow an expression frequently used by Christoph Theobald in his reflection on the relationship between human attainment and the Trinitarian mystery of God. See, e.g., THEOBALD, Christoph. *Présences d'Évangile I: lire l'Évangile et l'Apocalypse en Algérie et ailleurs*. Paris: Atelier, 2011, p. 220.

from the need for nourishment to survive, in order to enter the domain of joy, of celebration, of playfulness. The goal is no longer the universal law of nutrition, but the desire – somehow superfluous and gratuitous – for innovation and authorial personalization.

However, no pursuit of gustatory pleasure occurs if we are not able to transform and materialize a good idea. Therefore, gastronomy, at this second level of understanding, also refers to “knowledge about the construction of pleasure when eating” (DÓRIA, 2010, p. 16). This reflective level – constitutively oriented to practice – gathers, deepens and expands the knowledge accumulated by humanity over the millennia, in its relationship with the “necessary” cuisine, more linked to the law of nutrition. It is, thus, the ordered and systematic knowledge about various techniques, ranging from harvesting to the selection of good ingredients, from the use of culinary instruments to the more precise mastery of cooking time, from a more conscious understanding of the physicochemical phenomena involved in the simple act of cooking to an implication and body assimilation of this knowledge, that is translated into a large number of culinary gestures.

So far, we are treading the path opened by the already mature world food movement. Yet, a look more interested in *people* than in the *products* made by them – however good they may be! – seeks to unveil a third level of understanding, still incipiently explored by researchers. When we consider the two previous levels of knowledge, paying attention to the etymology of the word, we find that a gastro-nomic investigation – of γαστήρ, gastér, “stomach, womb” + νόμος, nómos, “law, norm” – is able to show a stored and hidden *normativity* in the *entrails*: the criteria, tastes, values, as well as the difficulties, disorders and risks faced by each person, inserted in a particular culinary culture. Theogastronomy engages in dialogue with the first two levels, trying to help this deeper level of personal and sociocultural self-awareness to emerge.

What emerges here is an approach to the culinary world similar to that exposed by the Portuguese biblical scholar, José Tolentino Mendonça. In one of his theological-spiritual books, he states:

The kitchen is a metaphor of existence itself, for we are distinguished by a certain capacity to live in transformation, in a mobility that is not only geographical, but total. In each of our kitchens so many transformations take place that they become almost invisible. The kitchen is the place of instability, of searching, of uncertainty, of unexpected mixtures, of the most unforeseen creative solutions. That is why it is messy so often, because it lives in this latency of recomposition. In the kitchen it becomes clear that the way we transform things reflects that which happens inside us (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 159).

The culinary and gastronomic fact, since it concerns every human being – from those who eat without being aware of the implications of their act to men and women scientists who wonder about the links between this practice and the other dimensions of a culture and a society – allows for dialogue with a wide range of interlocutors. This is how theogastronomy, in addition to being conceived as a properly theological act, intends to be an aid of the Christian faith to every human movement towards integral health and a more overflowing life, removing the threats that lead to the illness and death of an individual and a people.

However, as we implied in our introduction, we do not think that this perspective is something absolutely new: the biblical tradition also bears witness that the relationship with the act of eating is a privileged way of knowing humanity, its quests, contradictions, institutions, relationships, and spirituality. From the moment we decide to focus our attention on the food phenomenon, we can discover how ubiquitous this theme is in the Scriptures of Israel and of Christians, from the accounts of the *origins*, which recognize in the act of eating the first gift and the first limit directed to living humanity, to the *ends* envisioned by the Apocalypse, which announces the full happiness of those invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Moreover, the act of *eating together* explicitly becomes the founding mark of the identity of the people of Israel and of their conception of covenant with God at the Passover supper of the Exodus. For Christianity, the “sublime sacrament” arises in the Eucharistic re-signification of this act of commensality, lived and proposed by Jesus, in the accounts of the Gospels. It is still around meals that the most bitter criticisms of Jesus’ opponents, who do not understand why he wishes to eat together with people considered sinful and impure, take place. Indeed, biblical narrators do not regard the relationship with food, drink and guests as a secondary element in the existence of an individual or a people and in their relationship with God and the world. What is at stake here is, in fact, a way of living and dying and, ultimately, the access to a holy life and death.

To exemplify the centrality of this perspective in the *Torah*, let us see an instigating summary of Tolentino Mendonça:

We must not forget that the first command God gave to Adam and Eve, in the garden account, was of the food category (“You may eat freely from every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you must die” Gen 2:16-17); that the promised land is above all defined in terms of its food resources, a land where “milk and honey flow” (Deut 6:3; 8:8; 11:9; 26:9-10. 15; 27:3; 31:20; 32:13-14); that the goal of Moses’ great march with the people, from the Red Sea to the Jordan River, is to “eat and rejoice” before the Lord God (Deut 27:7). The consummation of the Exodus is expressed in an idealization of commensality in the country the

Lord has chosen, a commensality celebrated in the abundance of the fruits of the harvest and in the solidarity among all members of the people, extending even to their borders: “then shall come [to your door] the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow living in your cities, and they shall eat and be satisfied” (Deut 14:29) (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 163).

A theological reflection that chooses gastronomic knowledge as an interlocutor and epistemological mediator, on the three levels above, helps us to read these biblical texts *from and beyond* their immediate materiality, with respectful attention to the “entrails”. This hidden part of the body carries with it an always surprising physical and symbolic wealth, as it manifests – discreetly – the relationship with our origins, with our interiority and with the needs of the other. In fact, in Scripture, the entrails reveal three fundamental dimensions of the human person: the origins of life, in gestation; the conservation of life, in the relationship with hunger and food; and the creation of vital bonds, in the capacity for compassion towards the hunger and pain of the other<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the Scriptures authorize – and even encourage – the line of investigation explained here. And this gains even greater significance when we turn our gaze to the way the Gospels narrate the practice of Jesus, presenting Him as someone who considered no table unworthy of His presence. Theogastronomy is particularly interested in His pedagogy of proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, which gradually reveals the relationship between the *gift of food* and the *gift of self*, as a fruitful path to a unified, fulfilled and saved life.

There would still be much to say, also about the other sections of the biblical world. However, we believe that the presentation made so far is already enough to demonstrate that the theological approach proposed here is not understood as an uprooted innovation, but rather as the resumption, deepening, and universalization of the discrete links between nourishment, revelation, and salvation, expressed in filigree in the set of holy Scriptures. Indeed, in a similar way to the narratives of the biblical world, the slow gestation of a single and unique individual in the bosom a people always leaves “witness stelae” of the relationships and utopias, of the desires and conflicts that built their history. If we want to revisit the foundations of faith from the concrete experience of individuals and peoples, it is important to listen to *alternative* witnesses who keep their historical-cultural memory alive and reveal what moves them deeply.

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<sup>4</sup> These elements will be developed, in a different way, in prophetic literature, resuming the paradigm of the banquet accessible to all and associating it with the pacification promised for Messianic times, when the Spirit of Prophecy will finally be poured out on all. See: TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 164.

Accessing the deep “engines”: this is not an easy project because, as the Christian faith repeatedly says, every individual is, for themselves and for others, a true mystery. Even more difficult would be the project of identifying the probable drivers of the expectations, desires and collective errors of a people. However, the mysteries are hospitable and always leave doors open. Therefore, it is up to the researcher to choose that portal that seems most suitable for their search. Next, we will explain more clearly what the outlines and delimitations of the “portal” are, that we have chosen.

## *2 A wisdom serving the prophetic irruption: the parabolic function*

Our intention to help open wide doors to access people’s interiority, from the common heritage of humanity, has led us to identify, in the fundamental and universal act of eating, a particularly rich and privileged portal. As we have just shown, this approach takes seriously the “flesh” and the body, the sensitive and non-verbal relationship with reality, affecting the human being in deep and very diverse dimensions: physiological, social, cultural, symbolic, spiritual, etc. Such a path also allows access, right from the start, to a field of dialogue within the reach of each and every person, regardless of their academic background, respecting what nourishes them physically and symbolically, and helping them to identify a discreet inner movement, an implicit intelligence and, often, an unnamed quest.

To achieve its objectives, theogastronomy proposes an epistemological shift and is inspired by a knowledge proper to the “peripheries” of the biblical tradition: a knowledge that will gradually lead us to the core of the mystery of the Christian faith. We speak here of wisdom<sup>5</sup>. Let us see the reason why this specific type of knowledge is the existential, spiritual and methodological matrix of the theological approach presented in this article.

In an article entitled “Wisdom: Peripheral Texts?”, a Brazilian Lutheran exegete, Milton Schwantes, questions his own ecclesial tradition, more sensitive to prophecy, about the reception of sapiential theology. He proposes to “draw attention to this silence of theology about wisdom” (SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 55)<sup>6</sup>. According to him, the churches have focused their attention on the *Torah* (teaching), which privileges narratives and

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<sup>5</sup> The Latin American theological tradition had already spoken about the mediating role of wisdom (See: J. C. Scannone) in accessing the historical rationality of a people’s faith. See: IRARRAZAVAL, D. Notes on the theological activity of the poor. In: RICHARD (Org.), 1987, p. 367-376.

<sup>6</sup> In this regard, Milton Schwantes gives an example: Gerhard von Rad’s *Old Testament Theology* focuses on the historical traditions and on the prophetic traditions of ancient Israel.

commandments, and the *Nebi'im* (prophets), who privilege the prophetic word and acts. Consequently, he denounces a lack of knowledge of the tradition of the *Ketubim* (writings), which privilege wisdom, as well as the misunderstanding of the particularity of this theological knowledge (SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 63).

After examining the context in which the biblical sapiential texts were born<sup>7</sup>, and indicating wisdom as the matrix of a very ancient tradition about Jesus of Nazareth<sup>8</sup>, Schwantes seeks to demonstrate the specificity of the theology of the third part of the Jewish biblical canon. He thus summarizes his message, giving an alert to the faith and the ecclesial liturgy:

The core of the Writings is sapiential. Together with prayer, this part of the canon is wise. Even the prayers are frequently configured in a sapiential way. Contained horizons do not necessarily obscure everyday life. Closed gates still don't end life, even if they shorten it. Storms on the horizon tend to bring people and bodies closer, as the fear that arises can draw them together. In this way the Chant celebrates life, although slavery surrounds life. Yahweh is not excluded, but neither is he central. At the center are us, people, and what we do or don't do. Theology without peace with Anthropology is therefore alienation. That is the problem of faith today. It is that on Sundays God is celebrated without us (SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 61).

After this harsh and incisive diagnosis, Schwantes considers that the difficulty that churches encounter in receiving the theology of sapiential books is founded on two "issues": wisdom remains in the environment of creation, and speaks very little of God (SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 61). However, he concludes, its greatness consists precisely in "its human density" (SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 64).

Faced with this provocative analysis, we can ask ourselves: what does the *disappearance* of the central reference to YHWH in the *third* section of the Jewish canon reveal to us about the very mystery of God's relationship with his people? Why does this God confessed by biblical faith, after His revelation in the *Torah* and the prophetic emergence of His covenant partners, *leave* the center – His center – to the word of another? Within the limits of this article, we can only formulate a hermeneutic hypothesis, based on the transmission of holiness in the manner of Jesus. Biblical

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The author mentions wisdom, but not in depth. It was only at the end of his life (1970) that he came to publish a book on biblical wisdom. According to Schwantes, this is not the "problem of a thinker, in this case, von Rad, but of biblical theology, of the theology of the churches, in short of the Judeo-Christian religion, especially in the Christian religion". See: SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> The author refers to Alexandria, where wisdom helped to accelerate the rapprochement between biblical faith and Greek culture. See: SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> In the New Testament, the exegete draws attention to the discoveries concerning the sapiential tone of the Q-source and the letter of James. See: SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 55.

Wisdom would be a *literary witness* to a *theological* and *soteriological* truth: after the constitution of the fundamentals – narrative-legal and prophetic – of the Covenant, God leaves the centrality to his partners, so that they, in turn, learn to *receive it* and to *give it* freely in favor of others. If we accept this hypothesis, we must recognize that the Biblical Covenant would find its fulfillment neither in the apotheosis of a chosen one nor in a glorious anthropocentrism, but in a progressive *kénosis* – lowering and emptying – of a beloved people or person, who choose to leave the center *empty*, in view of the emergence of other free and equally unique partners, within this same vital relationship.

This hypothesis of a “mediating” wisdom, guided to the always surprising irruption of other partners of the Covenant, finds support in the discovery of a link between wisdom and the prophetic phenomenon in the Bible. Schwantes refers to the study of H. Wolff, which identifies a relationship between the sapiential circles and the intellectual roots of the prophet Amos<sup>9</sup>. According to the Brazilian exegete, this study causes a hermeneutic shift in relation to divine intervention in the calling of each one:

As long as we thought it was possible to attribute the prophetic origins solely to vocational inspiration, to the God who in His absolute difference throws Himself at human consciousness, we could pretend that historical-religious mediations were dispensable. If “the word” is only “of God”, then why want to mediate it? (SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 64).

Everything we have just presented echoes an interesting intuition of the Galician philosopher and theologian Andrés Torres Queiruga. He developed a new theological category to rethink the way Scripture considers the process of divine revelation: it is a “historical maieutic”<sup>10</sup>. The process of revelation represented by this category is summarized as follows:

The two basic elements are given: the external word of the mediator (of *the maieutic person*), and the sending of the listener to their own reality. The mediator, with his or her words and gestures, helps others to discover the reality *that they already live and that they already are*, the presence that was *already* accompanying them, the truth from God that they already were, are and are called to be. The external word is necessary because, without it, the discovery

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<sup>9</sup> See: WOLFF, H. W. *Amos 'geistige Heimat*. [Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament, 18]. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964. 66 p. Apud SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 64. Regarding the study of his professor H. Wolff, who brought Amos' Javist theology closer to the sapiential circles, Schwantes states: “As we approach the Javist theological event with the cultural and theological event of wisdom, par excellence universalist, we would certainly understand prophecy in a new way”. See: SCHWANTES, 2008, p. 64-65.

<sup>10</sup> Queiruga takes up the socratic meaning of maieutics: “The basic meaning of ‘maieutics’ is expressed in *the Teetet* (148a-151e) with the unparalleled style of socratic dialogue. Socrates, son of a midwife (*Maya*), claims to practice the same art as his mother: *maieutiké techne* (*maieutiké techne*). Through his word he brings out into the light – ‘helps to give birth’ – what was inside the interlocutor”. See: QUEIRUGA, 2010, p. 119.

would not take place – *fides ex auditu* –; however, it does not send the subject out of themselves or their situation, but within themselves, in a process of recognition and appropriation (QUEIRUGA, 2010, p. 119).

To rethink revelation from experience, that of the biblical world and that of today's human beings, Queiruga proposes a consciously hybrid category that combines an extra-biblical concept, derived from Greek philosophy, and an adjective that inserts into it a dynamic specific to Scripture. However, he himself considers the risks of this philosophical category, without the proposed addition:

It is certainly not to be ignored that its Socratic ascendancy can also burden it with the weight of Greek essentialism and apriorism, making its immediate application impossible under penalty of ending it in the immanence of the subject and in the cyclical game of "anamnesis". Qualification must therefore try to show its compatibility with the openness to the freedom of God and to the novelty of history. Hence the *historical maieutic* name (QUEIRUGA, 2010, p. 118).

The greatest risk of this perspective would be to consider this category in an absolute way, as if it could account for everything that faith attributes to the mystery of divine revelation. Theogastronomy identifies itself with the conception of revelation expressed by this category, placing it in a precise and circumscribed approach more appropriate to its nature and objectives: that of a post-critical sapiential theology, according to the requirements of scientific rigor, but based on its own way of thinking about the experience of biblical faith in the common ground of humanity. Indeed, the specificity of the biblical sapiential tradition rests on its attention to the universal questions of humanity (rather than Israel's privileges), resolutely choosing an anthropological starting point. Consistently and coherently, this tradition separates the categories of revelation proper to Israel, to speak from the experience common to human beings of other peoples (TRUBLET, 1995, Intr.).

In light of these reflections, we can better understand the fundamental role of the sapiential tradition in the New Testament and in all times. The constitution of a life *saved and realized* presupposes the development of a Trinitarian dynamic, of *reception, transformation* and *donation*, similar to a culinary process. However, in the slow passage from childhood to maturity or from a tribal humanity to a globalized humanity, we come to understand that each "passage" from the old to the new is marked by an experience of crisis, often painful and difficult to integrate. There comes a time when we are made aware of an existential truth: the mystery of life is crossed, from one end to the other, by the mystery of death.

Now the free, radical and definitive gift of Jesus' life, in the drama of the cross, does not come at the beginning of his ministry, just as He does not come at the beginning of everyone's life. Jesus, in his relationship with the

disciples and the crowds, used a kind of sapiential communication to give them access to the mysteries of the new Kingdom, a new quality of life and relationship, that he announced: the parables. With the parables, Jesus tries to make “those people enter the game of His logic and, once they are in, the surprise of the Kingdom of God can then erupt” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2012, p. 158). What does this “game” consist of?

The parable is a type of narrative that maintains an autonomy and a distance from history: “it illuminates the present, but in an oblique way. It goes through history, but without completely fixing its path” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2015, p. 59). It is precisely this semantic and temporal displacement that “produces a new look at the here and now” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2015, p. 59). The parables, particularly those of Jesus, propose a reframing of reality, belonging to a type of language that J. Zumstein calls “language of change”<sup>11</sup>. Contrary to the more didactic and explanatory “reinforcement language”, the language of change wants to “not only explain or deepen an issue, but above all ‘to shake and modify the potential recipient’s conception of reality’” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 222)<sup>12</sup>.

To this end, the themes of Jesus’ parables are accessible to all, as they belong to the context of ordinary life. This is what the French hermeneutist Paul Ricœur tells us:

The first thing that can challenge us is that parables are radically profane accounts. There are neither gods, nor demons, nor angels, nor miracles, nor time before time, as in the founding accounts, nor even founding events like the account of the Exodus. Nothing like that, but precisely people like us: Palestinian landowners setting out on a journey and renting their fields, managers and workers, planters and fishermen, parents and children; in a nutshell: ordinary people doing ordinary things. Selling and buying, casting a net overboard, and so on. Herein lies the initial paradox: on the one hand, these stories are, as one critic put it, accounts of normality; but, on the other hand, it is the Kingdom of God that is said to be like that. The extraordinary and the ordinary are alike (RICŒUR, 2001. Apud TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 99).

Modeled by this ordinary linked to the extraordinary, parables are like a mirror that helps us see an object from different angles. It is a mirror that invites one to look beyond it: like the mirror in Alice in Wonder-

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<sup>11</sup> See: ZUMSTEIN, J. “Jésus et les paraboles”. In: DELORME, J. *Les paraboles évangéliques. Perspectives nouvelles*. Paris: Cerf, 1989, p. 102. Apud TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 222.

<sup>12</sup> According to Tolentino, “Zumstein argues that this change can be of two types: a change of certain factors within a system, the latter remaining stable, or a change of the system itself, a reframing (that is, deeply questioning the image that the recipient/reader has of reality, giving it a different meaning, so that he/she discovers new possibilities or alternatives).” TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 222-223.

land, the reader or listener is led to “discover what separates a corseted, unfair, and sad world from a world even more enchanted than that of the little character invented by Lewis Carroll” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 245). Think, for example, of the mention of the grain of wheat, the salt of the earth, the yeast in the dough – realities linked to food – to help the listeners understand the relationship between life, death, and gift in the emergence of a radical newness, made possible by a relationship between different ones. However, the change desired by the parable is not reduced to understanding: triggering a discovery that “asks us for mediation so that the desired transfiguration of the world really happens” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 245), it invites us to a change of life.

We have reached the end of this section, in which we set out to delimit the epistemological field of theogastronomy. This theological approach must be understood as a sapiential and historical-meaningful type of knowledge, which has a parabolic function, guided towards the coming of the Kingdom in a person’s life and in the values of a culture. We thus want to continue the parables of Jesus that, unlike those of other masters of their time, are not the expression of an intellectual exercise or a moral teaching, but “the paradoxical wisdom they contain is a challenge that prophetically announces the Kingdom” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2015, p. 59). Our contemporary theogastronomic parable, *life received, transformed and donated* as food, is deliberately affiliated with *this* sapiential tradition: a “paschal” mediation in service of a new look at our common reality, and the unforeseeable irruption of prophecy in the unique life of each one.

To conclude our reflection, it is also worth pointing out some elements that indicate how this maieutic and parabolic knowledge, besides being a help for people of every time and place in their journey of self-transformation, also helps the whole of theology in its continuous task of deepening, re-signifying, and transmitting the living and pulsating core of Christian faith: the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ as the access of the created world to the Trinitarian life of God.

### ***3 An “aesthetic” intellection of our Paschal life: between the Word and the Table***

At this point in our reflection, it should have become clear that theogastronomy is based on the firm decision to collaborate in the elaboration of decentralized and partial knowledge. On the one hand, *decentralized knowledge* because, as in all sapiential theology, one does not seek simply to forge one’s own concepts and definitions, but aims to arouse *in the*

*other* the emergence of a word, a gesture, a deeply unique and unrepeatability choice, as an expression of the filial covenant with God. This is in the manner of Moses' exclamation, in the book of Numbers: "I wish all the people of YHWH were a prophet!" (Num 11:29). In this sense, it is a symbolic-generative type of knowledge: through a parabolic re-reading of the food reality, it is intended to create spaces for the gestation of something new, beyond what we already know and experience.

On the other hand, it is *partial knowledge*, because we are aware that wisdom is not and cannot be the only biblical partner in the service of the prophetic experience of others. As implied in the above biblical quotation, the *Torah* itself aspires to the emergence of the prophetic uniqueness in the lives of the members of this people. However, it does so from another type of knowledge, closer to a systematic-explanatory model: narratives, laws, rites and institutions that offer each person a common ground for their development and for the constitution, always mysterious, of their relational uniqueness. In other words, the *Torah* builds the common *ground* and *horizon*; Wisdom provides *companionship* for the delights and hardships of the path.

In addition to being inscribed in the lineage of a "peripheral" biblical knowledge, theogastronomy, for its valorization of knowledge that passes through the appreciation of the bodily senses, is situated in a philosophical current still considered peripheral today: aesthetic reflection. Tolentino Mendonça, referring to M. Perniola's reflection, argues that attention to the aesthetic dimension of human experience is far from being the option of an easy path because, "like metaphysics or ethics, aesthetics is precisely a reflection on the meaning of life" (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 51). Furthermore, citing S. Dianich, the Portuguese biblical scholar invites us to see divine revelation in Scripture as an event that leads to an aesthetic conversion:

Revelation is an aesthetic event, but it cannot be understood solely under the category of beauty: that of revelation is a beautiful *sub contrario*, the beauty of one who "had neither appearance nor beauty to attract our gazes" (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2008, p. 51).

With this evocation of the mystery of the cross of Jesus Christ, we enter the great drama of the Gospel message<sup>13</sup>: the realization and total gift of our lives passes through renunciations and trials, often deeply painful, and this explains the difficulty that we have to remain faithful to our own choices, especially when facing a crisis or impasse. The Gospel accounts recount the resistance of Jesus' disciples to the way their Master took on

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<sup>13</sup> As expressed extensively and deeply by the great name of the theological aesthetics of the 20th century, Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his famous trilogy: Theological Aesthetics; Theo-Drama; Theo-Logic.

this fact of human life. One of these accounts, by its form and content, places the theogastronomic proposal in its proper theological and spiritual place: it is the narrative of the encounter of the Risen One with the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24: 13-35).

In this narrative, after the failure to carry out the *disciples'* project in relation to Jesus, two of them are presented with the possibility of allowing the Paschal faith to be born in their hearts. But, this supposes the revelation of the main cause of their blindness: the inability to believe what had already been announced – “Was not the Christ to suffer all this in order to enter into His glory?” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2014, p. 106). Thus, on the road to Emmaus, the disciples' faith is progressively led to an inner shift, thanks to two experiences of a reversal of roles. First, after having listened to the disciples' reading of the events, the one who was apparently unaware of the gravity of the situation opens new doors of access to the intelligence of Scripture for them: Moses and the Prophets, that is, on the one hand, the ground and the promise and, on the other hand, the consequences of assuming a decentralized relational uniqueness. Then, at the edge of the village, the third pilgrim abandons his status as a foreigner, thanks to a hospitable invitation and, already in the intimacy of the house, presides over the table and acts as a master<sup>14</sup>. His gesture attests that “He not only takes the bread, but gives Himself in that bread, in a gesture that refers back to the total gift at the maximum hour of the cross” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2014, p. 107). Throughout the report, the reader follows the development of a sensitive or “aesthetic” experience of an “intimacy that is built on the return to the Way, to the Word, and to the Table where the Breaking of the Bread takes place” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2014, p. 103-104).

The unexpected revelation of an intrinsic connection among the word, the table and the cross, thanks to the foreigner who gradually reveals Himself Lord of the three, introduces the disciples to the Paschal faith: their eyes, finally, open. Simultaneously, Jesus disappears, and they recognize His sovereign Presence among them along the way. Readers should conclude: “Their eyes, like our eyes, are opened by the Faith” (TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2014, p. 108). This is how the theogastronomy applies, in its reflections, the “Emmaus method”. The articulation between the hermeneutics of the Word and the praxis of the Table seeks to explain this intimate connection among word, table and cross in the life of anyone who wishes to radiate their uniqueness, by helping others to become truly unique.

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<sup>14</sup> Tolentino says: “The houses in Luke are the territories where Jesus preferentially develops his ministry towards revelation. The house even represents an alternative to the Temple and everything it symbolizes. The center of the houses, in the Gospel, is the table as well as the movement of Jesus is in this direction”. See: TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2014, p. 106-107.

We will conclude our article with an example of how the issues raised by the world food movement and contemporary theology are interrelated in this deep ground of our common humanity. We can ask ourselves: how are the utopias and frustrations of the world food movement manifested today? How is the desire for uniqueness, and the crises that accompany it, also a recurring theme in this movement? To answer these questions, we can identify some clues in the evaluative differences between the traditional craft of the cook and the goal sought by young professionals in this area: to be recognized by their peers and customers as a *chef*. What does this change consist of?

Carlos Alberto Dória, a Brazilian sociologist of food, draws attention to two curiosities in the social understanding of the *chef's* craft. The first curiosity concerns its insertion into the art world, and no longer in the craft industry. The one who is recognized as a *chef* is considered a “creator who transcends this crystalline terrain of manual labor, placing oneself in the field of those who are ‘attuned’ to the deepest trends of culture” (DÓRIA, 2009, p. 232). The second curiosity concerns the attribution of a kind of priestly function to this professional, thanks to their ability to create a kind of harmonization destined to disappear: “in addition to taste, they combine color, aroma, texture, crispness and temperature in the construction of a spectacle of evanescent art, in which the diner finalizes the sacrifice” (DÓRIA, 2009, p. 216). These two changes may be linked to a crisis and a broadening of the understanding of aesthetic experience:

Current gastronomy seems to announce that an aesthetic experience can also rely on this sense previously banned from the field of artistic manifestations, whatever they may be. And, more than that, that this minor sense has a *modern integrative function*, creating, momentarily, a *subject as a totality* that didn't exist before: and that, to the extent that art recognized the crisis of support, was left floundering in the ether. The brutal materiality of eating seems to activate this problem (DÓRIA, 2009, p. 238).

However, when part of society is willing to distinguish men and women with the title of *chef*, as interpreters of the world of culture, some of these professionals go through a serious existential crisis. In many of them, an ethical question arises: does it make sense to go so far in culinary experimentation, when hunger remains such a reality in so many countries?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dória cites, among others, an outburst of the renowned Catalan *chef* Santi Santamaria: “Nobody has time to get emotional over roasted vegetables, a free-range chicken... Angry men need mental ecstasies, they need culinary ecstasies. Why? Because we always have to create new needs. In other words, the problem is not a culinary one, but one of mankind, of a society that lives in an irritated, tense way. The person is eating and seeing dead children on television, is experiencing misery and picking up his fork as if nothing is wrong”. See: DÓRIA, 2010, p. 196.

That is, when reaching the peak of recognition, the free excess of a banquet, the realization of an authorial and artistic path, the question arises: how to reduce the distance between us and others? Can we, in fact, live peacefully in delight without them? These questions are not the result of a logical need, but of a free, ethical impulse. What is at stake here is the maturation of the modern issue of the emergence of the subject and their relation to otherness.

According to a theological reading of Western history, proposed by the French-German Jesuit theologian Christoph Theobald, this modern question can be attributed to the slow and challenging constitution of a “multitude of the unique ones”<sup>16</sup>, desired and promoted by biblical revelation. According to the theologian, the emergence of the consciousness of a humanity formed by unique individuals is deeply linked to the confession of faith in Jesus as the only Son of God. But, in modern times, especially with the great navigations, a phenomenon related to the so-called globalization emerges: “the Mediterranean context that saw the birth of the confession of the oneness of the Son has gradually expanded to become, nowadays, worldwide” (THEOBALD, 2007, p. 823). The food movement, which emerged in a Mediterranean context, is also immersed in this culture that has learned to confess and value the “unique”, someone’s singularity.

However, this same expansion has led Western Christianity and culture to discover “the particularity of their universalism”, as they had to confront other “vectors of globalization”, especially in the East (THEOBALD, 2007, p. 823-824). This comparison with other traditions and cultures had, therefore, a radical relativization of the values sustained by each of them. In this regard, Theobald lists some criticisms of the southern countries at the center of the Western Christian tradition:

In the southern hemisphere of the globe, our rationality that makes everything homogeneous and our “absolutist” conception of the individual and their uniqueness are reproached, forces that are accused of producing violence of all kinds, cultural disruption and unnamed exclusions. Opposed to this is a cosmic “holism” that aims to be more modest and that “de-absolutizes” and “relativizes” the uniqueness in favor of the cyclical movement of emergence and disappearance of an insurmountable plurality of centers of life, integrating into this framework the great achievements of technical and economic rationality (THEOBALD, 2007, p. 830).

These rebukes suggest that the relationship of peoples to the uniqueness of each one is not the same at all. However, should legitimate criticism of absolutist individualism relativize the value of what each tradition and each person has as *unique*? Would not criticism itself bear witness to a desire

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<sup>16</sup> This expression refers to the reflection proposed by Christoph Theobald on the relationship between Jesus’ uniqueness and ours. See: THEOBALD, 2007, p. 821-837.

to respect the specificity of other traditions? In fact, contact between these different civilizations can reveal a fairer path in understanding the mystery of oneness: assuming and going through the comparison to the end, we can finally arrive at what each one has as *incomparable* (THEOBALD, 2007, p. 825). Therefore, as we said in the first section of our article, the reflection proposed by the Jesuit theologian tries to think, always in an articulated way, of the uniqueness and the relationship, in the case of Jesus, but also in the case of each person (THEOBALD, 2007, p. 822).

However, as we know from sad experience, the recognition of the uniqueness and incomparable character of each one does not necessarily lead to a fruitful relationship with the different. Referring to the Greek term *monos*, used in the New Testament to speak of the oneness of Jesus, the Monogenès, the One and Only begotten, Theobald draws attention to the etymology of this word: it can mean, at the same time, unique and alone. Thus, this term highlights the fundamental ambivalence of every singularity: the unique can stand alone, without another “of its kind”. According to the theologian, the path followed and proposed by Jesus, to overcome this existential ambivalence, is “the gift of self, the death of the grain to bear fruit” (THEOBALD, 2007, p. 826)<sup>17</sup>. This marks the distinction between a “uniqueness of singularity”, the primary characteristic of every existing being, and a “uniqueness of excellence”, the fruitfulness lived by Jesus and proposed to those who want to follow his way of life (THEOBALD, 2007, p. 825)<sup>18</sup>.

Theobald identifies Jesus’ “uniqueness of excellence” with the holiness that “He shares with the one and three-times holy God and that He communicates to His own and to all mankind, to each in an absolutely unique and incomparable way” (THEOBALD, 2007, p. 825)<sup>19</sup>. To communicate His holiness, Jesus wanted to fulfill his ethical commitment in an unmeasured way: in addition to sympathy and active compassion toward the suffering of others, He manifested the “courage to expose himself to the violence of others”, to “take upon [himself] their violence” (THEOBALD, 2002, p. 136). We can understand why Theobald claims that it is precisely there “where man’s last temptation lies” (THEOBALD, 2002, p. 134): holiness in the manner of Jesus, that is, the evangelical proposal to bring our own

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<sup>17</sup> Theobald refers here to the passage from the Gospel of John — “If the grain of wheat that falls to the ground does not die, it remains alone (*monos*), but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12: 24).

<sup>18</sup> Theobald takes up the categories created by Stanilas Breton. BRETON, S. *Unicité et monothéisme*. Paris: Cerf, 1981.

<sup>19</sup> For Theobald, holiness, according to biblical tradition, always has two dimensions: an inner one – authenticity, that is, an agreement among thought, words and actions; and an “external” or ethical one – translated by the “golden rule” and shared by many cultures and civilizations: “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you” (Mt 7: 12). See: THEOBALD, 2007, p. 827-828.

uniqueness to fulfillment “rudely tests the subject’s agreement with oneself and suspends one’s radiance to one’s capacity to remove oneself in favor of others” (THEOBALD, 2002, p. 136). Thus, the fulfillment of uniqueness, according to the practice of Jesus Christ, always passes through the gift of life: a person becomes truly unique, in the sense of a uniqueness of excellence, when they “give their lives for a multitude”, that is, that they live and lose their lives “so that each one can have access to their own uniqueness” (THEOBALD, 2007, p. 826).

Isn’t that what somehow happens every day, in a hidden way, in every kitchen in the world? Domestic kitchens, places of countless decentralized acts and “without beauty to attract the eye”, are a “laboratory of the Paschal faith”<sup>20</sup>, similar to that lived by the disciples of Emmaus. At the same time, in the light of this theological reading, we can suspect what is the core, perhaps not yet completely named, of the crisis of some great *chefs*. Having ensured public recognition of their “uniqueness of singularity”, they are faced with the always difficult and dramatic access to a “uniqueness of excellence”, to the desire for the uniqueness of *others*, to the path of fruitfulness and reconciliation that passes through free choice to offer their unique life, even when bearing on themselves the consequences of fractures, violence and unjust famines in the history of a people<sup>21</sup>.

All the advances and contradictions present in the world food movement<sup>22</sup>, ranging from relations with small farmers to the values disseminated by great television programs, through daily domestic kitchens and the drama of hunger that persists in the world, are research subjects for theogastronomy. In fact, this can help theology to understand, in a profoundly concrete way, the mystery of the messianic fruitfulness of Jesus’ gift on the cross: this mystery leads us to look at the ambitions and fears that lead us to betray or to deny our own life project, as well as the violence that can *interrupt* a unique life (our own and that of others). But, this same mystery can also lead us to identify and

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<sup>20</sup> Expression forged by José Tolentino Mendonça, to speak of the narrative of the disciples of Emmaus. See: TOLENTINO MENDONÇA, 2014, p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> In this regard, Theobald refers to the reflection of Pierre Claverie, the martyred bishop of Algeria, on the relationship of Christians with “fracture lines” within a society and between civilizations: “Imbalances and ruptures in bodies, hearts, spirits, human and social relations have found healing and reconciliation in [Jesus] because He has taken them upon Himself. He places his followers on these same lines of fracture, with the same mission of healing and reconciliation”. See: THEOBALD, 2007, p. 832.

<sup>22</sup> When mentioning the cooperation between the French physicochemist Hervé This, and the renowned Catalan *chef* Ferran Adrià, in the process of gastronomic innovation, Dória highlights the migration of both to the field of the training of children and young people: “One recognizes today the end of a fertile period of courtship or cooperation and it is interesting to note how these two leaders of the cooperation process, This and Adrià, have, each in their own way, moved towards teaching eating habits to young people and children, with the creation of foundations of a clearly educational character”. See: DÓRIA, 2009, p. 185.

appreciate the unprecedented gift of a countless multitude of men and women who, perhaps unaware that they are becoming brothers and sisters of Jesus, choose to *disrupt* their lives so that this “multitude of unique individuals” can expand ever more.

However, we must recognize that this mystery has always been the “cornerstone” (Ps 117; Mt 21: 42; Acts 4: 11) and the “stumbling block” (Is 8: 14; Rom 9: 33; 1P 2: 8) of the Christian faith, as well as for those who publicly profess this faith. In order for us to be able to face the way in which this relationship between the *gift of self* and the *emptying of self* takes shape in our people and in our own lives, we need time, help and parables. And that is exactly what theogastronomy intends to offer.

## ***Conclusion***

Our article aimed to explain, in a way that is both brief and serious, the theoretical and practical implications of a theogastronomic reflection. As our purpose was to present the methodological foundations of this aesthetic and sapiential theology, we wanted to draw bridges with concepts rooted in the theological tradition such as, for example, the relationship between the Paschal, Eucharistic and Trinitarian mysteries. Such concepts of Christian theology correspond, analogously, to the foundation and memory of the identity of a “separated” people, thanks to the writings of the *Torah*, but which, in moments of encounter with new cultures, must be approached from other languages more accessible to our common humanity: in our case, the language of the food movement. We hope we have been able to show the solidity of this proposal, which is still to be tested by the advance of research and the fruits in the formation of Christians, and in the dialogue with those who do not share this faith.

This fraternal and hospitable encounter with another symbolic world, at first “foreign” to our utopias and frustrations, offers theology the possibility of deepening and expanding its understanding of its traditional concepts. Therefore, placing theogastronomy within the great ecclesial and theological Tradition sheds new light on the successive meals throughout the history of revelation and salvation, which find their culmination in the Eucharistic gesture of Jesus as an anticipation and explanation of the meaning of his paschal donation. As we know, according to the Christian faith, there is no Peace – a personal, social and spiritual unification – without Passover, without a continuous passage from the Old to the New – where the life received, in an always unique way, becomes, in the freedom of love, a life given, also in a unique way. The journey to this paschal configuration of life presupposes a *Eucharistic conversion* which, in addition to receiving and giving, must learn to undergo the transformation of oneself, which

is always linked to a *grateful recognition* and a capacity for self-fraction: “He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it...”. Following this divine-human path opened by Jesus, His disciples are invited to let themselves be transformed until their lives become *food* for the lives of others.

If the *shared meal* has become the historical and spiritual place of the sacramental presence of this mystery, this universal existential experience remains for us a “place” of revelation. Therefore, theologastronomy proposes to invite Jesus to sit at the table of every person and of every people of our time, so that He may make His Eucharistic gesture on the “fruit of the earth and of human labor” offered in these places. This invitation to have Jesus sit at our table, as in the Gospels, always leads us to a deeper awareness about our desires, potentialities, and resistances in going all the way in fulfilling our own projects of life and communion.

Around this theological “table”, prepared by a wisdom that ardently desires to bring to light the prophecy hidden in others, we hope to rediscover the call to advance freely towards the gift of self, the only binding force capable of making us joyful and truly *present* to one another. Led by this mystagogical meal to the heart of the *mysterium fidei*, the brothers and sisters of Jesus, the Firstborn, will be invited to savor the joy of seeing, announcing and fulfilling in *their* world what He saw, announced and accomplished in *His*: the holiness of the Spirit active in the entrails of the Father’s creation, the source of Life unceasingly given as Food.

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Article submitted on 13.09.2022 and approved on 10.12.2022.

**Francys Silvestrini Adão SJ** has a PhD in Theology from the *Centre Sèvres – Facultés Jésuites de Paris*. He is assistant professor of systematic theology at the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy and Theology (FAJE). At this same institution, he participates in the research groups: “Mística e Estética” (interdisciplinary) and “Fé e Contemporaneidade” (theology). [Orcid.org/0000-0001-7601-9566](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7601-9566). E-mail: [francysadaosj@hotmail.com](mailto:francysadaosj@hotmail.com)

**Address:** Av. Dr. Cristiano Guimarães, 2127 – Planalto  
31.720-300 – Belo Horizonte – MG