

Hermeneutical Aesthetic and Writerly Excursions in Gastronomy

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Abstract

The issue of food plays a prominent role in life and, by extension, literature, and it is garnering new interest in some circles of the medical profession for a reason different from the obvious one that food is one in a line of four life survival items. Human life is dependent on the air we breathe, the water we drink, the sleep we have, and the food we eat, in that order of urgency. Food comes last on the imperative scale, but it is by no means inferior to the other three life sustaining elements. Food is not only of gastronomic importance, it is also of spiritual significance, as illustrated by the fall of Adam and Eve in the biblical account of the advent of sin in human history. The progeny of much literature is located in biblical narrative as is contained in the Holy Bible, therefore, food is in general ascribed a prominent role in secular literature. The novel attempt by medical science to correlate what people eat with sickness or healthfulness is an interesting development because it shows that the food choices humans make can be a matter of life and death, literally. This essay evaluates the role of food in biblical and other narratives in relation to real life experience.

Keywords: biblical; food; medical; sickness or healthfulness; narrative

Introduction

This is a discursive foray into textualities that are increasingly not the preserve of the sciences. In the postmodernist world things and the ideas of things flow into one another and tend to defy strict lines of demarcation. The present discussion proceeds by glossing the wording of its title in reverse order. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines gastronomy as the “the art and practice of cooking and eating good food”; it seems all right to skip the preposition “in” because of its relativity and ubiquitous obscurantist simplicity; excursion is “a short journey made for pleasure”; writerly is a translation from Barthesian “scriptible” and a description of that part of textuality that invites creative contribution by a reader; “and” affably conjoins “aesthetic” which refers to issues in the philosophy of criticism; while hermeneutical “relates to the meaning of written texts” since it derives from hermeneutics which is “the area of study that analyses and explains written texts”. The words combine to give a suitable title to discourse that is at once playful and speculative.

Gastronomic Episodes

Gastronomy raises important epistemological and practical questions as an art and a practice. Cooking and eating are issues. So too is good food. Is there such a thing as good food? A student of biblical hermeneutics might say that this is a foreclosed issue. Does not the all-time bestseller and most criticised book ever put together, the Holy Bible, assert “Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s”? (Psalm 103:5). Good food is a part of the good things referred to in Scripture. But the constituents of good food are variable in goodness as in the old saying, one man’s meat is another man’s poison. The variability of the goodness of food might also be dependent on the quantity of food ingested by the eater. This then means that what constitutes a

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standard amount of food that does good to all eaters is subject still to the factor of relativity. If good food is so variable in character, what might bad food be, outside of the outrightly poisonous, such as Lord Randal is served at dinner by his “true-love” when in answer to his mother’s query he discloses “I gat eels boild in broo” in the eponymous folk ballad?

In his critique of overindulgence, Geoffery Chaucer’s Pardoner takes eating and drinking together with dancing and playing, or revelry. The three young rioters in “The Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale” are described as foolish on account of excess:

They daunce and playen at dees bothe day and night,
And ete also and drinke over hir might,
Thurgh which they doon the devel sacrificise
Within that develes temple in cursed wise
By superfluitee abhominable (Greenblatt 2006a:288).

The good things can take different forms: solid, liquid, and gaseous. Nutritionists teach that there must be a balance in the intake of the good things which seem to have multiplied in form and variety in modern times because of an escalation in the capacity to convert food items from their natural states to processed food forms using heat and cold and several artificial methods. The air we breathe is mercifully naturally regulated to keep us alive; it is difficult to imagine that inhaling and exhaling air can be overdone. By deliberately taking a deep breath a person enhances the oxygen richness of the bloodstream. But the frenetic demands of modern life hinder it and many people go through their quotidian existential survival efforts in shallow breaths, the inhalation and exhalation of air is seldom deep-chested. Paradoxically, this is regardless of whether the person’s career or job or business exertions are of a sedentary type or otherwise.

Our water intake is measured, although not as automatized as our breathing. Hydration is frequently in response to a thirst-signal inbuilt in us, with a general susceptibility on our part not to take enough of it daily because of our reliance on not-very-healthy substitutes. Quenching thirst with water is tantamount to applying medicine after death, as biologists aver, because the thirst sensation is a signal to the body that some damage has already been done by the dehydration which occasioned the feeling of thirst. The psalmist David says of the Creator of the human body: “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are your works, and that my soul knows very well” (Psalm 139:14). Another psalmist Moses – David didn’t pen all the biblical psalms – plaintively pleads with God: “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). The lyric speaker in TS Eliot’s famous dramatic monologue harangues the past worriedly in contemplation of the present and the future:

For I have known them all already, known them all--
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume? (Greenblatt 2006b:2291).

While it is now general knowledge that inhalation of cigarette smoke is a nutritional indulgence that is hazardous to the human body, discussants are not in agreement in their verdict about the benefits

or otherwise of coffee which the persona in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” alludes to in his speech. The lyric speaker mentions another kind of drink:

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea (Greenblatt 2006b:2292).

Enlightened opinion also differs over the benefits to the human body of tea. But there are different types of tea. Rooibos, for example, is tea without caffeine described by dictionary as “a drug found in coffee and tea that makes you feel more active” (Hornby 2020).

A famous self-confessed hedonist, Solomon, who indulged in wine and women in his lifetime, has a piece of advice concerning another kind of drink: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart” (Proverbs 31:4-6). In the linguistically idiosyncratic prose romance narrative titled *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* Amos Tutuola’s palm-wine drinkard embarks on a long trip of eerie adventures to the land of the dead in quest of a dead man, his tapster, who had supplied him for years with the drink he liked, palm wine from fermented sap of the ubiquitous palm tree of the equatorial rain forest. The tapster had fallen to his death from a tall palm tree and his boss had felt unable to continue life without the brand of palm wine the tapster provided him while he was alive. The protagonist opens the narrative ebulliently:

I was a palm-wine drinkard since I was a boy of ten years of age. I had no other work more than to drink palm-wine in my life. In those days we did not know other money, except COWRIES, so that everything was very cheap, and my father was the richest man in our town.

My father got eight children and I was the eldest among them, all of the rest were hard workers, but I myself was an expert palm-wine drinkard. I was drinking palm-wine from morning till night and from night till morning. By that time I could not drink ordinary water at all except palm-wine (Tutuola 1952:7).

The palm-wine drinkard has soul mates in Luke and Simon of Moteane Melamu’s short story “The Unweeded Garden” (2006:99):

“We cannot get drunk on four chibuku cartons, man. It will take almost a dozen to get me properly soused,” Luke proclaims.

“Who’s talking?” Simon retorts contemptuously. “Have you forgotten what a bloody fool you made of yourself at the Christmas party which the office gave us last year?”

Nutritionists say that human taste buds are designed in such a way that the taste and desire for liquid and solid food items can be cultivated. Taste bud output is therefore susceptible to change and it is also prone to cultural determinism, as demonstrated by the 1950s scholar and cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who extensively analysed kinship relationships, mythology, and modes of preparing food, among others, according to the structuralist praxis modelled on Saussurean linguistics. The psalmist David and father of the preacher Solomon declares in fervent supplication: “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not incline my

heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies” (Psalm 141:3-4).

A few cross-cultural solid food items include bread, rice, meat, fish, fruit, vegetables, etc. etc., some of which are celebrated globally by having a day in the year dedicated to their official recognition as important to human survival. There is an international day of bread, for example, and an international day of rice, for good reason too. In a eulogy the psalmist declaims: “He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man’s heart” (Psalm 104:14-15)

Yam is a food item that is treasured in West Africa. It seems to be globalising slowly and steadily largely in trajectories dictated by the socio-seismic fault lines of emigration from Africa to the Black Diaspora. Yam is yet to acquire the kind of global celebrity status of, for example, bread and rice, because its pace of internationalisation is closely tied to diplomatic protocols crafted by many countries to stymie immigrant influx. But yam’s botanical and spiritual provenance will continue to ensure its local celebrity status as in the following account in the novel *Things Fall Apart*:

All cooking-pots, calabashes and wooden bowls were thoroughly washed, especially the wooden mortar in which yam was pounded. Yam foo-foo and vegetable soup was the chief food in the celebration. So much of it was cooked that, no matter how heavily the family ate or how many friends and relations they invited from neighbouring villages, there was always a huge quantity of food left over at the end of the day. The story was always told of a wealthy man who set before his guests a mound of foo-foo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other, and it was not until late in the evening that one of them saw for the first time his in-law who had arrived during the course of the meal and had fallen to on the opposite side. It was only then that they exchanged greetings and shook hands over what was left of the food. The New Yam Festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia (Greenblatt 2006b:2639).

While there is a natural connection between food and life, there is also a link between food and death. The Pardoner’s Tale is replete with biblical allusions about the genesis of sin as food-induced in the Garden of Eden, Noah’s character flaw as food or drink based, Lot’s incestuous family scandal as catalysed by drink, Isaac’s error of blessing an impostor son as food derived – although perhaps an instance of poetic justice in that the loser son had, prior to the incident of missed blessing, sold his birth right for a mess of pottage. The Bible’s classic illustration of the connection between food and the wages of sin (“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” Romans 6:23) is the display of temerity by the devil: “Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God command that these stones become bread’” (Matthew 4:3).

A repeat scenario of a catastrophic fall is promptly averted by Jesus’ tactful response to the tempter’s suggestion: “But He answered and said, It is written “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). The tempter fails to grasp the paradox: the word from God is the bread from heaven. The mystery is that the One to be eaten cannot be the eater. Jesus unravels the mystery: “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:33). The equation is resolved: the word and the bread of life are one and the same Subject: “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so

he who feeds on Me will live because of Me” (John 6:57).

For their part, the three villains in the Pardoner’s Tale mutually exterminate themselves out of failure to grasp the point that food and death can be interlinked in much the same way that food and life are closely connected. The narrative shows the three friends as literally playing into the hands of death in their disrespectful taunt:

“Nay, olde cherl, by God thou shalt nat so,”
Saide this other hasardour anon.
“Thou partest nat so lightly, by Saint John!
Thou speke right now of thilke traitour Deeth,
That in this contree all oure freendes sleeth:
Have here my trouthe, as thou art his espye,
Tel where he is, or thou shalt it abyde,
By God and by the holy sacrament!
For smoothly thou art oon of his assent
To sleen us Yonge folk, thou false thief” (Greenblatt 2006a:294).

These youths are up in arms against the fatalities of the bubonic plague and are rewarded, so to speak, with an encounter with the personified cause of the epidemic. Death settles scores with them using a food-and-drink related joker, as it were. In a cyber-age and twenty-first century of the ravages of COVID-19 pandemic, the solo and concerted quest for the originator of the crisis is undertaken as much by social media conjecture and hype as by scientific and technological inquiry and proof. By contrast, Tutuola’s palm-wine drinkard overpowers Death in a skirmish of wits and captures him in a net:

As I was carrying him along the road, he was trying all his efforts to escape or to kill me, but I did not give him a chance to do that ... When I reached the old man’s house, he was inside his room, then I called him and told him that I had brought Death that he told me to go and bring ... I threw down Death before his door and at the same time that I threw him down, the net cut in pieces and Death found his way out. Then the old man and his wife escaped through the windows and also the whole people in that town ran away for their lives and left their properties there (Tutuola 1952:15).

The adventurer releases Death in this episode and a whole town flees in its wake. But curiously, the venturesome protagonist lets slip through his magical fingers a chance to find out from the horse’s mouth, as the saying, the whereabouts of his dead palm-wine tapster. He passes up a golden opportunity, so the quest continues as he follows in Death’s trail in search of “Deads’ Town” which is believed to be the ultimate destination of the dead.

Death waxes lyrical in Markus Zusak’s bestselling *The Book Thief*. He is a first-person narrator who announces himself with customary magical braggadocio:

I could introduce myself properly, but it’s not really necessary. You will know me well enough and soon enough, depending on a diverse range of variables. It suffices to say that at some point in time, I will be standing over you, as genially as possible. Your soul will be in my arms. A colour will be perched on my shoulder. I will carry you gently away.

At that moment, you will be lying there (I rarely find people standing up). You will be caked in your own body. There will be a discovery; a scream will dribble down the air. The only sound I'll hear after that will be my own breathing, and the sound of the smell, of my footsteps (Zusak 2007:14).

Scripture declares that Death is the last enemy of humanity to be trounced. "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Revelation 20:12-14).Zusak's Death exults magically at possibilities, speaks of a diverse range of variables in his self-introduction.

Aesthetic Variables

Again, gastronomy is the art and practice of cooking and eating good food. To summarize: the connection between food and life is axiomatic; the link between food and death may not be as obvious. There is an art to cooking food; there is an art to eating food. Michael Greger's bestselling *How not to Die* delves into Death's exultation and trenchantly undercuts it with scientific and experiential lifestyle variable factors that prolong life. There is an artful concealment in the art and practice of cooking and eating food. There is much that is hidden from popular view but continues to make the rounds in privileged and esoteric circles. The hide-and-seek of genuine and counterfeit information or sheer propaganda is purposive:

The salt industry has its own PR and lobbying firms to play tobacco-industry-style tactics to downplay the dangers of its products. But the real villains aren't necessarily the salt-mine barons – it's the processed food industry. The trillion-dollar processed food industry uses dirt-cheap added salt and sugar to sell us their junk ... But there are two other major reasons the food industry adds salt to foods. If you add salt to meat, it draws in water. This way, a company can increase the weight of its product by nearly 20 percent. Since meat is sold by the pound, that's 20 percent more profits for very little added cost. Second, as everyone knows, eating salt makes us thirsty. There's a reason bars put out free baskets of salted nuts and pretzels, and it's the same reason fizzy drink conglomerates own snack-food companies. A cold drink and a salty snack go hand in hand. It may be no coincidence that Pepsi and Frito-Lay, a crisp manufacturer, are part of the same corporation (Greger, 2018:147).

Not many people are aware of the connection between salt and ill health, between sodium and high blood pressure, hypertension, and stroke. Fewer still know that the body chemistry of a black person is more intolerant of salt than that of a non-black person. Black people are more susceptible to hypertension and stroke than other people according to the following statistics: In 2017, the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association published some new guidelines respecting the conditions: "a greater percent of men (47%) have high blood pressure than women (43%); high blood pressure is more common in non-Hispanic black adults (54%) than in non-Hispanic white adults (46%), non-Hispanic Asian adults (39%), or Hispanic adults (36%)" (Wikipedia online). This should come as no surprise given the variable stress factor which a black man must put up with to survive.

Until 2020 and the humongous global crisis unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not widely known in many communities that several common food items that humanity had taken for granted for so long were loaded with so much more benefits than were assumed. So much useful, sometimes not so useful, information got out into perfervid circulation in social media during the many lockdowns engendered by an extraordinary year of fear and anxiety. The alarming developments also created a climate of gullibility. A lot was exhumed as new knowledge that was thought by some to be dead-and-buried archival material. Notwithstanding, there was much reasoned and substantiated information about physical exercise, about fire, yes, fire whether green, blue, or yellow, about beans and spices such as garlic, ginger, aloe vera, moringa, turmeric, and vegetables the likes of bitter-leaf, beetroot, broccoli, cauliflower, sweet potato, and nuts and seeds such as flaxseed, and fruits like berries.

For example, whoever thought that Adam's ale when taken warm first thing in the morning yielded so much therapeutic benefit to its drinker. Adam's ale is an exotic name for water. Some of us will only eat or drink what is labelled as exotica. Nutritionists recommend that warm water of up to three glasses in the morning to start the day has immense benefits which go beyond simply irrigating the alimentary canal. It purges the system of toxic substances and reinvigorates and readies the body for optimal organic function and healthful performance that impacts the entire day. It is said that the Japanese have known about the medicinal benefits of early morning hydration a long time and it probably accounts for their consistently high score on the longevity scale as a people (Malkmus 2006). If the practice is kept up, nutritionists explain, not only does water eliminate unwanted matter from the body, often, it also flushes out the diseases and sicknesses that are collateral with the presence of toxins in the body. Moreover, if sustained, and water starts up the day consistently, it can deliver preventive in addition to curative benefits to the human body.

Greger (2018) adumbrates on the ancient, or perhaps, modern saying that an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure. But he does so not with reference to water alone but to food generally in its ambivalent relationship to life and death: "Most deaths in the United States are preventable, and they are related to what we eat. Our diet is the number-one cause of premature death and the number-one cause of disability. Surely, diet must also be the number-one thing taught in medical schools, right? Sadly, it's not" (Greger 2018:2). There appears to be some mammoth conspiracy, both perennial and intense, to counter the veracity of the fact that God fills our mouths with good things so that our youth can be renewed like the eagle's (Psalm 103:5). It turns out that in real life the eagle is extant and real, and its ability to rejuvenate is biological; while in contrast the capability of the phoenix, for example, to revive is only mythical. God created both the human and the eagle, and He means what He says: "Beloved, I pray that you prosper in all things and be in health even as your soul prospers" (3 John 2).

Zusak's Death in *The Book Thief* brags shamanistically about variables. Greger in *How not to Die* describes five ways of implementing the age-old wisdom of prevention is better than cure. In this medical practitioner's own virtually jargon-free informative words:

In public health school, students learn that there are three levels of preventive medicine. The first is primary prevention, as in trying to prevent people at risk for heart disease from suffering their first heart attack. An example, of this level of preventive medicine would be your doctor prescribing you a statin drug for high cholesterol. Secondary prevention takes place when you already have the disease and are trying to prevent it from becoming worse, like having a second heart attack. To do this, your doctor may add an aspirin or other drugs

to your regimen. At the third level of preventive medicine, the focus is on helping people manage long-term health problems, so your doctor, for example, might prescribe a cardiac rehabilitation program that aims to prevent further physical deterioration and pain. In 2000 a fourth level was proposed. What could this new “quaternary” prevention be? Reduce the complications from all the drugs and surgery from the first three levels. But people seem to forget about a fifth concept, termed primordial prevention, that was first introduced by World Health Organization back in 1978. Decades later it’s finally being embraced by the American Heart Association.

Primordial prevention was conceived as a strategy to prevent whole societies from experiencing epidemics of chronic-disease risk-factors. This means not just preventing chronic disease but preventing the risk factors that lead to chronic disease. For example, instead of trying to prevent someone with high cholesterol from suffering a heart attack, why not help prevent him or her from getting high cholesterol (which leads to the heart attack) in the first place? (Greger 2018:3-4).

Greger (2018) goes on to show why the enumerated preventive measures are unpopular and slow of adoption and implementation by the administrations and bodies that should be adopting and implementing. The biases against prevention but in favour of cure range from the political to the mercenary. Corporate vested commercial interests permeate virtually all segments of society including business, educational institutions, and government establishments in a capitalist system. The capitalist wields economic power and exerts considerable political influence in the modern society. For example, the hallelujah diet canvassed by George. H. Malkmus and recommended as healthful is food that is plant based and largely unprocessed. In a raw form, the ingredients of nourishment to the human body are preserved in wholly plant derived food. It is not only the nutrients in unprocessed plant-based food items that are preserved but also their natural colours. Hence, a meal served for eating must display the colours of the rainbow. Malkmus (2006) posits that any food that is passed through fire has not much that is of value left in it which the human body can profit from, because the essence contained in the cooked food is damaged or destroyed by fire. As such, most fast foods, for instance, are dead on arrival at the diner’s table. Hence, fast food chains that retail an assortment of heat-treated heat-preserved food will do everything in their power to oppose the suggestion.

Nutritionists maintain in general that it is not just that processed food is deleterious to the body when it is passed through fire but that the way it is passed through fire determines the extent of its capability to harm human health. Greger (2018:67-68) elaborates on certain medical findings:

Although they were only discovered recently, sirtuins represent one of the most promising areas of medicine, as they appear to be involved in promoting healthy aging and longevity ... You may be able to do this by reducing your dietary exposure to advanced glycation end products, or AGEs. AGE is an appropriate acronym, as they are considered “gerontotoxins” meaning aging toxins (from the Greek *geros*, meaning “old age”, as in “geriatric”) ... More than five hundred foods have been tested for AGE content, everything from Big Macs and Hot Pockets to coffee and Jell-O. In general, meat, cheese, and highly processed foods had the highest AGE content, and grains, beans, breads, vegetables, fruits, and milk had the least. The top-twenty most AGE-contaminated products per serving tested were various brands of: 1. BBQ chicken 2. Bacon 3. Grilled hot dog 4. Roasted chicken thigh 5. Roasted chicken leg 6. Pan-fried steak 7. Oven-fried chicken breast 8. Deep-fried chicken breast 9. Stir-fried

steak strips 10. McDonald's Chicken Selects breast strips 11. Pan-fried turkey burger 12. BBQ chicken (sic) 13. Oven-fried fish 14. McDonald's Chicken McNuggets 15. Grilled chicken 16. Pan-fried turkey burger (sic) 17. Baked chicken 18. Pan-fried turkey burger (sic) 19. Boiled hot dog 20. Grilled steak.

You get the idea.

Yes, cooking methods matter.

There is growing scientific research to support the nutritionists' position regarding the immense preventive and curative benefits of deliberate dietary choices that are in favour of plant based as opposed to animal derived and processed foods. Therefore, pharmaceutical businesses (they tend generally to be long on cure and short on prevention) like the fast-food chains (they have rendered the domestic kitchen largely redundant in most homes) will do about anything to oppose the nutritionist findings through counter arguments and intensified hyperbolic advertisements that rely on publicity stunts which target consumer ignorance and play on the tenacity of old habits and tastes that have cumulated with time. The vested interests will not want anything to undermine the easy and voluminous circulation of commodities regardless of the net effect and negative indications on human life of the products. Profitability is what drives the capitalist system. Still, it does not seem that cooking food can be avoided altogether.

The famed discovery of Louis Pasteur leading to the pasteurization of milk, a procedure involving subjecting milk to some heat to eliminate harmful bugs from it before it is drunk or used came with incalculable milk-related sickness-preventing benefits that saved lives. Greger (2018) and D'Adamo (2017) are less sanguine though about the benefits of animal derived milk than other nutritionists, recommending rather that people abstain from dairy products and use instead plant sourced milks such as almond milk, soya milk. About food and one of the baffling mental health conditions Greger (2018:66) suggests: "While there is no proven way to halt the progression of Alzheimer's, if you do know anyone suffering from the disease, regularly cooking him or her saffron-spiced paella may help". In addition to the saffron spice, regular physical exercise is also recommended, because exercising for a minimum of half-an-hour a day can for older people and a bit longer, say, forty-five minutes to an hour, for younger people and does serve as tonic that does the brain a lot of good.

While on the point about cooking, it should be instructive that Scripture is not averse to subjecting food to heat. At the institution of the Passover, the instruction was specific which was given to the Israelites being freed from four hundred and thirty years of bondage and exploitation in Egypt: "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats ... Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire – its head with its legs and its entrails" (Exodus 12:5,8-9). The Bible discourages wastage. Scripture rewards balance and moderation in all things. The roast meat was to be eaten with bitter herbs. For example, bitter leaf is a plant that is common in West Africa and is well-known for its preventive and curative properties when added to certain food recipes of melon or vegetable soup and eaten regularly. A sizzling bitter leaf-based vegetable or melon soup goes very well with hot pounded yam. It must have been included in the vegetable soup that went with the yam foo-foo feast described in *Things Fall Apart*, as cited earlier. This kind of vegetable soup is usually made with palm oil – which oil D'Adamo (2017) does not think highly of because of its potential for toxicity, it would seem. However, it came to light in social media, during the COVID-19 induced lockdowns,

that a pharmaceutical company based in Austin, Texas, USA, had found out about how medicinally valuable bitter leaf is and has come out with a capsule packaging of it for commercial and ease-of-ingestion purposes.

Also, to the point, the adjective omniscient is only applicable to God. He is the all-knowing omnipotent, omnipresent Creator. What does God think about food and fire? A student of biblical hermeneutics might wonder at the question since God is Himself fire: “For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). This is literal, and not at all figurative. “And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that you are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.’ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench” (1 Kings 18:36-38). The burnt sacrifice was a bull cut in pieces and laid on wood (verse 33).

After this feat of humiliating the idols, the priests of the idols, and their royal patrons Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah finds himself on the run for dear life. In his flight an angel feeds him: “Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again” (1 Kings 19:6). Accounts of divine involvement with food-passed-through-the-fire are not confined to the Old Testament of the Bible and may also be found in the New Testament. “Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread ... Jesus said to them, ‘Come and eat breakfast’” (John 21: 9,12).

From the foregoing, it seems deducible that fire and food can get on nicely. Greger (2018) lists beans and bread among the food items with the least AGE content. Few varieties of beans can be eaten raw. For example, some brands of black eye beans are so refractory you need a sustained amount of heat to temper them and make them fit for human consumption. As for bread, it is often a product from wheat that has been exposed to oven-type intensity of heat. Overcooking is perhaps what to avoid in the art and practice of cooking. Also, in cooking and eating moderation remains the watchword, generally.

Mismatch Factor

In his bestselling book *Eat Right for Your Type* Peter J D’Adamo contends that it is not enough to know about foods and have food preferences that are touted as favourable to good health, a person must also know about the connection between food and blood. Food must be matched with blood type for good nutritive and health results, even if the food types are plant derived. The beginning points for making correct food choice is knowledge of your blood type and the food type that naturally goes with it: “Your blood type is the key that unlocks the door to the mysteries of health, disease, longevity, physical vitality, and emotional strength. Your blood type determines your susceptibility to illness, which foods you should eat, and how you should exercise. It is a factor in your energy levels, in the efficiency with which you burn calories, in your emotional response to stress, and perhaps even in your personality” (D’Adamo 2017:1).

This scientific standpoint about the significance of blood is biblical. On the sanctity of blood, Bible says: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11). According to Scripture, blood has both physical and spiritual significance. The nutrients in the food we eat are carried to all parts of our body by the blood. We are kept alive by nourishment reaching

all body cells through the blood stream. Practitioners of sorcery and witchcraft also know about the spiritual value of blood; it is the reason they slaughter animals for blood sacrifice to demons and offer human sacrifice to idols (Psalm 106:35-38).

Bible says: “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). In Christian experience the shedding of blood is fundamental to divine forgiveness of sin. To this end, Bible records: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29). Jesus fulfilled this office as sacrificial Lamb on the Cross providing appeasement on behalf of all who would believe in Him. Bible explains further: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15). This is compatible with Jesus describing Himself as “the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

Jesus Christ is the Bread of life (John 6:41): “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:53). Jesus, the Bread of life, when fully received corrects the mismatch factor between humanity and the devil and alters our spiritual DNA to enable us become children of the living God: “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).

Customized health and excess weight loss and other benefits seem to accrue to individuals from matching blood type and the foods that are appropriate to it. D’Adamo (2017:xiii) expatiates that “When I wrote *Eat Right for Your Type*, the word nutrigenomics (the way food affects gene expression) had yet to be coined, but it is a historical fact that the Blood Type Diet is the first nutrigenomic diet system. The Blood Type Diet is unique in that it presents a theory of personalized nutrition in a society where people have learned to be comfortable with a one-size-fits-all solution”. This scientific claim does not seem to be far-fetched, because it is also biblical. The human heart that pumps blood is customized: “He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works” (Psalm 33: 15). All of creation is an amazing tapestry of unique formations by an omnipotent omniscient omnipresent God. In all of it, there is a dignified place for old age: “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Timothy 5:17). God Himself is appropriately named The Ancient of Days who must be revered.

Implicit in a piece of information in social media is a rejoinder to ageism. This info with edifying value does the viral rounds in the following words: “An extensive study in the USA found that the most productive age in human life is between 60-70 years of age. The second most productive stage of the human being is from 70-80 years of age. The third most productive stage is from 50-60 years of age. The average age of Nobel Prize winners is 62 years. The average age of the presidents of prominent companies in the world is 63 years. The average age of pastors of the 100 largest churches in the USA is 71. The average age of Popes of the Roman Catholic Church is 76 years.” A study ascribed to a *New England Journal of Medicine* (2018) avers that a person’s potential peaks at 60 years old and continues into your 80s. Therefore, if you are between 60-70 or 70-80 you are in the best and second level of performance, respectively, in your life. This is reassuring news. Also comforting is the iterated biblical life expectancy ordained for humanity which averages at 100 years of age (Genesis 6:3; Psalm 90:10; Isaiah 65:20). Still, this is all subject to variable factors of

awareness, individual choice, corporate imposition, and nutrition.

In closing, the question may be asked, has abstinence any role to play in all this? Yes. Apposite to the issue of health is the practice of periodically cutting sources of carnal pleasure to the human palate. There can be Spartan abstinence that is included in the special regimens termed Diet. But biblical abstinence from food and drink and sexual gratification – closely linked to abstinence from wickedness – is known as a fast and can be beneficial (Isaiah 58:3-14). A fast can deliver incalculable health benefits to the spirit, soul, and body of the tripartite human make-up (Isaiah 58:8). It also sets the human spirit free to focus with minimal carnal distractions on the invisible omniscient omnipotent omnipresent Creator to whom all flesh must return with an account of how we lived here on earth (Hebrews 4:12-13) while burning away excess fat and toxic residual deposits from our body cells and organs. In a fast the body metabolizes what should not be in the body in the first place.

Conclusion

There is a grand design to all things and to all of creation, not excepting how we cook and how we eat, how we live, and how we die. Human nutrition must be discreetly handled to produce a balanced diet and live a healthy life. Also, the aesthetic principle can have nutritional relevance in the sense that it is recommended that each meal must wear the colours of the rainbow for it to deliver on the requirement for a balanced diet.

The “toxin” known as excess is reducible with an antidote named moderation and eliminable through fasting or the periodic abstention from food. Moderation in the art of cooking and eating can be as much a spice of life as variety that is instanced by the colour spectrum of edibles in the dinner plate. The crucial point remains that we do not have to die physically and spiritually. Jesus Christ is the bread of life who has famously remarked that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from God. He is the spiritual nourishment and Centre of a very much inclusive master plan.

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