



# *Institute For Theological Encounter With Science and Technology*

Volume 53 - #3

Summer 2022 Bulletin

## **The Science and Theology of Food**

We just celebrated Corpus Christi Sunday as I prepare to write this introduction. How fitting! This bulletin is mainly dedicated to food and theology.

Sister Marianne provides a well thought out review of a course on Science and Theology of Food offered to seminarians and other students at Seton Hall University. The link to the entire document is provided at the end of the review. The course focuses on food and theology, food and science, and then food, theology and science, as well as food in the humanities and social sciences. The question at the end is, will we enjoy the “food” of everlasting life?

Dr. Balabanski writes about how big food is in the Gospel of Luke. There are over 100 references to food in Luke’s Gospel. I never realized how many references to food occur in it. At Mass, I have listened to the times mentioned in the Gospel over the years. So I have heard and remember each reference. However, because we select only parts of Luke’s Gospel for reading at Mass, we sometimes don’t make the connections. I know that I never did until now. What about you? Have you made these connections prior to reading this article?

The final article contains excerpts from an interview with Fr. Leo Patalinghug. Dr Mary Anne Urlakis and her young adult daughter Grace Marie are the interviewers. The interview focuses on being fed both in spirit and body. It is interesting to learn how Fr. Leo was drawn to the priesthood. I won’t spoil it. You will have to read the article to find out. He spent a great deal of time with food as a chef and also in adoration with the Eucharist. Please read the interview and see how Fr. Leo is transformed. (The link to the full interview is at the end of the article.) In our own lives, how much time do we spend with the Eucharist? Will the amount of time increase after reading this bulletin?



*Ralph Olliges*

Ralph Olliges, *ITEST Bulletin* Editor

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## Announcements

### ITEST Webinars

**Watch** our most recent webinars on demand.

**Free Speech: What does it mean to speak freely in today's world?** Presenters: Rachel Fischer, Francis Etheredge, Peter Breen, and Lawrence Hopperton  
Watch at [www.faithscience.org/free-speech/](http://www.faithscience.org/free-speech/).

**Food, Logic, and Creation: Does STEM\* help form better Catholics?** Presenters: Dr. Thomas Marlowe, Fr. Gerry Buonopane, Fr. Joseph Laracy, with opening message from Fr. Leo Patalinghug  
Watch at [www.faithscience.org/food/](http://www.faithscience.org/food/).

\* Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

**Register now** for these ITEST webinars.

Saturday, August 20, 2022

**A Post Roe World** with presenters Kiki Latimer and Dr. Patrick Castle

Register at [www.faithscience.org/post-roe/](http://www.faithscience.org/post-roe/)

Saturday, September 10, 2022

**Bioethics and Law: Understanding the Nexus** with presenter Fr. Thomas Davis

Register at [www.faithscience.org/catholic-bioethics](http://www.faithscience.org/catholic-bioethics)

**Registration coming soon** for these webinars.

Saturday, October 29, 2022

**Two Wings: How Science & Theology Read One Another**  
Presenters Dr. Stacy Trasancos and Dr. Thomas Sheahen

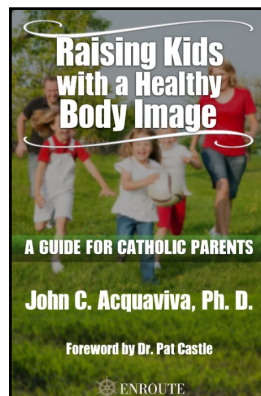
Saturday, November 19, 2022

**In Vitro Fertilization and the Sanctity of Human Life**  
with presenters: Mary Anne Urlakis, PhD and Craig Turczynski, PhD

### New Book

#### **Raising Kids with a Healthy Body Image: A Guide for Catholic Parents**

by Dr. John C. Acquaviva



This book presents the unique approach to the body image crisis that impacts many children. From a young age, our kids are under immense pressure from a variety of sources that can determine the value of their bodies. But God has something to say about this as well. Saint John Paul II's wonderful teaching known as *Theology of the Body* is the book's guiding force.

Along with Scripture and the Church's Sacraments, this book is an excellent parenting tool to guide your child so they see the worth of their bodies as designed by our Creator.

Buy the book at En Route Books and Media at [www.enroutebooksandmedia.com/raising-kids/](http://www.enroutebooksandmedia.com/raising-kids/)

### In Memoriam

Edward J. O'Boyle, PhD

July 13, 1937 - July 4, 2022

We remember fondly, yet with sadness, Edward J. O'Boyle who died and entered Eternal Life on July 4th. Ed was one of our few economists on the ITEST membership rolls contributing over the years his insightful and powerful essays on economics related to science, politics and yes, human nature. ITEST published a number of his essays in quarterly bulletins often evoking responses both negative and positive from our readers. See [ITEST Bulletin Vol 52 #4](#) (Fall 2021) for an example of the most recent response. Ed's essays made people think about issues that affected them personally, and he usually achieved his goal. Ed, now the most recent member of our ITEST "[Cloud of Witnesses](#)," joins the cohort in praising God. May we rejoice that God has given Ed the best of His gifts, the vision of Himself.

Find past  
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Sheila Roth, Managing Editor ISSN 1073-5976 • Copyright © 2022

## Development of an Integrated Course in Science and Theology of Food: Nourishment for Body, Mind, and Soul

By Fr. Gerald J. Buonopane, Dr. Thomas J. Marlowe, and Fr. Joseph R. Laracy

*Review by Sister Marianne Postiglione, RSM*

*When I volunteered to review this course on the science and theology of food, I knew it would be an enjoyable but somewhat challenging task. To attempt to synthesize/summarize this “award winning” exploration of food in relation to theology, science, social sciences, the humanities and the moral implications in each area, would not do justice to the course. Hence, I chose to highlight what I consider as editor/reviewer, the main points of each area of the original 19-page course. Download the full document at the link at the end of this review.*

Food, glorious food! The words of the song from the popular musical *Oliver*, have echoed in the minds and hearts of people from various cultures around the world. In fact, food is indeed a topic that seizes the attention of people at any time. Similarly, ITEST over the decades



has also highlighted the importance of food in the lives of people of all ages by offering specific conferences on food. One held in 1994, *The Science and Politics of Food* (pp. 198-199)\* marked a stepping stone to a subsequent conference in 2001 titled *Genetics and Nutrition* (pp. 211-212)\*. Among the discussions at that conference was the subject of genetically modified foods (Genetically Modified Organisms - GMOs) which at the time evoked from the public both positive and negative reactions, often coupled with heated debate about the safety, cost, and nutritious value of GMOs. Also discussed were questions from the academic community regarding the development, manufacturing, and distribution of GMOs and their effects on consumers and farmers. ITEST published the results of those conferences from the 1990's and 2000's, currently available in part at <https://faithscience.org/excerpts-from-the-1994-science-and-politics-of-food-authors-various-authors-from-the-science-and-politics-of-food/>.

To further document the interest of academia in the subject of food, and seeing the need for such a program, the following essay will feature syntheses and reflections

on the portions of the course relating to food and its connection to theology, science, and the moral implications involved. Created by Fr. Gerald J. Buonopane, Dr. Thomas J. Marlowe, and Fr. Joseph R. Laracy at Seton Hall University, the course offers students, especially seminarians, an opportunity to explore how such a topic as food has important implications for science and theology.

In the introduction to the integrated course, the authors state:

The interest in developing the course was inspired by the Science and Faith in Seminary Formation for College and Pre-Theology Program grant from the John Templeton Foundation and administered by John Carroll University. The goal of the program is to raise the “scientific literacy of clergy” and seeks the development of courses that connect branches of science with Catholic teaching. Two new courses have been developed at Seton Hall as a direct result of recent Templeton grants: a course entitled “Creation and Science” on the compatibility of the Catholic theology of creation with the natural sciences, and the course described herein on the science and theology of food. Fr. Buonopane submitted both a pre-proposal (April 2016) and a full-proposal (June 2016) for a grant to support the development of the food course, and in September 2016 he was the recipient of a \$10,000 grant.

### Introduction

Food is an ever-present fact of daily life. Yes, food is everywhere! No longer is ethnic food sequestered in the country of origin; there is a global quality to the enjoyment and proliferation of food. Walk down any city street in America, and you will find ethnic restaurants galore. The social interaction initiated by this phenomenon often results in forming community among various cultures. In this section the authors describe aspects of food, above all, as nourishment, and how good nourishment affects positively the health and well-being of the consumer, whereas inadequate nourishment often results in negative health effects. Another concern is food production and processing, including freezing, dehydration, thermal processing, and packaging of food and how certain packaging processes can affect the quality of food.

*Continues on page 4*

\* From *Written in our Flesh: Eyes toward Jerusalem*

## Food and Theology

“God gives to us a tremendous variety of food and an endless supply.” The authors remind us of God’s unlimited goodness and love for all creatures, plants, animals, and human beings, citing the many references in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testament, of instances where food plays a large role in the lives of the people often in difficult circumstances. Ruth, for example, shares her food with her mother-in-law, Naomi. Joseph brings about a reconciliation through food by saving his selfish brothers from famine many years after they had tried to do away with him. The New Testament too is replete with stories featuring food:

- The Marriage Feast at Cana “They have no wine.”
- The feeding of the five thousand “But what are these among so many?”
- Jesus, the host and head chef in the post-Resurrection scene at the lake where he prepared breakfast for his astonished disciples.

Jesus obviously enjoyed being with friends in “communion” with them at large feasts as well as at the more intimate meals. All these stories and many more found in the Bible attest to the importance God places on feeding his people in their physical need. But what of the spiritual needs? For believers it is easy to see the connection and relationship between the stories about food that prefigure the “greatest food of all,” the Eucharist. In fact, the authors note that “Bread is a metaphor for Jesus himself: ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.’” (*John 6:35*)

One of the saddest events in the New Testament begins with an invitation Jesus makes to his followers. Jesus says, “Eat my flesh; drink my blood, and you will have eternal life.” What is he saying? Jesus used the words to “eat my flesh” meaning to gnaw or chew on it. Is it any wonder that some of his followers found this a hard saying and could not accept it? **And they walked with Him no longer.** One of the saddest lines in the New Testament! Jesus didn’t say to them, “Come back, I didn’t mean that literally; I was speaking only figuratively.” The invitation continues daily on altars around the world when the priest proclaims the words, “This is my Body, this is my Blood shed for you.” This is the Eucharistic Feast, the Thanksgiving, the greatest invitation of all.

The authors further cover the practice of fasting from food and how fasting can be life giving. “Fasting allows us to put our focus on God and His will.” Wasting food can be considered a sin of commission. Jesus was aware of the need not to waste food. “Gather up the fragments

left over, so that nothing will be wasted,” he cautioned his disciples. (*John 6:12*) In modern times, much food is wasted because of improper handling, processing, and distribution methods. People go hungry when it is not necessary. However, food also serves a saving purpose. We need only read the stories of the manna in the desert, The Lamb’s Supper, Passover Meal of the Israelites which became ... “a ticket to new life, a mechanism for deliverance.”

*God gives to us a tremendous variety of food and an endless supply.*

## Food and Science

“Fresh foods (particularly fruits and vegetables) are breathing and living organisms.” The authors begin this section on food and science by describing the chemical and microbiological changes that occur in fresh food over time. Like a human person who needs sufficient oxygen to breathe, food must maintain sufficient amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sulfur to remain fresh and edible. Both food chemistry and microbiology alert us to the changes made in food by the specific cooking method, for example, grilling meat at a high heat to achieve a char on the skin, which in some cases may involve a cancer risk.

Some have searched for a healthy alternative to meat by choosing the Vegan route. They obtain their nutrients from vegetables, plant foods, dairy products, and so on, while others refrain entirely from dairy as well as meat.

Culture, too, has a great influence on the growth, production, and preparation of food. Food cooked in a southern Italian home differs quite substantially from food prepared in a Scandinavian kitchen. Americans, too, love their fats and sugars, especially those found in fast-food restaurants around the country. The McDonald’s arch, easily identified by most four-year olds, provides food that appeals to the sight and to the taste above all. If we are honest, we have to admit one time in our lives, eating and enjoying a small bag of French fries from our friendly McDonald’s. However, the long-term outcomes of such eating habits may result in hypertension, diabetes and heart problems, let alone high cholesterol.

Often a point of contention is the topic of genetically modified organisms, (GMOs) which ITEST covered in the conference on *Genetics and Nutrition*. (See note above for citation.) Often termed “Frankenfood” by its

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opponents, GMOs such as maize/corn, tomatoes, wheat, potatoes, and others were genetically modified in the labs for various reasons. The GMOs made the corn insect resistant, soybeans herbicide resistant, and potatoes virus resistant. The reason ostensibly was to increase food production especially for the poor in underdeveloped countries. Questions consistently arose in the media about the safety of GMOs, and as such, helped to fuel the public anxiety about certain foods. The American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture (AFBFA) eventually reported that the GMO seeds could be saved and replanted giving a lie to the so-called GMO “terminator” seeds which never made it into production. The AFBFA noted that “most farmers buy new seeds because generation of harvested seeds will not uniformly contain all the desired traits of the original seed.” (*Bringing Biotech to Life* - an Educational Resource for Grades 7 - 10 supported by the AFBFA). Not to be ignored, however, is the question of risk assessment regarding GMOs. For indeed there are still questions regarding safety of these foods. In the next section the authors discuss moral questions surrounding certain GMO modifications.

***How do we now bring all three topics  
– food, theology, and science – together?***

### Food, Theology, and Science

“How do we now bring all three topics – food, theology, and science – together?” the authors ask.

“One way is to look at the most basic principle of the Christian moral life: awareness that every person bears the dignity of being made in the image of God.” Applying the moral code to food and science requires that our food is safe to consume, that everyone has enough food, and that production companies are honest in their labeling of products. Risk assessments, for example, performed on GMO apples grown with the ability to “resist browning when cut open or sliced” show no immediate harm for consumers, and although the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2015 approved that apple for sale in the U.S., questions still remain regarding the long-term effects of such a modification on the health of consumers. Are food scientists then “God’s tinkers” in this kind of modification---admittedly with a goal of more and better food for the world---somehow interfering with God’s plan for creation? Father Robert Brungs, SJ, founder of ITEST, uses this very phrase, “God’s tinkers,” in an essay regarding genetically modified animals and plants. He approaches the subject somewhat benignly in an opening message for the Spring, 1993 issue

of the *ITEST Bulletin*, Volume 24, Number 2.

*“The Old Testament (Genesis 30) speaks of Jacob tinkering with the genetics of Laban’s sheep. We are the world’s tinkers par excellence – it can be one of our better spiritual qualities. As we, a people set apart but with arms open to all people and the whole of creation, face these opportunities and challenges that the biological sciences and technologies raise, so will creation flourish or falter.”*

The flourishing of all creation is everyone’s duty, and possibly the most effective current spokesperson for that position is Pope Francis. In his June 2015 address to the Food and Agriculture Organization, he emphasized three points for achieving food security: “reduce food waste, educate people to practice wholesome nutrition, and foster an attitude of genuine and effective solidarity to promote and achieve real food security for everyone.” Those sentiments find an echo in the pope’s encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. Although admitting that “no conclusive proof exists that GM foods may be harmful to human beings,” he warns that poor rural farmers around the world may be negatively affected by the high cost of GM seeds from large companies like Monsanto and DuPont who produce those seeds.

### Food in the Humanities and Social Sciences

The place of food in relation to the humanities and the social sciences certainly rates a mention if not a detailed analysis in this review; not that it isn’t as important as the subject of food in relation to theology and science, but that it goes beyond the purpose of this review. This course on food describes the global attention food commands in almost every aspect of the social sciences and in literature. The authors cite Shakespeare’s use of food references in his plays, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Coriolanus*, among others. Further proof of this keen interest in the topic of food, is shown by articles appearing often in non-food magazines on topics such as “Tackling Hunger,” and “The Problem of Hunger and How Food Banks Can Help.” I recommend a reading of this section from the course description as a worthwhile activity beneficial particularly to those more inclined to the humanities and social sciences than to science and technology.

### Presentations and Discussions on Science and Theology of Food

This list in part contains various topics such as:

- Overview of composition of foods and food systems

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- Science and chemistry/chemical reactions of major food components: water, water activity
- Food processing methods, food preservation and packaging
- Stability of food components under different processing conditions
- Food safety: chemical and biological; nutrition – eating healthy
- Food and metabolism, nutrient absorption/malabsorption
- Thinking theologically about food
- Food in Sacred Scripture: Jesus and food
- Sacrificial eating: the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; Holy Eucharist and food
- Food and culture, food consumption: what does America eat?
- Eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating, food addictions
- Catholic intellectual tradition

## Conclusion

I thoroughly enjoyed reading and studying this course and heartily recommend its application to the course of study for all seminarians of different faith traditions. The topic of food and its moral and ethical considerations coupled with theology, science, the humanities, and social sciences presents a masterful rendering of the integration of aspects of God's creation. Similar to a well-cooked meal, this "course" contains just the right amounts of each ingredient in the serving of a sumptuous feast of "Food, Glorious Food" pre-figuring the Banquet of the Heavenly Feast where all will sit down to enjoy the "food" of everlasting life.

Access the entire document on the ITEST website with permission from the *Seminary Journal*. [www.faithscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Development-of-an-Integrated-Course-in-Science-and-Theology-of-Food.pdf](http://www.faithscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Development-of-an-Integrated-Course-in-Science-and-Theology-of-Food.pdf)

Another valuable resource is *Science and Theology of Food: Learning Outcomes in Fall 2017, A Reflection*, which is posted with permission of the *Seminary Journal* at [www.faithscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Science-and-Theology-of-Food-Learning-Outcomes-in-Fall-2017-A-Reflection.pdf](http://www.faithscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Science-and-Theology-of-Food-Learning-Outcomes-in-Fall-2017-A-Reflection.pdf)

Watch the ITEST webinar, *Food, Logic, and Creation: Does STEM help form better Catholics?* [www.faithscience.org/food](http://www.faithscience.org/food).

## Food and Hospitality in the Gospel of Luke

By Vicky Balabanski

*Reprinted with permission from the author*

### Food is big in the Gospel of Luke.

With more than one hundred references to food and drink in *Luke* and *Acts*, it's an important theme. But what is Luke trying to get at?

### Jesus and food

Perhaps the first thing is that Jesus himself spent time eating with friends. This must have been noticeable enough for the people who didn't like him to pick up on it and spread the rumor that "he is a glutton and a drinker!" (*Luke* 7:34) Mind you, Jesus himself is quoting his critics here, so it seems that he's prepared to wear that description, while pointing out that his critics weren't satisfied with John either, who avoided wine and was known for his strict diet. So Luke seems to be saying that if food and drink was one way in which Jesus connected with people, that's okay for us too.

### Our daily bread

Luke is clear that God knows and cares about our bodies. Luke is one of the two Gospels in which Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer (*Luke* 11:2-4) The other is

Matthew. This prayer talks about both spiritual needs and bodily ones. God knows we need our daily bread and encourages us to ask.

### Inclusiveness vs. Preparation

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples who are on the road spreading the good news to "eat whatever is set before you." (*Luke* 10:8) Strict Jews were pretty wary of what they ate, because they couldn't be sure whether it had been prepared in the right way, or even whether the ingredients had been properly tithed. So, Jesus' instructions stand out as more inclusive, more interested in the people than in the food itself and how it had been prepared.

### God "visits"

As it turns out, eating with people, receiving their hospitality, is an important way that God "visits." Luke is only Gospel that says that God "visits" us. (*Luke* 1:68, 7:16, 19:44, and also *Acts* 15:14) Sometimes this word is translated as "looks favorably," but the word means "go to see a person with helpful intent."

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If it is *God* who visits us in this way, giving and receiving hospitality take on a new significance.

### **Making connections**

Hospitality in Luke is important, but of course it's not an end in itself. We know from Jesus' time with Martha and Mary (*Luke* 10:38-41) that the point is not ultimately the effort put into the food preparation, but whether or not the food becomes an occasion to really connect with Jesus, and through Jesus, with God.

Perhaps the best-known story in Luke of a meal becoming a place to encounter Jesus is the story of the two people on the road to Emmaus (*Luke* 24:13-35), who finally encountered Jesus when they broke bread together. That comes after the resurrection, right at the end of the Gospel, yet the connection of Jesus with food is hinted at right from the beginning, when we are told that Jesus was laid in a *manger* – a food trough. (*Luke* 2:1-7, 13)

### **Giving and receiving hospitality**

There are many other “hospitality” stories in the Gospel of Luke:

- Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee (7:36-50)
- Jesus feeds five thousand (9:10-17)
- Prayer and hospitality (11:1-13)
- Humility and hospitality (14:7-14)
- Jesus and Zacchaeus (19:1-10)
- The Lord's supper (22:7-13).

There are also stories which tell about some who refuse to offer and receive hospitality, for example the Samaritan village (9:50-55) and some who encounter the mission of the seventy. (10:1-12)

Luke makes it clear that receiving hospitality is as important as giving it.

### **What can we know about when and where Luke was writing?**

From the elegant Greek in which Luke wrote, and from various hints about the importance of Rome, it seems clear that Luke lived in a city or town of the Roman Empire, perhaps even in Rome itself.

Luke must have been writing towards the end of the first century, because he makes it clear that he used other written “Gospels” which were available. (*Luke* 1:1-3) Most scholars think that Luke knew and used Mark's Gospel, but probably not Matthew's.

It's impossible to be certain of the date of any of the Gospels, but a scholar named Gerd Theissen has suggested that late 96, early 97 is plausible, because shortly after the death of the hated emperor Domitian (*Luke* 81-96) might have been a time when even an aristocratic or wealthy reader like the one to whom the Gospel is addressed – “most excellent Theophilus” – would have welcomed the revolutionary tones of Mary's Song about the God who “has brought down mighty kings from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.” (*Luke* 1:52)

### **Multicultural society**

It's likely that the Christian community within which Luke was writing was pretty multi-cultural, with people from Jewish, Gentile, and even Samaritan backgrounds. There were also different socio-economic groups represented, with some wealthy associates as well as poor members, patrons as well as clients, and masters as well as slaves and dependents. Luke does not criticize the wealthy, provided they act with generosity and care towards others.

### **Is the Gospel making a difference?**

In the ancient world, the social distinctions between people were reinforced by many customs. Meals were ceremonies which were formal, hierarchical occasions, an ideal forum for highlighting the differences between those who do, and those who do not “conform.” For this reason, meals could show up whether the Gospel was really taking root and changing peoples' ways of relating to one another, or whether the surrounding culture still dictated what happened at Christian gatherings. So when Luke explores the Gospel in the setting of meals, he is inviting the reader to reflect on whether the Good News of God in Jesus was really making a difference in practical ways in their lives – see *Luke* 14:7-14, 15:11-32, and 16:19-31 as examples.

### **It's worthwhile for us to ponder the very same questions in 2022!**

*This article was originally published in KUCA News, Dec. 2003.*

Dr. Rev. Vicky Balabanski is Director of Biblical Studies at Uniting College in Brooklyn Park, South Australia. She teaches across a range of topics, including an introduction to advanced study of New Testament writings, biblical hermeneutics, and Greek. She is also an ordained Uniting Church Minister of the Word.

## Father Leo Patalinghug, IVDei, on WCAT Radio's *Vows, Vocations, and Promises*

Partial transcript from the June 15, 2022 interview by

Dr. Mary Anne Urlakis, and her daughter Grace Marie Urlakis

Watch the full interview at [www.faithscience.org/food/](http://www.faithscience.org/food/)

**Mary Anne:** Thank you for tuning in to WCAT Radio's "Vows, Vocations, and Promises: Discerning the Call of Love." I'm your host, Dr. Mary Anne Urlakis, and my daughter Grace Marie Urlakis is co-hosting this special edition of this program. We are honored to interview Fr. Leo Patalinghug, the founder of Plating Grace, an international movement focused on the theology of food and the renewal of the family in Christ. Father Leo was ordained in 1999, and he is a member of the community of consecrated life, *Voluntas Dei*. Father Leo is an award-winning chef, radio, and TV show host including the host of *Savoring Faith* on EWTN. He is the author of four best-selling books, and he is an international speaker who travels the world educating and inspiring about the theology of food. Father Leo is the founder and chair of The Table Foundation ([www.thetablefoundation.org/](http://www.thetablefoundation.org/)), a nonprofit organization which works to harvest the power of food to do good, one meal at a time, bringing people together around a common table. Father, I am delighted and honored to have you join us today.

**Fr. Leo:** Thanks. It's my pleasure.

**Mary Anne:** Would you start us off with a prayer?

**Fr. Leo:** Certainly. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Loving God, we ask for your guidance in our conversation. We ask you to help us to understand our words, to give glory to you, but also how to put these words into practice. And may we be fed with the good things that you want to give to us so that we in turn can share it with others, especially with those who go without. We ask all of this with the prayers of our Blessed Mother and the angels and saints through Christ our Lord.

**Mary Anne:** Amen. Father, welcome. This program "Vows, Vocations, and Promises" is dedicated to the universal call to holiness, and explores the various vocations that people have. I have heard and shared a lot of interesting vocation stories over the years, but I can hardly wait to hear yours. I am curious as to how a breakdancing, double black belt in martial arts, and trained chef heard and answered the call of God to serve in the ministerial priesthood. Can you share a bit about your vocation and your vocation story?

**Fr. Leo:** Sure, I grew up pretty much a typical teenager, not necessarily liking church, but not willing to fight parents about it just because there were bigger things to do. And I did assume, even as a child, that church wasn't there to hurt me. So I never felt the need to rebel too badly. I didn't enjoy it, but I didn't care for it. And so, more importantly, I think what happened was, as I was growing up, people were not afraid to challenge me, including a mission preacher who invited me and everybody at the church to come to at least one night of a mission that he was putting on. It was during the Lenten season, and he specifically said that if you don't want to go to church after this, you don't have to go. So I kind of took him up on the offer. I wound up not only appreciating what he had to say, but I was interested. All he did was explain the basics of the faith, especially the Mass; he did the teaching Mass. And it was at



that moment that I realized that Mass was something I did not understand. But if I was willing to just put myself into it, I could get something out of it. And that something was really a *someone* - to get God out of Mass in the Eucharist. So that started the trajectory of seeing how church wasn't there to hurt me, but was there to help if I was willing to engage. I think that is one of the big struggles in today's modern world - that people assume that they know the faith, but they haven't actually engaged it.

And so, I had some people who were willing to challenge me about what I believed in a respectful and patient way. I was also given the opportunity to go on a pilgrimage. I went to Medjugorje, which was at one point in the country known as Yugoslavia. This was all in the 80s, mind you. It was there that I saw the universal Church, how big it was, and interestingly enough, how young it was, especially when I saw people from Europe, who did not have the chance to practice their

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faith. They came in droves to go to a pilgrimage site, not necessarily for the miracles, but for the universal, experienced church. That gave me a bigger view of what church was like. After coming home from Medjugorje, I got more involved in youth ministry. I eventually directed one of the music groups at church, started teaching religious education, and just started to defend the Catholic faith from people, especially my friends, who were starting to move into Protestant churches. This gave me a chance to reflect and think, and to see if God is real. And so I turned to the priesthood, and that was a slow go. It took a year and a half after I graduated from college to enter the seminary at the Catholic University of America for a degree in philosophy. And then I was sent to the North American College where I studied at the great Gregorian University for my bachelor's degree. Then I was given the opportunity to study for my pontifical licensure degree in Mariology, which is the study of the Virgin Mary in the life of Christ and salvation history. So it was a slow, long process, but it was intentional, I think, at least on God's part. He doesn't want to rush anything. And so, I just started asking the questions, and I was willing to hear the answers. And every step of the way, God just kept giving me a good answer for why to not only believe in the Church, but also be a part of it. And then, of course, in a unique way, as a priest.

**Mary Anne:** Can you talk about your prayer life as you were discerning the priesthood? What was what was your go-to prayer? Where did you find your peace?

**Fr. Leo:** I started going to Mass daily, and at the time, I was heavily involved in martial arts competitions. I was pretty healthy and pretty athletic, and doing a lot of working out. During some of my exercises, I would pray parts of the Rosary, and then, as I was driving to and from work or school, I would pray a little bit of the Rosary. I started getting involved in apologetics and read a lot more of the lives of the saints. Adoration was not as available in the 80s as it might be now. I mean, we were still suffering from a misinterpretation of Vatican II. I remember hearing some priests, sad to say, comparing the Eucharist to "cookie worship." But I do remember going to adoration with my family on certain feast days. Praying the family Rosary was something we did at least on a weekly basis. The only thing consistent in my prayer life was when I was exercising and praying the Rosary. Using the scriptures, I entered into debate with other people. So it became a form of fascination and a kind of interpretation, but ultimately, meditation.

**Mary Anne:** What role did food play in your discernment?

**Fr. Leo:** It really didn't have any play whatsoever, because I never thought about becoming a priest and a chef. Food was a part of my life; it wasn't a part of discernment. As a Filipino American family, we had a lot of parties. My mom was a consummate hostess, and we always had guests. Food was a big part of my family growing up, so eating together was just something we did. We made it a point to make sure that there was some sort of family meal throughout the week. Food did not really begin to kick in until I was a seminarian living at the North American College in Rome. We had retreat led by a lay woman who was a psychotherapist. She was pretty direct in talking about maintaining purity in the heart, dealing with the humanity of sexual temptations, and all of those things that deal with the body. As part of her presentation, during a meal-time when we were eating in silence, she led us through a meditation about food. And somehow, just a simple conversation about the power of food led me to adoration, looking at that host in the monstrance, and then, all of a sudden, developing this theology of food. This was in the 90s, so the Food Network wasn't even on yet. But towards the end of my seminary, the Food Network started up. I already knew how to cook because my mom was a home economics teacher, and I was always in the kitchen with her. When I went to Italy, I became fascinated by their food culture, so I started to investigate it more personally. I started taking some cooking courses, learning more, and meeting chefs. It nurtured my faith because one of the things that we enjoyed doing most was having dinner, but more importantly, having dinner at the seminary. We had a kitchen that we could sign up for and rent, so to speak. And so I became one of the regulars, cooking for friends. Other Italians would come up to the kitchen, and we would share recipes about Italian food. I would show them how to make ribs and hamburgers.

***Food was a big part of my family growing up, so eating together was just something we did.***

**Mary Anne:** As you're speaking about Rome, and about your experience there in seminary, I'm envisioning the beauty of how the restaurants and cafes are next to the incredible basilicas, churches, and holy sites, and how it could have all come together for you there in that setting, in a unique way that it would not have anyplace else.

**Fr. Leo:** That's correct. You know, in Europe, in partic-

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ular, romance language Europe, they take food very seriously. The reason why Rome is so vibrant is because the churches are prominent, and the restaurants are plentiful. That's just the reality when you can be fed in spirit, as well as in body. When you go to the markets and see the freshness, you're struck intellectually by how Europeans eat. I mean no criticism of anyone, but they shop daily; they don't go shopping once a month for boxes of things that have been processed and store it all in their garage. For Italians, grocery shopping is a daily activity, so they would be getting the freshest, the most local, the healthiest food. And it is an experience; it is a natural encounter of community. Unfortunately, our experience of food and sourcing our own products is a little unnatural; it's a little disconnected. I think you can see what the effects are; we have a less healthy approach to food than our European counterparts.

***For Italians, grocery shopping is a daily activity, so they would be getting the freshest, the most local, the healthiest food.***

**Grace Marie:** This reminds me of the experience of going to a dinner in Italy, where you're counting the forks. And you think, oh my goodness, it's going to be this many courses! At the same time, the fact that it's happening in that community, that you're sharing a warm meal with people, it's not like I'm going to eat in 15 minutes. I'm going to leave this meal with something much more than just nourishing the body.

**Fr. Leo:** That's very true. In Italy, if you're going to a restaurant, it could take a couple hours, for sure. And they're very attentive to portion control and the timing of the food so that when you walk out of there, you're not stuffed, but you are, as they would say, content, because they know how to space it out and limit the portions to give your body time to digest. The beverages are just as necessary to the meal, not just the food. They have a more mature understanding of things like alcohol. They have a culture that celebrates food. Now in America, we're developing it. We already have a great food culture, but I think we are also inundated with the amount of fast-food available. The more disconnected we are from what is natural and fresh, the more disconnected we are from the ones who make the food.

**Mary Anne:** Can you tell me about your community Volantus Dei?

**Fr. Leo:** It was Pius XII who, prior to Vatican II, established a new form of consecrated life called the Secular

Institute. So on one hand, you have religious, which is usually founded by a founder, preferably a saint, or someone who is definitely holy, and they have a specific calling or charism that they want to work with. For example, Franciscans work with the poor, and Dominicans work with education. Then you have diocesan priests who are subject to doing what the bishop needs them to do. They are called secular priests. And so the difficulty is that after the age of enlightenment, the age of the industrial revolution, and modernism creeping in, Pope Pius XII discovered that people were not coming to church, and the church wasn't going to them. The religious communities were busy with their own charism, so he created another form of religious life, a consecrated life, and they call it the Secular Institute. We have the responsibility of entering into the secular world, but with the consecration of a religious community. And so, Voluntas Dei was founded prior to Vatican II, but then it really developed after Vatican II. Wherever we go, as Secular Institute priests, there's going to be a secular look to the work that we are doing. That's why I'm in restaurants, on my food trucks, and speaking at conferences, whether they be religious or secular. There are a lot of different things that we do in the world. Our motto is to say "yes," as the Virgin Mary did. St. Paul is a pretty important figure for us, because he was sent outside the church's jurisdiction. He went to the pagans. He went to the people who never considered themselves part of God's covenant. So, we're a missionary group. And our job is to be a leaven in society, and to bring Christ's presence and brotherhood wherever we go in the midst of the world.

**Mary Anne:** It's a beautiful community. Can you talk about your food truck and how it brings about this charism in your ministry?

**Fr. Leo:** There was an original thought to have a restaurant, but thank God we didn't, because COVID started up and it was a mess. So, one of my board members suggested that we look into a food truck; I had always been fascinated by that. I have cooked in restaurants before, but I'll be honest, cooking on a food truck is five times harder. I also took on the objective to work with people coming out of the prison system and people coming from disadvantaged communities. So we're hiring people who might need a little bit of extra attention. And boy, that is not easy, because I need to make sure that the standards of cooking and service are high. That's just how I have been raised, and that's how I've been trained. We're dealing with a culture that doesn't

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have or share those expectations, nor do they have the skill set. Now, we're only in our second year, and I can proudly say our food is really good to the point where we've won the People's Choice Awards at a food truck festival now two years in a row.

**Mary Anne:** I love what you're doing with the mission of the food truck, bringing in those who need a hand and using food. I saw that your Auxiliary Bishop blessed the food truck on the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker.

**Fr. Leo:** The food truck was dedicated to St. Joseph in the year of St. Joseph (2021). We wanted to talk about the dignity of work, and the whole idea of being able to provide dignified work. My objective is to bring in people as a small team and train them so that by the end of this year, they'll be more viable to a more self-sustaining job. I don't want them to work on my food truck forever; I want them to use this time for training, make a little bit of money, develop a relationship, and support community, but also to do some personal discernment. What do they think God is asking them to do? I'm trying to find some people who can help with the mission, to kind of grow it and to expand it.

**Mary Anne:** How would they get in touch with you?

**Fr. Leo:** Reach out to us through our website, [www.platinggraceandgrub.com/](http://www.platinggraceandgrub.com/). We need to find mission hearted people who want to work with food and work with a unique population.

Jesus wants us to be pastors, to feed the flock. He calls us to be servants at the table, to be Father, where we're providing the daily bread. I think that everyone in the church needs to learn how to wait on tables, to do that in a spiritual way. I think everyone needs to learn how to put on an apron, because if you don't have an apron, then you might think that you're there to be served.

**Mary Anne:** I think that's an excellent point. From the very beginning, from Abraham and Sarah through Christ Himself in the washing of the feet - the sense of hospitality has been woven through our faith as a strong thread. With your mission, you take that thread, that hospitality, internationally with your speaking tours, the cookbooks, these video presentations, and the food truck. You call many of us to that level of hospitality and remind us that it is part of our vocation, whether we are married, in the generous single life, or in the ministerial priesthood or religious life, that hospitality is part of who we are.

**Fr. Leo:** Hospitality is rooted in the same word as hos-

pital - for healing. Working with people who are coming out of the prison system, or even just disadvantaged communities, they are shocked by my personal mission to have regular family mealtimes together as a team. At one point, people resisted that, but I said if you work for us, you're going to have to treat us like family. We don't want to be your best friend. We don't even want to be your family. But it has to create a sense that we're responsible to each other. And eating together is the one thing that Jesus did very, very specifically. That's what really annoyed the other religious leaders; they would never be caught dead eating with a prostitute or a tax collector or a pagan or someone who has leprosy. But Jesus sought them out and ate with them. I think our world is in a place where we are constantly divided, and I believe that food is what can bring us together. It's the most religious thing that God gives to us. That's why Jesus became the Eucharist. I wrote the books to teach people not just recipes, but why you eat together. Then, in my most recent book, called *Saving the Family*, I teach families *how* to eat together.

***And eating together is the one thing that Jesus did very, very specifically.***

**Grace Marie:** On the subject of the family, I have a lot of young friends who are just recently married, and they're anticipating children or they've got a little one. What advice would you give to young adults who are just starting out with families of their own?

**Fr. Leo:** Make your mealtime regular; teach the very basics of saying a prayer together. Don't be afraid to discipline your child. Teach them gratitude. Don't turn your child into a spoiled brat where if they don't like something, you make them something else. There's got to be discipline when it comes to food because it helps develop the child's palate, but also their sense of belonging as part of the family. And it's also important, especially for young couples, to make sure that they can spend time and share a meal together - monthly dinner dates. And that's why I wrote the book *Spicing Up Married Life!* because they need to strengthen their love for each other as husband and wife. Their responsibility is to be a parent, but their vocation is to be married to each other. I want to encourage couples to make sure that they're taking time and doing what they did before they got married, going on dates and talking and being intimate with each other around a meal, because a meal is an intimate experience.

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**Fr. Leo:** A regular family meal reduces drug addiction tendencies, and in teenagers reduces out-of-marriage sexual expression, reduces obesity, and improves testing scores. Some accuse me of being a showman because I just cook and talk. But that's only because people aren't actually listening to what I'm saying. I bring relevance to the sacramentality of food. I mean, look, I make pretty good food. I beat Bobby Flay in a competition, and I've cooked around the world. But what strikes people is the power of what food can do. And that's what Jesus wanted to do when he gave us himself. He said, do this, eat this, drink this in memory of me. It's just a piece of bread and a drop of wine, but infused with God, it is his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. We don't have that power to make fried chicken or mashed potatoes or turkey and stuffing into the body and blood of Christ. But if we invite God to the table, it can become a sacred moment. It's interesting that at Thanksgiving, not even a religious holiday, everyone prays before they eat.

***But if we invite God to the table, it can become a sacred moment.***

**Mary Anne:** When I think about the priesthood, I think of spiritual fatherhood, and our world is experiencing a crisis of fatherhood with the incarceration problem, out of wedlock pregnancies, and so many other social ills. People are hungering for the father that many do not have in the home, and they need spiritual fathers to be there and nurture, to feed their children. What advice do you have for young men who are in formation for the priesthood?

**Fr. Leo:** Just a few things to consider. Pay attention to how you spend time with the Eucharist. Pay attention to how you spend time with the saints, praying the rosary, invoking a saint's intercession, because they're in the company of Jesus. Take notice of who you invite to dinner and who has invited you to dinner. How you eat a normal meal will eventually be translated to how you celebrate the Mass. If you rush through your food, you're probably going to be a fast Mass guy. You have to know the balance: how to be formal, but also how to be familiar. Monitor how you eat because Jesus was very clear when he sent his disciples. He said to eat what is set before you, and whatever house you enter, have a meal with them. That requires us to not be cli-

quish; it requires us to not only eat with the rich donors, but to be familiar and spend time with your parishioners. So I always say to priests, and I'll say to seminarians: Who invites you to dinner? Who have you invited to dinner? That's going to speak a lot about your spirituality, of the horizontal understanding of the Eucharist. The vertical is Jesus and us; we get that.

**Mary Anne:** You are involved in so much, between your foundation, Plating Grace, the food truck, the books, the writing. How do you keep it all together?

**Fr. Leo:** I've got a great team of people. We're a very small team, but they're all triple-threats; they have many talents, and they use their talents generously. There is a lot of grace that the Church gives to me, because all I'm trying to do is promote the mission of the Church. There are going to be times when I fail, but I think a sign of faithfulness is when you get up and you try again. If you have the abilities that God has given you as a charism, or a gift or a talent, and you don't use it, woe to you. That's the kind of person Jesus will spit out of his mouth on Judgment Day. So again, I'm just trying.

**Mary Anne:** You've got an amazing amount of stuff going on. When you go home at night and you cook yourself a meal, what's your favorite meal?

**Fr. Leo:** Honestly, whatever is in the refrigerator! Last night, I had some leftover crab cakes, and I used some of my Italian seaside sauce and made a crab pasta dish. I don't have a lot in my refrigerator, though because I'm hardly ever home. So, I have to go shopping the way Italians do - a little bit at a time. Honestly, I enjoy eating alone sometimes because I'm always with people. This gives me a chance just to be a little quiet and prepare something where I don't have to make it pretty, but I will make it tasty.

**Mary Anne:** Father, it has been a joy to have you with us for WCAT Radio's "Vows, Vocations, and Promises: Discerning the Call of Love." Would you be so kind as to close this with a prayer?

**Fr. Leo:** We give you thanks Almighty God for these and all thy benefits which we have received through Christ our Lord. May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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