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Food ethics in Bible banquets: passage, communion and power

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Abstract

Banquets, since ancient times, have offered elements to reflect on the passage from nature to culture operated via commensality within the human cuisine. And the Bible, as a literary work, the greater influence on the formation of Western culture, leaves clues for understanding the movements that have instituted the practice of sociability around food, helping us to reflect how they echo in our current practices. Thus, this article aims to understand the ethics constituting banquets described in the biblical text, taking the Bible as a corpus. Text analyses were performed according to the proposal by Bauer and Gaskell (2002). The results pointed to three types of behavior governing the acts of food sharing: (1) *the ethics of passage*, which serves as a sign of change in collective or individual lives; (2) *the ethics of communion*, which creates a sphere of shared values, achievements, ideals, care favoring someone or a people, aiming at a political end; and (3) *the ethics of power*, sharing that engenders relations of agreement, demonstration of power via the production of images of abundance and drawing a distinction between the sovereign and the subjects. From this perspective, thinking of food involves focusing not only on the nutritional components, but thinking of the symbols, the collective imagination, sociability – in short, issues that pervade humanity. This raises challenges and the need to build an Anthropology of Nutrition.

Keywords: Banquet. Commensality. Sociability. Culture. Religion.

Introduction

All language, besides a rational and functional value, contains its noises, deviations and symbolic aspects. So, too, is food which, in addition to its nutritional components, is full of culture, sociability, and aspects of human subjectivity.

According to Canesqui,[1] "Food, besides its utilitarian character, consists of language." The following rituals are focused: the beginning and maintenance of personal and business relationships, the expression of love and affection, the distinction of a group, the reaction to psychological or emotional stress, the meaning of social status or wealth, rewards or punishments, recognition, strengthening self-esteem, exercising political and economic power, prevention and treatment of physical and mental illnesses, changes of habits. All these are events related and marked by the consumption of food in a network of sociabilities.[2] This social component that inhabits the act of eating and drinking in a community defines commensality. *Mensa,* from Latin, means to share a table and this involves not only the food pattern or what one eats but mainly how one eats.[3]

And what could be said about the commensality rituals in one of the books that, according to Sellier,[4] most influenced the formation of Western culture: the Bible? Taking this reference as a starting point, in addition to anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's statement,[5] who believes that literature as an art form can be taken as a model reduced for understanding culture, the questions that stimulate this work are born: which ethics structures the banquets narrated in biblical texts? How does this ethics echo in our eating practices today?

The present article therefore aims to understand the constitutive ethics of banquets described in the biblical text.

Methodology

In this article, the Bible is taken as a literary text.[6] Its choice – in a work that tries to understand the cultural phenomenon of commensality – is justified as this is one of the most read works in the world, alongside the Greek mythological narratives and the Roman law writings, that greatly influences the Western culture, as highlighted by Sellier.[4]

The specific corpus of analysis is delimited by the Old Testament (OT) from Genesis to the Book of Malachi and the four gospels of the New Testament (NT) from the Gospel of Matthew to the Gospel of John. It was analyzed from the thematic analysis methodology, which is a type of content analysis. According to Bauer & Gaskell,[7] the thematic analysis is a gradual procedure to reduce the qualitative text.

Initially, the first reduction was carried out, in which the texts were paraphrased in more succinct sentences. After that, a second reduction was carried out, in which the sentences were paraphrased in keywords. "Both reductions operate with meaning generalization and condensation."[7]

Results and Discussion

Bible banquets offer countless examples of how ancient life was centered around meals. In relation to the initial question of this work – that ethics is founded from these banquets –, some lines of reflection could be classified: the Ethics of Passage, the Ethics of Communion and the Ethics of Power. This, in addition, has made us think about man's behavior in relation to eating practices exercised in the contemporary world.

Ethics of Passage

It is possible to say that the banquets that, inserted in the eating system[a] presented in the text, are moved by an ethics of passage, punctuate moments of transition and are configured like symbolic acts underlined by eating practices, having as their main objective to mark a change in the life of an individual or a collective. Therefore it is possible to understand, from the idea of *passage*, by Van Gennep[8]:

> [...] It is the very fact of living that necessitates the successive passage from one special society to another and from one social situation to another, such that the individual life consists of a succession of stages, of which the ends and beginnings constitute ensembles of the same order: birth, social puberty, marriage, parenthood, class progression, occupational specialization, death.[8]

In the corpus analyzed, banquets were found that explain the ethics of passage, such as banquets for weddings, birthdays and funerals (Table 1).

a According to Fischler (1995), eating systems are representations, beliefs and practices that are associated with them and that individuals who are part of a culture or a group within the culture share. Each culture has a specific cuisine that involves classifications, particular taxonomies, and a complex set of rules that serve not only to the preparation and combination of foods but also their harvesting and consumption.
FISCHLER, Claude. El (h)omnívoro: El gusto, la cocina y el cuerpo. Translation by Mario Merlino. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1995, p. 34.

Table 1. Ethics of Passage

Book, chapter and verse	Type of banquet	Hosts	Reason for the banquet	Guest public	Foods/preparations consumed
Genesis 29:22	Wedding party	Laban	To celebrate Jacob and Raquel's wedding. A negotiation between Laban and Jacob	Family and friends	Non-reported
Esther 2:18	Wedding party	Ahasuerus	To celebrate Ahasuerus and Esther's wedding.	All citizens of the city	Non-reported
Genesis 40:20	Birthday party	Pharaoh	To celebrate the birth of the Pharaoh. Murder of the baker	All citizens of the city	Non-reported
Mark 6:21	Birthday party	Herod	To celebrate the birth of Herod. Assassination of John the Baptist	Princes of Galilee	Non-reported
Samuel I 25:36	Funeral	Nabal	To celebrate his victory over David	Nabal	Non-reported

The earliest mentions to weddings in Western history appear in the biblical texts. In these reports, the spouses were exposed to some religious ritual to formalize the bond. Here at least two excerpts that refer to the passage of weddings are going to be highlighted: the marriage of Jacob and Rachel and the marriage of King Ahasuerus and Esther. Two ceremonies with different concepts but the same purpose: to celebrate matrimony.[b]

Jacob, the son of Rebekah, upon arriving at Harran, met and fell in love with his cousin, Rachel, Laban's daughter, his mother's brother. Faced with this, he promised to serve her father for seven years to have her as his wife. After the deadline, however, Laban did not fulfill the agreement: instead of Raquel, he gave Leah, the eldest daughter, as it is customary to marry the eldest daughter before the youngest one. Jacob then served Laban for another seven years to finally

b According to Souza (2008), civil marriage is a contract between the state and two persons with the purpose of forming a family. According to Costa (2007), religious wedding is a celebration in which the marriage bond of the rules of a certain religion is established. It is subjected to the respective religion rules and is independent from its recognition by the state or civil law to be valid.

have Rachel at his side. This time, however, when the years were over, Laban gave Rachel's hand. To seal each of the weddings, Laban offered public banquets among friends and family, making his agreement with Jacob official.

As for the second case, there is the example of the banquet that marks the marriage of King Ahasuerus with Esther. This one, in turn, after dismissing Vashti as queen of his reign, goes in search of a new wife. The chosen one was Esther, a beautiful young woman. Esther charmed King Ahasuerus and he knew that the presence of a new queen in his reign would show more confidence to the people. A wedding ceremony was held, publicly ratified with a banquet for all the citizens of Susa. Such a convivial meal became known as the Feast of Esther, when the king distributed gifts according to his generosity.

As can be seen, weddings, already in biblical accounts, had the function of marking a passage that, more than an affective bond, constituted a contract, a business carried out on the advice from their parents, tutors or ancestors (Laban, Mordecai or Mordechai, the latter being Esther's cousin and tutor).

The main role of weddings, therefore, was to serve as a basis for alliances whose importance would prevail over love and sexuality.[9] Laban was seeking a community ethic with the marriage of Jacob and Rachel. Ahasuerus wanted to secure his power to maintain territorial limits and perpetuate his lineage. Mordecai, in turn, concerned about the Jewish people's fate, was guided by Jewish ethics: on the one hand, fidelity to the king of the land in which he lives and, at the same time, the reaffirmation of who he is and what responsibility he has for this. Thus, he knew how to give Esther the proper guidelines for the consolidation of this passage: from a deported Jewish woman to the Empress of Persia.

Why the need to mark this contractual passage with food? Offering and sharing food, in these cases, could symbolize the desire to create bonds.[10] Commensality, then, functions as a sign of acceptance of the individual's participation in a particular social circle: a new family, a new people.[11] The guests are invited to share this bread as participants in this game of social interactions, in view of the need to make public the contract signed. The passage is made explicit.

Something interesting to consider is that what was consumed in the biblical weddings banquets is not known for sure. The exception in terms of food description appears in the biblical episode marked by the miracle of transformation of water into wine in the episode known as the Wedding at Cana.

Therefore, in the case of banquets, it is perceived that there is in the biblical text a desire to give foods a sacred character. Wine, for example, is an alcoholic beverage which, together with bread and oil, has been given a sacred and liturgical character by the Church.[12] In the struggle against gluttony, sacralizing such foods would be a way of shielding them as objects of desire. Gluttony

is one of the deadly sins. Quellier[13] shows that among all capital sins gluttony is regarded by the Church as the most serious one, since it incites other carnal vices, especially lust. Desiring food beyond its subsistence function would be the first step in incurring sin.

Regarding this statement it is possible to mention the narrative concerning the manna offered to the Jews. As it is narrated in the book of Exodus, manna refers to the "bread of heaven" (Exodus 16), the daily food given by God to the people of Israel during the forty years of their journey through the desert to the Promised Land.

Some of the common characteristics of the weddings mentioned above could be identified: they were offered to the public, usually to close relatives, friends and the community, with the hosts being the subjects of passage and/or the bride's and groom's parents. Today's wedding banquets bear some resemblance to such festivities: they continue to be offered to close people, and they are a time to socially mark this contractual passage. The decor, the attractions, the cuisine and clothing for the occasion were being adapted to the time when they were held, depending on the culture. In general, large wedding banquets are distinctiveness of luxury and socially mark the joining of wealthy families.[14]

Weddings are models of ethics of passage because they represent an express change in two people's social lives. They are identical passages for both and with only one objective: to cross the stage from engaged couples to married couples. It is one of the most important rites for society in life and the common sharing of food attests to this change. Commensality promotes a strong and expressive conviviality in particular circumstances. It brings people together on the occasions of rites of passage, namely, birth and marriage.[15] Therefore, the consumption of food in this case is ritual and the rite is something that places order, classifies, establishes priorities, gives meaning to what is important and to what is secondary.[16]

Another ritual of passage marked by banquets are birthday celebrations. In the biblical text, the Egyptian Pharaoh's and Herod II's birthdays are highlighted.

The Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, after being offended by his butler and baker, had them arrested. The butler and the baker had dreams; Joseph, the son of Jacob, revealed its meanings. The butler told Joseph that he had seen a vine from which three branches sprouted with clusters of grapes. The grapes ripened and he squeezed them into the Pharaoh's cup. With the help of God, Joseph soon understood the meaning of this dream and told the butler that the three branches meant three days and that after that time the Pharaoh would again give him the position of butler. Likewise, Joseph interpreted the baker's dreams: there were three baskets of loaves on his head as well as birds that would be eating what was in one of the baskets. The answer to this riddle was revealed to Joseph, who brought up the interpretation: the three baskets are three days. Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the

birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee. And as it was said it happened: the butler was restored as chief butler and the baker was murdered: "And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants." (*Genesis 40:20*).

Already in the celebration of king Herod II's birthday, his daughter Salome introduced herself to the king and the other guests. After her introduction, the king promised to give her anything she asked for. The girl, guided by her mother, told the king that she wanted the head of John the Baptist. The king sadly conceded the request. Before other authorities and leaders of Galilee, the head of John the Baptist was served on a plate:

> And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: And he went and beheaded him in the prison; And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother. (*Mark 6, 25:28*).

The birthdays mentioned in the biblical passages draw attention to what is tragic: the murder of two people at a birthday party time. The butler and John the Baptist were victims of their kings' power, a not uncommon action in the Old Age. The birthdays tragic tone places the passage of birth face to face with the funeral passage.

The biblical texts do not specify what was eaten or drank on the occasion of these birthdays but it is believed that the custom of consuming treats during feasts dates back to antiquity and is likely to have originated in worship feasts of that time. The appearance of a sort of birthday cake is attributed to goddess Artemis, celebrated by the Greeks as the matron of fertility. It is probably the evolution of a moon-shaped preparation of honey and bread that worshipers would take to the famous temple in honor of her in Ephesus, the ancient Greek colony in present-day Turkey. As for the use of candles, it would also have been inherited from the worship of the ancient gods, whose mission was to carry the desires and prayers of the faithful to heaven through smoke, so that they might be answered.[17] However, the strict tradition of cake and candles as we know it has originated in the eighteenth century in Germany.[18] The candle still maintains the same intention: to carry out the request from the person who would be celebrating their birthday. As for the cake, it gained the meaning of the most important celebration food of that passage.

Birthday parties are not related to any kind of religion in much of the world. Unlike weddings, which have come to be an act of great religious relevance in the last centuries.

Some religions, such as Jehovah's Witnesses', do not celebrate birthdays. The followers of this creed raise some reasons for this: (1) The origin of birthdays is pagan; (2) The first Christians would not celebrate birthdays; (3) The only celebration to be observed by the Bible is the commemoration of the death of Christ; (4) The Bible does not say that some of God's servants have celebrated their birthday. On the contrary, it only presents two single passages, throughout the book, where murders occur. This fact, more than an omission, would be a divine indication that such feasts should not be celebrated. They also avoid greetings, visits to relatives on the day of their birthdays and personal celebrations.

Another type of ritual of passage that deserves at least to be mentioned is the funeral ritual. At the beginning of the Paleolithic Age, man's contact with the divinity, with the supernatural, was instituted. This fact is recognized by a new way of burying the dead.[19] Human beings, trying to maintain a link with the divine world, have always surrounded their dead with ceremonies of the most varied types.

Mithen[19] also states that the process of burial, followed by rituals, signals a change in the first modern men's thinking in relation to archaic ones. The first modern men would bury their dead by promoting funeral rites that would use totemism, with carcasses or images of animals deposited in the tombs, characterizing the dead with peculiarities of the animal in question. There was also the destruction of objects and animals belonging to the dead as a sign of their loss and the suffering of their own. Following the delivery of the gifts in sacrifice, the banquet, another stage of the funeral ritual, would take place.

The banquet, over a long period of antiquity, would be prepared and consumed at the side of the pyre or the tomb of the dead. But at a certain point in history it would be prepared at home and consumed at the table where people would imagine that the dead were present. After the banquet, funeral games would be held. These competitions would take place to celebrate and honor the deceased, in addition to establishing a social function, characteristic of mortuary rituals. The games would also serve to obtain prestige, because the more honor the dead received, the more important they were.[20]

The celebration of Easter, also called Pasch, is also a funeral celebration for commemorating not the coming of a life or the union of two people, but Jesus Christ's passage from life to death. The very word "Pasch" means "passage" and not "passion," as many believe.

In antiquity, Pasch would be celebrated with the representation of the liberation of the people of Israel, that was captive under Egyptian rule. The Pasch meal would be made with bitter herbs, unleavened bread and roasted lamb. Each food has its own meaning: bitter herbs represented the bitterness of the people's lives during slavery in Egypt; unleavened bread, the rush to flee on the road; grapes and wheat, a sign of prosperity; milk and honey, the promises of God of a

good land; sweet fruits, representing the action of God on behalf of the oppressed; water with salt, representing the sweat of the people in the execution of forced labor; boiled egg, a symbol of resistance against oppressive forces.[21]

From the knowledge of the New Testament and the last supper of which Jesus participated, Passover passed from a celebration of the liberation of the people of Israel to the celebration of the memory of Christ and his passage on Earth. The day of the Passover is the Christ's death anniversary. However, for the Jews – even today – the memory of the Last Supper is a mark of liberation from slavery of the people of Israel from Egypt.

In addition, in the corpus of the research the banquet that Nabal prepared for himself after a discussion with David culminates in the death of the vile Nabal, as reported in the biblical account. Perhaps as a reminder of the sin of gluttony, Nabal dies after being fed with so much food and drink:

> And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light. But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. (*Samuel I, 25:36-37*).

Birthdays and funeral rites make up the ethics of passage due to the change of yet another stage of life. Birthdays, the celebration of another year of life marked by a common and individual ritual that a person goes through each year. Funeral rituals, the mystical passage from the stage of physical life to a non-physical one.

> The ceremonial cycles through which man passes in all the life circumstances always end up having a collective or individual goal, as we can see in the passages taking place in weddings, birthdays, baptisms, pregnancies, funerals, and so on. The individual is classified in several compartments, synchronously or successively, and to pass from one to the other in order to be able to meet with individuals classified in other compartments, is obliged to submit, from the day of birth to death, to ceremonies often diverse by forms, but similar in mechanism. The individual would be alone before all the groups or else would be a member of a particular group separated from all.[8]

Ethics of Communion

It can be said that the biblical banquets that have as their main objective to propagate the solidaristic sharing mediated by caring are moved by an ethic of communion. As said by Brazilian theologian and writer Leonardo Boff[22] in his book *Saber Cuidar* (The knowledge of how to take care) (2013), it is necessary to understand the true meaning of caring, only to reflect on the ethics

of communion that governs the banquets described below: "Care then means caring, solicitude, diligence, zeal, attention, good treatment. We are faced with a fundamental attitude, a way of being through which the person gets out of themselves and focuses on the others with care and solicitude."[22]

Thus, in the corpus analyzed banquets were located that indicate the *ethics of communion*, ruled by banquets in which values, conquests, and ideals are shared, or an idea of community or even an intervention in favor of somebody or some people, aiming at a political end, the construction of a sphere of common good (Table 2).

Table 2. Ethics of Communion

Book, chapter and verse	**Type of banquet**	**Host**	**Reason for the banquet**	**Guest public**	**Foods/ preparations consumed**
Luke 22: 17-20	To share	Jesus	To show the value of last supper communion	Apostles	Bread and wine
Esther 1:5	Sharing	Ahasuerus	To share the king's achievements	All citizens of the city	Non-reported
Esther 1:9	Sharing	Vashti	To share the king's achievements	Only the women of the city	Non-reported
Esther 5:6	Intervention	Esther	To beg the king for the Jews	King and Haman	Non-reported
Esther 8:17	Community	Esther	The Jews' celebration for the death request atonement	All present	Non-reported
Job 1: 4, 5	Communion	Job's children	Socialization between brothers and sisters	Brothers and sisters	Non-reported
Matthew 14:19	Intervention	Jesus	To quench the hunger of the multitude. Bread and fish multiplication	Servants and disciples	Bread and fish

Ritual practices that involve sharing food are found in scriptures. To this end, banquets are organized as a liaison between the host and the guests. The miracle of the multiplication of bread and fish, performed on the Mount of Olives, the Great Supper and the feast of Queen Esther are highlighted as examples. The following are brief accounts of such excerpts.

Jesus Christ, after receiving news of the death of John the Baptist, found a boat and went to the desert but his disciples and crowds went to meet him. Jesus, sensitized with such devotion, healed the sick who were present. Finally, one of the disciples asked Jesus to let his people go back to the villages to eat for there was not enough food for all. Jesus then asked the disciple for the loaves and fish they had, held his hands, looked up to the sky, blessed and returned to his disciples, who in turn passed them over to the crowd and all of them ate until they were satisfied:

> And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full (*Matthew 14,19:20*).

Jesus made a great supper and invited his closest apostles to celebrate his death, which was to come. His death would offer the redemption of human sins and open the doors to the coming kingdom. This covenant was sealed by the transubstantiation, according to Catholic Christian beliefs, of wine and bread into the blood and body of Christ. "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves; […] And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me" (*Luke 22:17-20*).

Queen Esther, in turn, worried about what might happen to all of her lineage, prepared a feast for King Ahasuerus and also invited Haman. Such a banquet had only one intention: to appeal for the life of the Jews, her people. It was at this ceremony that Esther revealed her identity as Jewish to the king. After appealing for the life of the Jews, the king canceled his order, given at Haman's request, to kill all the Jews and condemned him to the gallows for having outraged Esther within her own palace:

> And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed (*Esther 5: 4-6).*

In view of the meaning of the word "care," as stated by Boff,[22] the sharing of food brought to light by the banquets listed above starts an ethic of communion because, in sharing, one gives oneself to the other with attentive attitude and zeal (Jesus and his sacrifice, Jesus and the attention with the hungry, Esther and compassion with her people). The communion marked by the sharing of food, besides marking an identification and solidaristic commitment, marks a diligent concern for the well-being of others: the sharing of material bread.

In the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus, by feeling sorry for his hungry followers, who nevertheless walked a long distance to meet him, performed the miracle of the multiplication of food to supply his people's needs. Famine was relentless in the period to which the biblical text refers.[9,23] Therefore, the parables that Jesus told, despite being a carpenter's son, were not based on carpentry or timberwork, but activities such as tilling, sowing and mowing, economy, livestock, grazing, vinification vintage and the preparation of bread.

Many were interested in the ethics that Christ would propose and the prophecies he announced as if, simultaneously, he were the founder of a kingdom of abundance, a kingdom of grains.[24] The attentions of the hungry masses were turned to all the prophets that appeared, always with a more practical solution: because the truth is that the heavenly bread was not enough, the masses needed the earthly bread.[24] It should not be forgotten that one of the Jewish prophets' oldest tasks was to take care of their people's food.[24] Take care, above all, of their bread.

People lived in a world where speculators held grains and in which the state and the emperor used bread for political ends, giving food to those who supported their power. Therefore, Jesus would offer bread basically for two reasons: (1) To somehow demonstrate what prospects his reign would bring in relation to material hunger, where these actions would lead him to conquer and have confidence in that people. And also as a (2) form of care. People would go to him suffering from the most terrible diseases, desperate and hungry. Christ would plunge so deeply into the suffering of those people that it was unbearable not to help. He would heal them and give them bread.[24] His sharing was founded on a loving act, with love being an opening to the other and "co-living" and "co-fellowship."[22]

Besides bread as physical food, as manna was, he points out that that bread, as word and verb, had the power to grant spiritual eternity: those who ate the bread, that is, who partook of that ritual moment of the word, would reach the eternal life longed for: "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die." (*John 6 48:50*). This is evident in the Last Supper ritual.

> This feast got this denomination due not only to the sharing of Jesus with his disciples and servants, but above all by the division of the spiritual bread: the kingdom of God. Jesus brings forth commensality as the unifying and founding practice of a ritual of radical communion, where his own body, symbolically, is given to the guests according to Christian ritual.[25]

He thus founded a community of equality. Commensality pushed the movement to the table and sought the consolidation of the ideas propelling the adhesion to conviviality. In this case, concordant perceptions were sought: the Christian ideal. The community ended up not constituting what (French philosopher) Jacques Rancière[26] calls the "political community," where subjects, even with their individual discordant perceptions, interact not in search of an understanding but to bring about dissent. This act found a political regime by encouraging the multiplicity of manifestations within the community. Therefore, food sociability based on an idea of immunology: identifying equals and distinguishing them from the different ones as a form of protection, antibodies against external influences, strengthening the community's internal bond, as suggested by (German philosopher and cultural theorist) Peter Sloterdijk.[27]

It is at this time that Jesus first consecrated the Eucharist rite. Correia[28] raises from the text questions such as, "What kind of meal is this in which Jesus eats with his disciples and in which he institutes the Eucharist?" A Paschal meal or a farewell meal? It is well known that long before the institution of the Eucharist rite one would speak of eating at the table and its meanings as an act almost as old as humanity, as well as of ritual sacrifices. Thinking about answers to questions gets to motivate our gaze to try to understand this kind of sharing.

Correia[28] responds that it was not about the Paschal Supper but a farewell meal held in a familiar and appropriate environment. At that time, Jesus made personal communications to his disciples and revealed to them his last wishes. Sharing bread and wine and attributing to them a ritual meaning (bread signifying His body and wine His blood), Jesus instituted the Eucharist rite:

> And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. (*Luke 22:19-20*).

Therefore, the Last Supper is enacted as an ethic of communion because Jesus shared with his disciples what should have real value and importance in their lives and in humanity's life. An ideal instituting the act of eating the "bread of life" that could give eternal life.

For Catholics, the *Eucharisticum Mysterium* instruction on the worship of the Holy Eucharist presents three of its inseparable dimensions: sacrifice, memorial, and banquet. It says the following: the Mass or Supper of the Lord is at once and inseparably a sacrifice in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated, a memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection, who said, "this do in remembrance of me." (*Luke 22:19*). A holy banquet in which, through the communion of the Lord's body and blood, the people of God participate in the goods of the Paschal sacrifice, renews the new covenant between God and men, sealed once and for all with the blood of Christ, and prefigures and anticipates in faith and hope the eschatological banquet in the kingdom of the Father announcing the death of the Lord until he comes.[29]

Queen Esther's sharing was revealed by two indirectly familiar intentions such as those of Christ's: she had the desire to stand out as a leader, as Christ did, but her main goal was the freedom of her people, the Jews, and the constitution of a policy of civilization for them. French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin[30] formulated imperatives of a policy of civilization, which may be helpful in reflecting on Esther's opportunities for the Jewish people: a people enslaved, persecuted and murdered by others. The imperatives Morin[27] formulated were: (1) Solidarity (against the atomization and compartmentalization); (2) Return to origins (against anonymity); (3) To live together (against the degradation of the quality of life); and (4) Mobilization (against irresponsibility and egocentricity). From the biblical narrative, Queen Esther demonstrated the desire for a new culture for the Jews, the promotion of acts of solidarity, equal conviviality, respect, unity, cordiality, that is, good practices, almost non-existent actions towards Jews.

In the ethics of communion it is noted that all banquets were accompanied by intentions, like all acts of human life. But on such occasions, what is observed is that such attitudes were guided, above all, by a community ideal. We do not know what was consumed in the Queen Esther's feast. It is only understood that the only participants were Ahasuerus and Haman. We know that after Ahasuerus complied with his queen's request, the Jews celebrated the end of the decree of his death and all those who rejoiced in the news about the Jews participated in this banquet.

> And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them. (*Esther 8:17*)

The ethics of communion creates a sphere of sharing values, achievements, ideals (Last Supper), caring for someone or some people (the miracle of loaves of bread and Esther's intervention), aiming at a political purpose, that is, the construction of a sphere of common good, where food denotes a sign of communion, whether of physical or spiritual bread. The ethics of communion is explicitly embraced by care, seeks to unite people and recreate, through loving language, the feeling of benevolence and belonging.[22] For Jesus and Esther, from the narrative, no efforts are spared when trying to establish a new sphere of good in humanity. Their solidaristic actions seem to cherish the teaching and/or creation of new meanings and human values.

Ethics of Power

One can say that the banquets that, from the biblical narrative, have as their main objective the expression of supreme power are moved by an ethics of power. As is commented by Albert:[31]

> The banquet takes on meaning and plays an essential role in ancient societies. It is the means in times of peace to glorify the great power of the one who offers it, be it a powerful person or a city. And it represents an occasion for the rediscovery of collective life and the affirmation of a cultural identity.[31]

In the corpus analyzed, those banquets having a political character that would be presented with the function of instituting agreements, alliances or honoring someone are expressed as an ethics of power, expressing this by producing images of abundance and making hierarchical distinctions between sovereigns and servants.

The following banquets can be emphasized as having an ethics of power: Abimelech's, David's, King Ahasueruss, Elisha's, and Belshazzar's. Below is a brief account of some of these banquets (Table 3).

Table 3. Ethics of Power

Book, chapter and verse	**Type of banquet**	**Hosts**	**Reason for the banquet**	**Guest public**	**Foods/ preparations consumed**
Genesis 26:30	Alliance	Abimelech	Alliance between Isaac and Abimelech because Isaac was expelled from Gerar	Isaac and Abimelech	Non-reported
Samuel II 3: 20	Agreement	David	Agreement between David and Abner for David's sovereignty over all	David, Abner, and soldiers present	Non-reported
Kings II 6:26	Peace	Elisha	To establish cordiality between the king of Syria and Elisha	Soldiers	Non-reported
Esther 1:5	Power	Ahasuerus	Demonstration of riches to the servants	All citizens of Susa	Non-reported
Daniel 5:1	Honor	Belshazzar	To honor the best soldiers of the king	Soldiers	Non-reported

Isaac, as a faithful servant of God, always obeying his orders, resides in Gerar for a definite time in the King Abimelech's lands. There, Isaac prospered and began to acquire many lands, animals, workers and water. Abimelech, afraid of Isaac's growth, drove him out of his lands. Noticing the possessions that Isaac acquired by exalting a God, Abimelech went to meet him with a friend and the prince of his army and asked Isaac to create a covenant of peace, which they sealed with a banquet.

> And they said,: We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee. That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of the Lord. And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink (*Genesis 26 28:30*).

Ish-bosheth accused Abner of having taken for himself a concubine of Saul, named Rispah, daughter of Aiah. Abner was the commander of Saul's army and they were cousins. Abner took as an insult Ish-bosheth's accusation and went to meet David, Saul's enemy, who decided to join him in conquering David's kingdom for sovereignty. After offering himself as an ally to David, he sealed the agreement between them at a banquet:

> […] And Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin: and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and that seemed good to the whole house of Benjamin. So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty men with him. And David made Abner and the men that were with him a feast (*Samuel II 3: 19, 20*).

Prophet Elisha, by order of God, lived many years away from the reign of the Syrians. One day a king's servant commented that there was a prophet who knew what he was saying in his bedroom. The king, curious about prophet Elisha, sent for him horses, chariots, and a great army. Elisha, upon seeing them, asked him for an act. Then God raised fire around Elisha. Elisha prayed and asked God to blind them so that he could take them to the middle of Samaria. Arriving at Samaria, God commanded that Elisha gave food and drink to all and let them go to their Lord:

> And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel (*Kings II 6: 22, 23*).

King Ahasuerus, willing to display his riches and the glory of his kingdom, offered a banquet in his third year of reign to all his princes, servants and nobles, to show all his greatness: "In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him" (*Esther 1:3*).

King Belshazzar, after acceding to the throne after his father Nebuchadnezzar, by virtue of celebrating his most honorable army soldiers, provided a feast for them, where he ate and drank in the presence of all. During this banquet, an episode occurred in which someone wrote on the walls of the palace with blood-soaked fingers some prophecy that astonished the king, who ended up going in search of Daniel to try to interpret the message: "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand" (*Daniel 5:1*).

The banquets highlighted are aimed at an observation by Albert:[31] meals are an occasion for a particular kind of sociability. As places of decision-making, demonstration of strength, integration and exclusion, hierarchy or leveling, meal tables are one of the most subtle and most effective tools.

Abimelech at his banquet wanted to strengthen his authority in his estates by associating with Isaac because he was the one who acquired more possessions than anyone in recent times. David consolidated Abner as an ally for future reign unification and Elisha created a form of peace agreement for him with Assyria for his protection. Ahasuerus impressed by his abundance at the table, as Belshazzar's father, Nebuchadnezzar. All of them together would perform rituals in which they distinguished themselves from their subjects.

The table laid by the two kings, Abimelech and David, draws attention to similar purposes: strengthening an alliance in which they attribute to food the role of witnessing agreements, sharing the same interests established among their fellow guests, and union for the same political sense. Sitting down at the table was not a harmless gesture.[31] Elisha, however, was not a king, but a prophet who served a God. This God would listen to him and the fear of the situation in which the soldiers who were looking for him were placed would give him an image of power.

We do not know what was consumed at these banquets but we know that apart from their hosts, Abimelech, David, and Elisha, there were soldiers accompanying their kings in signing the agreements.

The banquets of Classical Antiquity had very distinct divisions. The first stage of the banquet was deipnon (evening meal), followed by the symposion (drinking party). At deipnon the host would serve the roasted and/or grilled meats from their creation, accompanied by bread. In the sequence, the symposium was defined as a form of social organization in which a group of men would express its identity through ritual drinking and eating.[32]

François Lissarrague[33] describes an archaic symposium:

> […] It is an enclosed space, limited to a small number of guests who are equal and self-sufficient. The pleasure of the symposium associates and combines wine, music, words and the spectacle: it is only the spectacle provided by the guests, the decoration of the room in which they meet, and, of course, the glasses that circulate in the hands of those who drink.

A direct apportionment with the king would represent the cohesion of equality and citizenship among the guests. The private banquet that King Belshazzar provided to his soldiers is taken as an example. The Bible passage reports that the king shared his wine with his soldiers. Sharing a glass of wine with the king was a sign of unity and interaction with the guests. Feeding the guests established a form of fellowship that, in return, attributed duties to this food boon.[31] Candido[32] reports that in ancient Rome banquets were moments in which one sought to reinforce values such as unity through commensality. Therefore, public meals had a political burden which evidenced not only the prince's great power by the initiative of the feast but also the organization of society thus represented.

Hence, these banquets participated as an ethics of power due to the existence of agreements sealed among sovereigns, the production of images of abundance and excess, and, above all, of attention to one of the most contradictory characteristics of commensality rituals: the simultaneous establishment of equality and hierarchy.

While by communing it is desired to establish equality, the ritual is permeated by rules that hierarchically distinguish the guests, whether in the distribution or in the places taken. Banquets governed by the ethics of power are surrounded by signs to determine one's social and political standing.

Final thoughts

In reflecting and analyzing what constitutes food ethics in biblical banquets, one can see that the analyses carried out here from one of the documents that form the western cultural scene deal with three types of behavior that govern the acts of sharing food: (1) The ethics of passage, which serves as a sign of a change in collective or individual life such as weddings (Jacob and Raquel, the Wedding at Cana, Ahasuerus and Esther), birthdays (Pharaoh and Herod II) and deaths (Easter and Nabal), mediated by commensality, which in turn orders, classifies, establishes priorities, giving meaning to these milestones of social life; (2) The ethics of communion, which

creates a sphere of sharing values, conquests, ideals (Last Supper), of care for someone or some people (the miracle of the loaves of bread and Esther's intervention), aiming at a political end, that is, the construction of a sphere of common good, where food denotes a sign of communion, whether of a physical bread or a spiritual one; and finally (3) the ethics of power, where sharing engenders relations of agreement (Abimelech, David, Elisha, Belshazzar) and of demonstrating power through the production of images of abundance (Ahasuerus), drawing a distinction between the sovereign and his subjects (all).

Regarding the characterization of banquets, it can be said that (1) on consumption, foods are practically not mentioned at any banquet, with the exception of the Last Supper passages and the multiplication of the loaves. Some hypotheses have been presented during the text to think about such omission and others may be thought and analyzed in future studies. On the (2) protocols and (3) the audience, who varied according to the motivation to perform the banquets, it can be said that something constant in the banquets is the fact that there is no equality relationship among the guests and even though commensality seeks to establish an idea of horizontality, the hierarchy in some moment emerges in the context of sharing. On motivations (4), they can be synthesized under the three ethics – passage, communion and power.

In addition, it is believed that the ethics described above may aid in a study of commensality rites in today's society. The ethics of communion, for example, could support the following reflection: how does a society influenced by the Christian ideal in a country like Brazil understand the divergence between the ideal of the ethics of communion presented in the Bible and a Christian unconscious and resistance to some Food and Nutrition Safety policies, especially those related to income transfer? That is, how to defend the ideal of sharing and equality from a religious unconscious and deny this same ideal in the moment of concretizing it as a state policy? Such policies, in fact, are based today on a sort of politics of civilization, that is, the guarantee of the right of all to inhabit the common table of humanity.

Thinking about such questions opens new eyes towards the food phenomenon and, therefore, the science that most directly concerns it in today's world: Nutrition. Thinking about food involves paying attention not only to the component of function and subsistence that lies in food but also involves thinking of symbols, collective imagination, sociability, in short, all questions that pervade what is human. This raises challenges and the need to build a Nutrition Anthropology. The issue of food ethics at biblical banquets would open up more possibilities for studies related to culture and sociability.

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