

**THE ETHICS AND SOCIOLOGY OF FOOD IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT:  
MORAL LESSONS FOR CONTEMPORARY FOOD  
CULTURE AND RELATIONS**

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**Executive Summary**

*The importance of a rational approach to the nature of food cannot be over emphasized. The act of eating forms an integral part of human existence and culture. We cannot continue to exercise the habitual ontological activity of eating without creating time to reflect over the philosophical and anthropological densities of food. Thus, this paper presents the idea of food from the biblical renditions as its subject matter. The aim of this study is to harness the lessons, morals, values and food pathways exemplified in the biblical era and delineate them for contemporary relevance in cultures and relations for food studies. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to academic understanding of food in a world besieged with food insecurity, hunger, malnutrition, health –dietary deficiencies and food shortage, waste and crisis from a philosophical and socio- religious perspective. Again, studies of food from religious perspective are scant and this work as well adds to literatures on food from religious perspectives. Our methodology is hermeneutics and prescriptive analysis. Hermeneutics offers us the opportunity to presents the Biblical food scenarios as they were, as well as interpret them with the aim to harness their contemporary values in today's food studies. Whereas prescriptive analysis will help us draw, develop and recommend the lessons from these biblical renditions that are useful to contemporary food cultures, relations and policies.*

**Keywords:** Bible, Food, Food insecurity, Sociology, Ethics, Values, Virtues, Relations, Religion,

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## **Introduction**

Food crisis, malnutrition, hunger, famine and food shortage have been in the history of humankind. A sociological exemplar is presented in the biblical account (Holy Bible, 2020). This account presents the experiences and sufferings of a people besieged by food insecurity, crisis, food abundance and a supernatural intervention. The rationale of this study is from the fact that a historical study on food in the contemporary society shows that food and food systems have been a world issue (Osuji, 2022, Osuji, 2021: 46; Kaplan, 2012). The problems food crisis and insecurity create are global issues. This opens invitations for all to study food and know how to tackle the food crisis from a multi-disciplinary perspective. From academic perspectives, the study of food is complex. This is because food belongs to disciplines like agriculture, food science technology and economics. Food also belongs to cultural studies since the historical evolution of food is cultural (Mbamalu, 2009: 100-109). Food studies are also complex because food is in compound relations with manufacturing distribution and consumption. Food also has to do with health, global warning, climatic conditions and diet even entertainment. The media have a lot to do with food than academics; making the idea of food more secular and popular for the world. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore the various ways food has been conceived in the bible, analyze it and delineate the contemporary lessons for food cultures and relations. This discussion from the biblical rendition of will enable us understand their “ideology and philosophy of food;” as this will help comparatively ameliorate the contemporary food (ideological) crisis in the world today.

The methodology of this research is hermeneutics and prescriptive analysis. Hermeneutics helps in digging deep into the biblical notions of food; interpret the scenarios that gave rise to such ideas of food, delineate them and explore their contexts. It provides tools for sourcing rich data from the biblical presentations of food. One benefit of hermeneutics analysis is that it is with profound, detailed and understanding of the scenarios that warrant food ideology, conceptualizations and philosophy in the biblical era. This will enable an even and unbiased analysis of the idea of food given each presentation from the bible. More so with prescriptive analysis, we will be able to draw the required lessons and prescribed them for contemporary food cultures, habits, ideologies and relations. The scope of this work is on the Christian analysis of food as presented in the bible. Thus, the bible is our primary literature; however secondary sources of data are from journals, books, monographs and internet sources on food and biblical interpretations of food. The need for secondary source is to help us deepen the ideology of food, and the challenges it posits on humanity. Materials on food, food crisis, as well as books and journal articles on philosophy of food and religious perceptions of food will be used. The justification of the study stems from the connection between food and religion, which is often less discussed in the academic

world. There are many reasons behind that. Many scholars might assume that food habits and practices in religions is superstitious, irrational, rituals or secret of a particular sect which does not require much intellectual and mental effort. Religions add different values (moral, behavioural and spiritual) to different people while food adds value to peoples' health, wellbeing and religious practices. Food is required in some religious activities, making food an inevitable substance in religious practices. Religions have its main theme which is God, his worship while food enhances humans and their religious practices. Thus, this paper articulates the sociological and ethics of food in biblical contexts. The central theme is on food and the subject matter here is the biblical presentation of food. This essay is structured into five sections. The first part is this introduction which is followed by conceptual clarification. The third part will discuss on the idea of food in biblical renditions as well as Christian religion and philosophy. This is followed by the lessons, learnt from the biblical food culture and context, after which conclusion and recommendation follows.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Clarifying the concepts used for this research helps remove ambiguities and clumsy understanding to food studies. Thus, such words like bible, food, religion and philosophy will be clarified. We begin with the bible. The holy bible is the scriptural book of Christians. It comprises of three major parts; the Old Testament, the Apocrypha books and the New Testament. It consists of sixty-six books, consisting of chapters and verses. The bible in this research is seen as a primary source book consisting of a historical analysis of the sociological experiences food played in the lives of people in the biblical era. Though, there are many definitions of religion, the Latin *religio* and the Greek *theosebeia* indicate the religion which binds us to God. Thus, religion is man's ability to bind himself back to God (Amaku, 2010: 25). Here, it has to do with human's effort to find meanings of his life by worship of ultimate source of his being. This is to say that religion binds us to the one omnipotent God (*religetnos religio uni omnipoteti Deo*). We shall conceive religion and its relationship with food here. The roles food plays in religion will be discussed in this research.

Philosophy came from two-word *philos* (meaning love) and *Sophia* (meaning wisdom). Putting the two together it means love of wisdom. It is the study of the most general and abstract features of the world and categorises with the following; think, mind, matter, reason, proof, think (Jimoh, 2021: 23). Philosophy approaches the world with enquiry. Philosophy is an activity, referred to as philosophizing. It is an activity we undertake to seek understanding of fundamental truths about humanity, the world, and what we do. Philosophy in its pristine nature as a critical and reflective enterprise engages the existential challenges confronting man and the society in which he lives (Offor, 2021: 4). Philosophy is used here as reflective and critical thinking about the

concepts and principles surrounding food, food culture, hunger, starvation, malnutrition, food (abundance, shortage and crisis). This helps us to organize our survival experiences in the world. Philosophy in this study is used in two senses; first it is used as training in rationality, as well as a critique of ideology by engaging the concrete problems food raise today and in the biblical presentations. Second, it is a search for the guide of food cultures and ethics: Critical tools of philosophy will be utilized to correct the prevailing wrong assumptions about the requirements for world food ideological development.

Food has no definite definition. To understand the idea of food, we move to speculative philosophy, this ensures our claims and belief and ideals on food do not rest on confusion. The idea of food emanated from natural reason. In the state of nature, humans have to device means of sustaining themselves by looking for what is edible and what is not edible. This accounts for why what is food is differently conceived. This makes what is food and food stuff to be bound in location. We can say that the idea of food is cultural. Osuji (2021) notes that human food culture sprang from interactions between people and climate, nature and other competing species: It is the cultural society that determines what food is; what is permissible to eat, how and when particular things are consumed. Food has social meaning and significance. Cultures are known in the course of the food they eat, this is why we can say Igbo foods, Yoruba delicacies, Italian food and lots more. In cities and metropolis, food stuffs are stalled according to cultures (Osuji, 2021: 50). The food stuff you sell is needed and bought by people bound by that food orientation and culture. Food has been conceived in many ways. This means that food can be acknowledge as a common good which sustains human survival. Food is the edible object hungry people eats to satisfy their appetite. It is one of the basic human needs to quench the physical sensations of hungry generated by physiological reactions.

Food has been anthropocentrically, metaphysically and theocentrically conceived (Osuji, 2021). This means that food is multidimensional; it ranges from human involvement and understanding to that which is beyond humans. One has to be careful in choosing a particular definition of food because the definition adopted can influence human relations to food. Osuji (2021:50) opines that a particular definition of food can have a big effect on health, environment and economy. Food is also seen in terms of its nutritional functions. The idea of balanced diet, enables the conception of food as composed of naturally possessing nutrients needed to enhance bodily metabolism (growth, sustain, repair of vital life processes). In summary, food is seen as nutrition, nature, culture, social good, desideratum and aesthetic object (Kaplan, 2012: 4-5).

Food can also be defined as spiritually. This is because food is central to religious traditions of the world (Kaplan, 2012: 5). This Biblical study of food shows the

centrality of food in religion. The biblical context prescribes which food should be eaten and which to be avoided. Kaplan (2012: 4) says; Religions assign significance to food production, preparation and consumption; and they assign regimentation with moral conduct and spiritual salvation. Food in this model has metaphysical (nonmaterial) dimension that is realized only in religious practice. This spiritual dimension of food connects us to religious communities and to the supernatural when consumed appropriately. Food has in the biblical renditions lots of connection, to the supernatural, human, natural and environmental connection. Food also provides a guide to human conduct. Food as we shall see is also a service to humanity when we see it as object of charity (for the poor) and hospitality. Food is inseparable from humans and so its challenges. This is discussed next subsection.

### **Food and its Problematic in Contemporary Human Experience**

Access to food becomes a world issue down the history. ‘Historical moments that provide occasions to re-think about food and human existence and experiences on food are many. The year 2020 is one of the historical moments that the world experienced pandemic arising from corona virus (corona virus). This gave rise to government measures that included lockdowns, movement restrictions and policies’ (Osuji, 2023: 41). In 1981, economist Amartya Sen (1981) began his essay *Poverty and Famines*, with the argument: “Starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat.” This book presents a concern for food as a global problem. Mexico was not the only country to experience riots due to spiking food prices in 2007 to 2008, known as Mexican Tortilla Crisis.<sup>1</sup> In Bangladesh, which declared itself food self-sufficient in 2002 experienced riots where dozens of protesters and police officers were injured in Dhaka Karl, 2015: 3). Haiti experienced food riots that took the lives of five people in various protests (The Trumpet, 2008). Most development institutions, world leaders, and academics view the crisis as both a supply and demand problem. Their argument is simple; the solutions are not reached. They tell us demand is increasing dramatically due to rising populations and changing appetites as billions of people in China, India, and other rapidly developing nations enter the middle class. In order to meet this demand, they argue, world food supply must double. Unfortunately, global climate change, water shortages, desertification, and slowed technological advancements threaten our ability to supply enough food to meet this demand.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Mexico in early 2007 experienced a 67% rise in corn prices, which drove up the price of tortillas and limited community access to 10,000 year food staple. This led to protest by the first week of February 2007 where over 70,000 protesters marched through Mexico City, taunting the President and demanding relief from the soaring prices. President Calderon responded by freezing prices of more than 150 consumer staples including Corn, coffee, sardines, and tuna until the end of December 2008.

Averagely, the *Guardian* reported riots in fifteen countries while the *New York Times* and the World Bank both reported food riots in thirty (Cribb, 2010). The 2008 food crisis riots in Burkina Faso shut down three major cities and threatened the stability of its government on February 22, 2008 (IRIN news, 2008). The UN Integrated Regional Information Network reported “at least a dozen protestors were wounded during several hours of clashes with police on 31 March 2008” in Ivory Coast (IRIN news, 2008). In some countries, these protests turned deadly. In Egypt, days of protests led to multiple deaths. NBC news reports “Egypt's prime minister rushed to contain an explosive situation in a northern industrial city rocked by two days of deadly riots over high prices and low wages, some of the worst economic unrest here in 30 years” (Msnbc.com, 2008). The social unrest NBC News is referring to were the 1977 Bread Riots, which, as the name tells, were also about food.

The year 2020 and 2021 were years Africans and the rest of the world including US, experienced hunger due to the governmental policies and restrictions caused by Covid-19 pandemic lock-down (Osuji, 2021: 52, Human Right Watch, 2021, Worlds Bank, 2012). The Latin American suffered hunger as a result of Covid-19 lock-down in 2020. These years were the years food prices were on the high side. There are speculations that this will continue in the coming years. Food insecurity and crisis have been experienced worldwide over the years (Okenye, 2021: 39-46). Food insecurity has been a part of human history. Many countries are facing growing levels of acute food insecurity, reversing years of development gains. Around 118 million more people were facing chronic hunger in 2020 than in 2019. Using a different indicator that tracks year-round access to adequate food, nearly 2.37 billion people (or 30% of the global population) lacked access to adequate food in 2020 that is, a rise of 320 million in just one year. COVID-19 is estimated to have dramatically increased the number of people facing acute food insecurity in 2020-2021 (World Bank, 2021). UN World Food Programme (WFP) executive director David Beasley announced “we are once again sliding toward the brink of the abyss” and warned of “famines of biblical proportion” and a near doubling of people experiencing crisis levels of hunger from 135 million to 270 million as a result of pandemic. Covid-19 has made the hungry hungrier and the poor poorer (Sova, 2021).

Food is one of basic necessities of life amidst others. The human species needs food for survival and to sustain continuity. This is why the problems posed by absence of food are now basic human existential problems. These problems include hunger, malnutrition, health, diet, starvation, food unavailability and insecurity. Discussions on food, more so, come with the paradoxes of modern food and agriculture systems such as abundance of food, unequal distribution of resources and access to food in market systems, commodification and de-commodification of food and natural resources, the limited availability of natural resources for human consumption and the continuing

economic “growth mania” (Karl, 2015:1). There are also the risks which for food production and consumption generated under conditions of global social and environmental change. This requires knowledge synthesis, critical analysis and the practical significance of the philosophy of food for searching solutions to food and resource problems (Osuji, 2017: 89).

The World Bank Group and United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) offer similar solutions to the coming food crisis. Their rhetoric follows three main themes: increase production, increase efficiency, and increase domination of nature. The UNFAO’s 2014 report, *Economic analysis of supply and demand for food up to 2030*, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization argues: “With the world’s population expected to reach 8.2 billion people by 2030, and with 842 million people estimated as having been undernourished in the period 2011-13, food supply will present a growing challenge in the next two decades” (UNFAO, 2014) The solution that the UNFAO presents is to increase food supply to meet growing demands such as aging populations, urbanization, and changing consumer preferences as billions enter the middleclass. The FAO argues that food supply “will need to both increase and become more efficient if it is to grow within the constraints presented by the availability of natural resources and existing technology” (UNFAO, 2014: iv). The 2007-08 food crises were a global phenomenon with world food prices spiking 80% on average, according to the UNFAO (2021). Thus, while world leaders, agriculturist, development institutions, academics, and reporters debate the causes of the 2007-08 crises, they overwhelmingly agree on two simple conclusions: It will not be the last food crisis; it will not be the worst food crisis. The implications of these conclusions are colossal. Future crises will bring much social unrest, destabilizing governments and threatening regional and global security. What should be done? Cribb explains this as follows:

To sum it all up, the challenge facing the world’s 1.8 billion women and men who grow our food is to double their output of food using far less water, less land, less energy, and less fertilizer. They must accomplish this on low and uncertain returns, with less new technology available, amid more red tape, economic disincentives, and corrupted markets, and in the teeth of spreading drought. Achieving this will require something not far short of a miracle (Cribb, 2010: 13).

There is more to do in other solve the problems food creates in the contemporary world. One way of doing this is by looking at existing histories. This study will undertake the study of culture in the biblical eras. Necessary lessons will be analyzed for contemporary usage in food relations and culture.

## **The Idea of Food in Biblical History, Christian Philosophy and Religion**

The bible describes many foods, drinks and different stories of feasting, eating and religious practices. Many of the contemporary known healthy food featured in the biblical renditions and classification of diet. They are water, olives (oil), pomegranates, grapes, goat milk, raw honey, meat (including lamb, birds etc.) and bitter herbs. Food in the bible can be categorized into fruits, seeds, spices, vegetables, grains, fish, fowl, meats drinks, and many more. Seasonings, spices and herbs in bible context were used as flavors on food preparation. Such food includes bread, cake, soups, and meat. They also fed on vegetables and legumes such as beans (2 Samuel, 17::28; Ezekiel 4:9), cucumbers (Numbers1:15) gourds (2 Kings4:39), leeks (Numbers, 11:5), lentils (Genesis 25:34; 2Samuel 17:28; Ezekiel 4:9), and onions (Numbers11:5). Grains were principal staple food in the bible era. Such grains include barley (Deuteronomy 8:8; Ezekiel 4:9), corn (Matthew 12:1), wheat (Ezra6:9, Deuteronomy 8:8) millet and spelt (Ezekiel 4:9). They fed on fish as another principal food (Matthew 15:36, John 21:11-13). Fowls were also part of the biblical diet. These fowls include partridge (1Samuel 26:20; Jeremiah 17:11), pigeon (Genesis 15:9, Leviticus 12:8), quail (Psalm, 105: 40) and dove (levinticus12:8). Animals were part of biblical menu. The book of Leviticus differentiated between approved animals for consumption and unclean animals not meant for consumptions. Animals for consumption (clean animals) must have cloven and chew cord including calf (Proverbs 16:17; Luke 15:23), goat (Genesis 27:9) lamb (2 Samuel 12:4), oxen (1kings 19::21) sheep (Deuteronomy 14:4) and venison (Genesis 27:7). Other sources of nutrition in the bible were fresh raw products from cows, sheep goats and fowls. Such products include butter (proverbs 30:33) cheese (2 Samuel 17:29; Job 10:10), curds (Isaiah 7:15, milk (Exodus 33:3. Job 10:10, Judges 5:25), eggs (Job 6:6, Luke 11:12), grape (Numbers 6:3), raw honey (Genesis 43:11; Exodus33:3, Deuteronomy 8:8, Judges 14:8-9), olive oil (Ezra 8:9, Deuteronomy 8:8), vinegar (Ruth 2:14, John 2: 1-10). The bible acknowledges food varieties, many food pathways and systems, their multiple uses and different symbolizations.

From another perspective, the ideology of food eluded the founding fathers of the church, Christian apologist and philosophers, despite the rich food scenarios the bible presents. The idea of food in Christian philosophy and religion has been given a lower place in history. Food is not considered as worthy sfor mental contemplation in Christian academics, religious studies and Christian philosophy. Again, the holy bible is written within patriarchal setting where food and its preparation where exclusively women affair and so was considered as a gendered issue not worthy of mental exercise, (Proverb 30; Osuji, 2017). This is basically because of the teachings of the primacy of the soul over the human body. The idea of God, His name and Proof of his existence dominated the discussions of Christian scholars in the Middle Ages (Itanrin, *et al*, 2019). This teaching is popular among the medieval scholars who advocated for the

nurturing of the soul through abstinence from food and suffering of the human body as a motivation towards achieving holiness and eternal life.

The Christian philosophers, theologians and scholars of the medieval era did not regard food as object of intellectual exercise. This was probably seen from their influence from the works of Plato and Aristotle. Platonic and Aristotelian thoughts dominated the thinking and postulations of the middle age philosophers and theologians; the polarity on the conception of food arises.<sup>2</sup> In the mist of sufficient and surplus food, medieval Christians stress on renunciation for perfection in spiritual growth to gain salvation. The difference between these Christian scholars and Greek thinkers is that while the Greek fasted to gain wisdom, the medieval thinkers practiced asceticism to gain salvation in God. The popular maximum of this era is “nothing in excess,” which means a little bit of everything, which included food for the well-being of the body as well as its survival. Among the Christians, the importance of moderation in ordinary life, especially in food and sex, were stressed. An approximately frugal diet was considered sufficient to cover the unavoidable needs of the believers, him-self or her-self to the more important business of attending to spiritual matters. Thus, everything should be consumed in small proportion considered only for practical living. This makes the study of food in medieval Christian era and the writing of these thinkers on food scant and less rational.

The Christian theologians and philosophers also wrote less on food. The writing of St. Thomas Aquinas on food was centered on the ‘Eucharist.’ Aquinas did not regard food as worthy of mental speculation but he recognized food as a requirement for bodily nourishment where he writes; “In the bodily order a person must first be born and thereafter he requires steady nourishment as living as life last” (Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, IIIa, qn73, art 1; Gleen, 1999: 37). Thus, Christianity took ascetic life from ancient civilization as their dominant ideology. This, they believed is the ideal way of attaining perfection since they are engrossed on the salvation of their souls and union with God. So, they exercised self-controlled, especially on food and sex in order to be united to God through salvation. Thus, depriving the body from almost any nourishment was the safest way to attain a full development of the soul and a perfect knowledge of God. Thus, “when Christianity took over the ancient philosophical and religious ways of thinking and became the dominant ideology, the ideal of perfection focused on salvation and union with God. In order to attain this divine union, which recalled the

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<sup>2</sup>Here, the medieval era was advanced in food production more than Greek classical era (it was an era where meat was widely eaten, this era also advocated a shift from animal products to grains and vegetables). There was also good use of spices, sauces and high level of food preservation technologies. But the scholars of this era did not see food as worthy of mental exercise; they continued the contempt for food inherited from the influences of classical Greek thought.

original perfection before sin, all passions should be controlled, especially sex and food” (Camps- Gaset and Grau, 2021: 83). In the Western tradition, the ideal of perfection has changed throughout history up to the present, from ancient philosophy to spiritual salvation, purity or even aesthetic excellence, all of which are subjective concepts of perfection only to be attained by individuals through despising material food, sometimes to the point of starvation (Camps- Gaset and Grau, 2021: 84). The idea of food, its significances in religion, culture and relations and philosophy was poorly developed and did not enter the writings of Christian theologians, philosophers as well as their academic ideologies while food orientations, philosophy and practices were well exhibited in the bible. We now expose the place of food in the bible.

### **An Expository Analysis of Food Uses in Biblical Context**

Food is used in many contexts to show that it is beyond the nutritional and anthropological densities of human. Food was expressed in varieties of ways in the bible; as objects (of consumption, worship, trade and economics) weapon of war, objects of wealth, reward, miracle, as well as unusual and supernatural outcome from God in the bible. Food depicts and portrays the fall of man Genesis (3: 6: 22). Food is used as a means for betrayed. It is also used in the bible as a means of trade or exchange of birthright in the story of Esau and Jacob. Thus, inheritance of Esau was transferred to Jacob by means of well-prepared food. Food was also portrayed as an inheritance where the land God promised the Israeli was to flourish, milk, food and honey.

Food is used in supernatural scenarios in the bible. Such instances include as fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life (Genesis 3:6, 22). It also depicts supernatural relations and divine provisions. We see this in God’s provision of manner and quell, water from the rock (Exodus 16: 31-35) and as gold dust (Exodus 32:19-20). Food was used in Supernatural relation and covenant in Israeli’s feast of Passover and Christ’s Last supper. We see food in covenantal issues with God between Cain and Abel. It was because of the food sacrifice that Abel gave to God that God fought for him, God accepted Abel. Cain gave God animals that are not worthwhile and good. God refuses his sacrifices. More so, Solomon became the wisest king in the world after offering God a thousand ram in a night. God gave him wisdom as reward. Food was used in other supernatural illustration and visions, proverbial expressions in the bible including human flesh (Deuteronomy 28:53-57), two-sided scroll of lamentation (Ezekiel 2: 8; 3:3), bread baked over human excrement (Ezekiel 4: 10-17), Angel cake (1kings19: 3-9), animal diet of grass (Daniel 4:33), bread and meat from ravens (1kings17: 1-6), we live these discussions for theological studies. A delineation of food pathways in the bible is what this research concentrates on.

Food is part of God's miracle: the story of Genesis (21:14-19) and Numbers (20:11) portrays miraculous provision of bread and water in the deserts. It is the result of miracles provision of flour and oil (1Kings 17:10-18; 2Kings4:1-7). Food is the result of the miraculous provision in the form of locust (Mark 1:6). The turning of water into wine by Jesus in the New Testament is also a miraculous provision of a necessary food in time. Fish and loaves of bread was miraculously multiplied to feed the hungry crowd that came to hear the gospel of Christ eat in Matthew (14: 13-21; Matthew 15: 32-39; Mark 6: 30-44; Mark 8: 1-13, Luke 9: 10-17, John 6: 1-15, 2 Kings 4: 42-4). The idea of miracle is another instance of the food used in the supernatural way. Food was also source of spiritual strength to Saul and Elijah in the bible. It shows Saul encounter a warning on killing animals and what to feed on. Saul has been culturally schooled on what is food and what is not. This means cultures have no final say on what is food. It only shows variations.

Food was used as instrument of hospitality where Abraham fed his visitors not knowing that they were Angels. Christ feed 5,000 and 7, 000 men at different occasions. Food and bodily treatment were discussed in the books of Esther and Daniel. There are also food laws in the book of Isaiah and his visions of food, as well as Saints Paul and Peter's writings on food. The bible shows that God gave man food to eat, (Genesis 1,2) where he said, "I have given man the birds of the air, the animals in the sea, and all creeping things on earth to feed from". This shows that God has given humans the totality of nature to feed from.

### **Lessons from the Contemporary Interpretation of Biblical Food Presentation**

There are lessons from these biblical scenarios on food relevant for contemporary food studies, relations and culture. Food is central to national development, individual uses and the economy in many ways. We shall discuss these lessons now:

*Food Ethics:* This brings out the morals behind food consumption. The bible teaches what should be eaten in a meal and what should not be eaten; it also teaches food presentation, instructing the etiquette and manners as well as food presentation methods before Him, in his temples and during feasts. All these suggest food ethics. Food ethics is required in other to be please God. One needs to exercise self-discipline over food. The bible condemns gluttony (Deuteronomy 21: 20, 1 John 2: 15-17). Thus food, wines, and other pleasurable things are to be consumed with moderation (Genesis 1:29, Ecclesiastes 9; 1Timothy 4: 4-5).

The bible also teaches *food virtues*. We see it demonstrated in the *Bible* where Abraham entertained visitors. Jesus Christ himself used food as a show of hospitality where he feed five thousand and seven thousand men at different instance because he had

sympathy on them. This is a show of food virtue called hospitality. Another virtue here is containment: This, we see in the instruction where they were asked to only take what will make due for each day when the manna falls (Exodus 16). Those that disobeyed experience food wastage, where it soiled and was thrown away. Containment is a good virtue to control human's appetite for food. It also goes with self-discipline. There is need to exercise self-discipline in whatever we do more importantly on our appetite and food ways. Again, obedience to food instructions is necessary both to the manufacturers and consumers. Food producing companies should pay attention to how long their products stay before they get expired. It is essential to inform their consumers too. While consumers should obey the instructions on the food labels in order not to eat what they are not supposed to.

*Food, Integrity and Manners:* This is another lesson from the biblical presentation of food. One has to exercise manners in the sight of food. Food presentations call for integrity in attitude, also there is need to know why we eat food given to us by others. We see this in the story of Esau and Jacob where food was given in exchange of birthright and wealth. The need to exercise self-control when hungry, this becomes a good virtue called endurance.

*Sources of food:* The question of source of food from the bible is from nature. God gave food from human through nature in forms of plants, animals and even water bodies. God assures human that he will give them food (psalm 136: 13, Matthew 6:25). We see this in the story of creation. Also, abundance of food is as well spiritual; this is seen in God's promise of prosperity in material things including food (Deuteronomy, 28). In Genesis (1:29), God taught a formula of making food available through seeds. He also gave nature as sources of food to humans (Genesis 9:3, Exodus 16:12). The lesson here is that food availability should not be left in the hands the poor or citizens alone. There is need for authorities and agencies to ensure they contribute to food production. Seed researchers are encouraged here. The availability of viable seed of nutritional plants should be prioritized by seed agencies. This will ensure that hunger and starvation is put to a standstill.

*Food and (divine) provision:* We live in the world where food insecurity is one of the problems the human race is facing. We always have the poor among us, this means there are questions on food availability and accessibility. For instance, who should be responsible for feeding the poor? Is it Government? These poor live on divine provision not on government provision. As human, living on divine provision could mean living in probability. The need for inclusive policy to eradicate hunger is a great challenge we should clamour for the government to do the needful. Again, food has been given to humanity in nature in form of plants, animals, fishes and the rest. It is humans' creativity to domesticate the ones that is more nutritious, making them more surplus

for human conception. From biblical excavation, one can see that God laid emphasis in good food and nutrition. Gods is telling us that good meal or balanced diet is good for human physiological, spiritual, emotional and health wellness.

*Food is seen as a political weapon.* The story of Joseph in Genesis shows how food is used as a tool to control the world. Food is used as political weapon: (especially in slavery and food is tool to conquer the world (Genesis 26). Food was also used in another political sense where the Amorites and other nations brought food to Gideon and Joshua in order to avert wars against them. Today cities are besieged with starvation in order to conquer them in times of war. We see this in Nigerian - Biafra war where food was used as weapon of war. Another important lesson here is that people migrate in search of food. Migration is a critical factor in the world today. People migrate in search of food and good life. A nation that feeds its citizens well will not have the citizens leave in search of food to other nations. This should be integrated in national policies, to make food available for her citizens; in other words, food sovereignty should be a priority in nation building.

*Food and Human Health:* The lesson here is for us to be conscious of what we eat. It is not all that nature provides are edible. Some are poisonous for humans while others are edible and medicinal. Food can also be object of trade. We see many instances where food is used as exchange of material things and immaterial things (birth right). Food can be a medium of exchange as well. Food values can also be seen in these instances. Food has lots of value. It is for human good. It is a call for responsibility; an ideal instance of one's duty to oneself and others. The bible also discussed about people eating highly unusual food.

*Food and Nutritional Plan:* The *Bible* also developed nutritional plans, where the people of Israeli used religious languages that legalizes food, milk, fruit, honey and bread, making then needful for human nutritional wellbeing (Ecclesiastes 9:7)

*Food as Medicine;* St. Paul instructs Timothy to take wine in small portions so as to relieve himself of stomach ache. Here food is used as healing agent.

*Food in Religious doctrines and foundation of faith:* We see the place of food in religious worship. God, himself commanded the people of the biblical era the kind of food and animal they will use in this temple, and the species they need for their uses. Food is used in different levels of offering for different purposes in the house of God as recorded in Leviticus. In the New Testament, Christ demonstrated a covenant of remembrance by offering us "last supper." He commanded that this should be done always in remembrance of him. Food is also used in sacrifice, religious covenant, as a show of religious dedication, thanksgiving to God and many other rites and rituals.

*Different conceptions of food and food symbolization:* The study of the biblical presentations of food has sprung different conceptualizations of food. Thus, *Food as Spiritual Nourishment:* Thomas Aquinas recognized food as a form of special spiritual nourishment required by a child of God. This nourishment is called the Holy Eucharist (Gleen, 1999: 378). The matter of this Holy Eucharist is bread and wine (Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, IIIa, qn 74, art 1-8). He writes that no tangible amount of bread and wine is either too small or too large for valid use in conferring the Holy Eucharist. How can physical food (bread and wine) be used for special spiritual nourishment? Thomas Aquinas answers through *transubstantiation*. He explains that the substance of the bread and the substance of the wine are not merely dissolved or disintegrated either gradually or instantaneously, neither is those substances annihilated. They are changed into the body and blood of Christ (Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, IIIa, qn 75, art 3). The whole substance of the bread is by divine power, changed into the whole substance of the body of Christ. And the whole substance of wine is by divine power changed into the blood of Christ (Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, IIIa, qn 75, art 4). The accidents of bread and wine (such as size, colour, shape, taste) remain after the change. This is called transubstantiation: an instantaneous change (Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, IIIa, qn 75, art 7; Gleen, 1999: 368).

We talk about food symbolization when food is used to symbolize another thing. Bread stands for not just what it is butte symbol of God's life- sustaining provision. Jesus described himself as the bread of life and living water (John 6:35). This means that He is the true source of spiritual life; the bread he represents never perishes but a source of eternal life (John 6:27; John 4:37). Food is seen as supernatural task of Jesus who saw the will of God as his food (John 4:34) He was of the view that man shall not live by bread alone (Matthew 4:4). There are other necessary and genuine endeavours to engage on rather than food. Actions and wills can be understood as food when they fulfil purpose. Matthew (5:6) captures the acts of goods as life fulfilling food.

*Food Aesthetics:* Foods are also used in human bodily treatment. This seen in the Babylonian culture where food is used as aesthetic tools for beauty and bodily treatment and well-being as presented in the book of Esther and Daniel (Daniel, 1:12; Esther 1). They observed a diet of only vegetables. Today vegetarianism is a movement, personal life style, healthy living and religious doctrine. Here, people were fed with the primary intention of making them look beautiful and more attractive. Here food is seen as an instrument of body preservation. We see in social media where foods are prescribed for body treatment as well. This means that food serves an aesthetic value apart from its nutritional functions.

*Food laws:* From biblical studies pork meat is condemned for Jews and early Christians. There are contentions on the legality of pork meat, even in its used as a sacrificial animal on the altar. Medically pork meat and swine are to be found full of worms that are contagious and antithetical to human physiological development. Hence one can deduct from the foregoing that pork is not just condemned for scarified but it is for the wellbeing of man. Another instance of this is seen in fish consumption (Leviticus 11:9). Only fish and /or sea food that have fins and scales was approved for consumption. Shellfish was prohibited. Today, fishes such as tuna, salmon, cod, red snapper and many others are high in protein and healthy omega fats which can help reduce inflammation, lower blood pressure and provide many other health benefits (Mary. 2020). Also, blood of animals and meat scarified to idols were forbidden. This goes a long way to buttress the blood as a major specimen in dictating disease. Animals scarified to idols do not pass the hygiene test; they have been contaminated in the process of such acts. Obedience to food laws is necessary in the bible (Chukwuezie, 2012: 78) for human survival. The way food preparation is handled matters. Food hygiene should top the objectives of food companies.

*Food security, economics and sustainability:* The book of *Genesis* also provided an account of food security in the mist of famine. The Egyptians through the instructions of Joseph to Pharaoh were engaged in food preservations to conquer hunger and famine that lasted for seven years. This means that they had food produced in surplus and had good food preservation technology to achieve that. This is a lesson to fight hunger in the world. There is need for advanced safe food technology to fight hunger and save wasted food in some parts of the world. With this in mind, food producing countries can export food to hunger and famine infested countries to save humanity, as well as improve their economies. Governments, policy makers and food institutes should work hard to ensure the development of sustainable food security programmes as exemplified in the bible. In this, food preservative technology is necessary to ensure preservation of food as long as seven years as seen in Egypt-food bible story.

*Food and Social Relations:* Food is another way we nourish our social relations. Food is an instrument of hospitality used by Abraham feed his visitors not knowing that they were Angels. We saw in the Biblical instances where food was used as a show of human relations; kings celebrate with food. Food relates human and humans, food and God, food and supernatural, food and worship.

*Food and Leadership:* Food creates leadership-followership problems. Hungry people do not obey their leaders. We see a biblical instance where followers of Moses refused his leadership because they were hungry and thirsty. This is lesson for leaders; food provision and serenity affect followership-leadership relations.

*Food as object of reward and charity:* Food is used as reward for true worshippers of God (Isaiah 1:19). Food can be as object of appreciation.

*Human and God relationship;* with food; we see instances where there is feast of Passover and others. Food is used to build supernatural relations through food sacrifices, food offerings, and covenant. We see this in the contemporary churches where Christians celebrate harvest. This is a season where they handover to God bounties of food, animal, fruits and vegetables in the worship of God and the acknowledgement of God as the lord of harvest through food and fruit dedication. Food is relevant in the development and growth of man and God relationship cum the advancement of the ministry of God. Jesus Christ also used food to nourish his social relations: He fed 5,000 and 7, 000 men at different occasions in the bible. He turned water to wine in a wedding where many keep asking for more. He also celebrated the feast of Passover (with bread and wine) where He told his disciples that this is his blood and flesh of the new covenant, given to them and many. This, he instituted as a feast to be done in order to renew his relationship with them and others who will join the faith. We see similar things in some of our cultures where food is used to nourish human social gatherings. This means that food is a necessary tool to maintain and cherish ourselves: a virtue and habit which we must learn to keep.

*Contributions to Food and dietary knowledge, food science and Epistemology:* Seasoning spices and herbs were used extensively in the bible as food flavours, and digestive enhancers. This is seen in the use of coriander (Exodus, 16:31; Numbers 11:17), the seed of cilantro is till this contemporary time a major anti-oxidant with natural cleansing effects (Fairchild, 2020). Other spices like garlic (Numbers 11:15) mint (Matthew, 13:31) Rue (Luke 11:42) Dill (Matthew 23: 23) Cinnamon (Exodus 30: 20; Revelation 18:13), anise (Matthew 23:23), mustard (Matthew 13:31) and salt (Ezra 6:9; Job 6:60) are food spices that provide medicinal and healthy living in our times. Lots of food companies are teaching about the good bodily regulatory power of garlic and mint. That they were richly fed with vegetables and legumes implies that they understood the high impact of these stuffs with nutrition, fibre and protein. These food path ways and culture are also good in these contemporary times. Food played significant sociological roles in the bible as well as in the contemporary society today. It is an integral part of humanity from health, to wealth, economics, peaceful co-existence; food is an inseparable factor.

## **Recommendations**

There are lots of lessons from this study. Food ethics should be applied to all in order to live a healthy life. The Joseph's ideology of seven years food preservation in Egypt to fight hunger and famine is worth cutting from for contemporary food relations. Food

technologists and scientists should work on safe food preservation of seven years to avoid food wastage. This study recommends a multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and intercultural study of food. This will engender more integrated evaluations of food values and laws to support humanity and societal development. Food is a social good a rethinking of food should generate new ideologies that will sustain viable contemporary food culture that will stand against the continuous problem food insecurity and unavailability rises to humanity. By this, a universal practical food laws, ethics and values will be reached: This will enhance government of nation's ideologies and perspectives to enrich their food policy formulations.

## Conclusion

This study is a tour into the food presentations in the biblical context. It revealed that food is guided by ethical and sociological factors. To fight hunger in the contemporary work today there is need to stop food wastage as the teachings in the biblical presentations of manner. There is need to exercise food virtues of hospitality, temperance and manners. This paper is a constant reminder that we own ourselves a responsibility of feeding ourselves and those entrusted in our case. It also brings out other conceptions of food such as food as miracle, spiritual, divine which shows that the conception of food is beyond the nutritious status. Food indeed is a social good, obtained in nature, conceptualized in (biblical) cultures as a gift from God.

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