

Food and eating have a central place in social relationships and, for some time now, this has aroused the interest of several sciences. Food understood beyond nutritional aspects and eating thought from historical, economic, social, political, cultural and religious contexts. In other words, food and eating from the so-called “culinary systems” have provided clues to understand how different groups have expressed their identities and reinvented themselves over time.

Properly, as some authors suggest, food is one of the oldest expressions of the sacred and, in turn, an object of worship. Offering food to the deities was related not only to the permanence and maintenance of the group, but it was an act of gratitude to those responsible for the fertility of the land, for example. One of the first concepts was born, food as a gift, a gift from the ancestors to humanity and a gift from the latter to the supporters of the group. The second view followed the first; the idea of “food as a vital force” and, for that matter, a kind of hierophany of the divine. Eating was thus “appropriating the body of the sacred”.

The history of religions bequeathed us the record of several gods and goddesses who give themselves in the form of food, in order to be consumed. Food is still at the origin of many peoples. In the Americas, among native peoples, maize and manioc stand out; in the African Continent, in some groups in West Africa, the same goes for yams, but this Continent long before drew attention through the manufacture of foods and beverages based on wheat and on other cereals, with the objective of immortality or the maintenance of those who are born always alive, because in addition to ideas such as exchange and vital force, food and the act of eating are permeated with concepts and views of the world, among them the idea of ancestry.

Either in the religions originated from the American peoples or in those originated from traditional African religions, food is a central object of worship. A good example is found in the traditional communities and terreiro peoples spread over Brazil. In Candomblé terreiros, it is said that “everything eats”. In other words, everything receives special foods capable of maintaining the ties of the sacred with the community through the renewal of something that can only be verified thanks to

the act of eating. Thus, food is present at all times in these spaces and it permeates the rituals of consecration of houses, objects, clothing, people, etc. Birth and death are crossed by eating and drinking together.

It is the social group that defines what food is. Generally speaking, “food is what is good to eat”, however, within this classification system, there are foods that are not eaten, such as the so-called food interdiction. These foods are related to the identities of the group and individuals and always find explanations from the deities or the notion of sacred, after all, nothing more dome than “displacement of ancestral issues”.

This edition tried to bring together religious experiences from Latin America based on the theme: Food and Religion, emphasizing rituals, cults and practices centered on commensality, on food itself and on the relationships between it, health, celebration, identities, among other topics. Talking about food and religion is also reflecting on political relations from populations that historically went through genocide, that were enslaved and invisibilized, but despite this, contrary to everything that the colonialist discourse boasted, they are there, eating and drinking, celebrating their ancestors through true banquets since, from an early age, they discovered that food is strength and that eating is invested with power, after all, nothing stays alive without it.

Vilson Caetano
Denise Oliveira e Silva