



The Three Wise Men. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy.

Nina Aldin Thune photo

Epiphany and Soufflés

This article is adapted from Not by Bread Alone: Pondering Theology and Food (charlestonbread.blogspot.com), a weblog by Charleston David Wilson, a student at Nashotah House Theological Seminary and candidate for holy orders from the Diocese of Fort Worth. He is a certified sommelier and the founder of Jinsei Sushi in Birmingham, Alabama.

By Charleston David Wilson

Julia Child, still the epitome of gastronomic cuisine in my book, once said, “Soufflés are, after all, mostly hot air.” So is a lot of what passes for modern Christianity, with its watered-down anthropology and penchant for stroking the ego and providing the countless couches required for self-actualization.

Let us apply dear Julia’s words, in tandem with the wisdom of Scripture, to the great feast before our eyes: the Epiphany of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Imagine a world in which our little opinions and fix-it schemes were the ultimate test for reality and existence. Can you say *complete misery*? Well, that’s where we

are. We, like many of our saintly counterparts who have gone on to their celestial reward, dwell in a time of utter chaos on all fronts, especially what we digest emotionally — or, as Freud would have it, in our heart of hearts, the ego. Calling this worldview solipsistic is not a stretch; it’s the brutal truth.

As Scriptures and sacred tradition tell us, we are idiosyncratic, hard-headed, consumeristic, and, to borrow from Tocqueville’s *De la Démocratie en Amérique* (1835) — the first real theorist to notice this defining characteristic of American life — “dangerously individualistic.”

And the problem does not end there,

A recipe for four soufflés

3 Tbsp. of flour, plus a bit for dusting
1 cup milk
4 eggs separated
1 tsp. Dijon mustard (not coarse grain)
1/4 tsp. Maldon salt

1/8 tsp. Tellicherry finely ground pepper
Pinch of Penzey's nutmeg
3 oz. of finely grated Gruyere cheese
1/8 cream of tartar

1. Preheat the oven to 475. Heavily butter a 4-cup soufflé mold. Dust with basic flour. Set aside.
2. In a small pan, bring the milk to a boil over medium heat. Whisk the egg yolks with 1 Tbsp. of water in a small bowl. Add 3 Tbsp. of flour to the yolks and whisk till very smooth, almost creamy.
3. Before the milk reaches a rapid boil, stir 1/4 cup of it into the egg yolk mixture. When the milk boils, add it to the egg yolk mixture and stir well. Return this base to the pan, and whisk rapidly, getting the bottom and sides, too, until the mixture thickens up nicely; this is usually about 45 seconds. Continue whisking for 1 minute while the base gently boils. It should become shiny and easier to stir.
4. Reduce the heat and allow the base to simmer. Season with salt, mustard, pepper, and nutmeg. Stir in the cheese. Allow the cheese to melt completely, and then remove from the heat and cover.
5. In a large bowl, beat the egg whites with the cream of tartar until stiff peaks form. Pour the base into a large bowl and whisk in 1/3 of the egg whites. Put the rest of egg whites on top.
6. Pour the mixture into a soufflé mold and level with a cake spatula. It must be level and without splotches of the mixture on the sides.
7. Bake on the lower rack of your oven for 5 minutes. Lower the temp to 425 and bake for another 5-8 minutes. The soufflé should rise 2 inches above the mold. Serve immediately with some freshly micro-planed parmesan on top.

does it? The issue continues unabated in our schools, workplaces, and, sadly, at our dinner tables. The Western world says the primary goal of life is one of total self-actualization, one in which we simply must get in touch with ourselves and unlock our futures. To quote Robert Bellah's renowned respondent, Sheila Larson, who self-identified as being very religious: "I believe in God. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheliaism. Just my own little voice. It's just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself."

Likewise, Emersonian wisdom, writ large in society at the moment, says it this way: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." This is hot air, plain and simple. Metaphorically, this is darkness, despair and even gloom. Where is the healing we all so desperately need? Where is the mighty Savior?

The Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ to all the peoples of the earth tells a drastically different story: "darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you" (Isa. 60:2).

Behold the true star of Jacob shining

now! Let the light in; have your lives flooded once more with the "pure radiance of the ever living Father in heaven." Let us crush that cursed mirror on the wall, and look instead to the star of heaven, the Christ child born to heal us, save us, and make us whole.

The Lord has appeared, and the shining star that is his light — not the dim glow of self-actualization and Sheliaism, but the one true eternal Light of life — still carries us and sustains us, just as it did for those famed kings of orient who traversed afar.

If you're visual, consider Sister Wendy Beckett's explanation of the icon of Kiev: "The child is radiantly beautiful, a golden boy, reaching out in love to whoever comes, with fearlessness."

This "radiantly beautiful" child is none other than the source of the great feast of the Epiphany, which we celebrate this season. Come now once more; follow that most blessed star of ancient lore through all life's travails till such time, thanks be to God, we shall behold him face to face in the splendor of heaven.

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