

Let Us, With a Gladsome Mind

John Milton (1608–1674)

Let us, with a gladsome mind,
praise the LORD, for He is kind:
for His mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

Let us blaze His Name abroad,
for of gods He is the God:
for His mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

He with all-commanding might
filled the new-made world with light:
for His mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

All things living He doth feed;
His full hand supplies their need:
for His mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

He His chosen race did bless
in the wasteful wilderness:
for His mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

He hath with a pious eye
looks upon our misery:
for His mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

Let us therefore warble forth
His high majesty and worth:
for His mercies shall endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

International Delicacies

Kevin T. Bauder

Last week I wrote about foods that I've sampled as I've traveled around the world. As it happens, I missed a favorite: Wienerschnitzel, which I have enjoyed right in Wien (Vienna). Did you know that it's sold as a fast food there?

International travel is no longer part of my agenda, but I haven't given up on unique dining experiences. The United States is a big country in which each region seems to offer delicacies of its own. I'll list a few of my favorites below.

I was reared in eastern Michigan where I grew up eating Kogel's pickled ring bologna. When my uncle would take me fishing, a ring of pickled bologna and a tube of saltines made for lunch. Only subsequently did I realize that some people don't care for pickled meat. I think it's great.

Another Michigan favorite is Vernor's ginger ale. Vernor's is one of the few golden ginger ales still in production—a completely different drink from the pale, tasteless stuff sold by—well, let's not mention names—"North of the border desiccated." I'm happy to be able to find Vernor's in Minnesota now.

Another east Michigan favorite is the coney dog. For all its problems, the city of Flint still has the greatest variety of the best coney dogs on earth. Made with Kogel's Vienna wieners and a dry chili sauce, coney dogs have been offered in diners like Angelo's and Starlight for decades. Each diner has its own secret sauce. I'm OK with any of them, and I'll eat mine with onions and mustard for a few moments of bliss.

One more eastern Michigan delicacy is blue moon ice cream. I don't know what they put in it to get that flavor. It almost seems citrusy, but not quite. I first tried blue moon ice cream in Pinconning as a pre-teen. It has been one of my favorites ever since.

Driving into the Upper Peninsula is like traveling to an entirely different state with its own culture and cuisine. The most characteristic food in the UP is the pasty, a kind of meat pie folded into a turnover and baked. Traditional recipes call for beef or pork with rutabagas in the filling, but many pasty shops have experimented with various combinations. Now you can



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find chicken pasties, breakfast pasties with egg and bacon, and even pizza pasties that are virtually indistinguishable from calzones.

When I was thirteen my family moved to Iowa, where I first encountered the pork tenderloin sandwich. Back then, these savory treats were only available in a few Midwestern states. This sandwich begins with a tenderloin cutlet, pounded flat, breaded, fried, and served on a bun. It makes a perfect meal on a summer evening.

Later I pastored on the edge of the Dutch community that centers on Pella, Iowa. That's where I discovered Dutch bakeries. The Dutch are some of the best bakers in the world, and my favorite confection was "Dutch letters." These are crispy pastries, filled with almond paste and twisted into alphabetic shapes before baking. They make a great dessert after a Maid-Rite, a loose-meat sandwich that is another Iowa specialty.

I never tried Mexican food until I was a senior in high school. Mexican cuisine was hard to get in Iowa. When I moved to Denver for seminary, however, I experienced my first good Mexican restaurant. Denver had a chain of restaurants—the Holly Inn, or La Fonda de Acebo—that offered something they called a "tacorito." It was essentially a smothered burrito. I wish I could get one now. I've had a love affair with Mexican cooking ever since.

Texas offers a different variety of Mexican food: Tex-Mex. I'd be hard pressed to say which I enjoyed more; the truth is that I love them both. When we lived in Dallas we could take our children to Panchos buffet where they could eat free and get all the sopapillas that they wanted. It was great fun.

Texas was also where I tried my first real barbecue. Barbecue certainly isn't unique to Texas, but different regions celebrate different meats and sauces. In Texas, the church ladies provide pans of barbecued brisket for dinner-on-the-grounds. Barbecue was also available from fast-food joints and from fine dining establishments. There's just something about the collision of smoked meats and well-seasoned sauce that is amazing, especially if it is served with blackberry pie for dessert.

Maybe the most uniquely Texan food, however, is chicken-fried steak. This dish is available elsewhere, but no place else does it like Texas. You can order it at any hole-in-the-wall lunch counter in any backwater town, and you'll get a crispy fritter of meat that's bigger than your plate and covered in cream gravy. I've never had anything quite like it anywhere else.

In east Texas, southern Arkansas, and Louisiana a different cuisine takes over. You can find deep-fried catfish served with a side-dish of gumbo over rice, and perhaps a cinnamon-caramel bun for dessert. If you'd prefer you can try a jambalaya or a crawfish etouffee.

You can also find grits in Texas, but the further east you go the better they get. Grits are eaten for breakfast and they look a bit like cream of wheat. The first rule for grits, however, is that you must never, ever eat them with milk and sugar. Butter is acceptable. Cheese is good. The best grits are served with gravy. I cannot understand why this food has never become popular in the North.

Let me mention just one more: the Wisconsin fish boil, which you can find up and down the eastern side of that state. The best place I know serves cod filets, boiled outdoors in a cauldron over an open fire. New potatoes are boiled in the same cauldron and served alongside the fish. If you don't think that boiled fish and potatoes could be appetizing, think again.

I'm running out of space, and there are still so many foods to talk about. Wild rice soup in Minnesota. Whole-belly clams in New England. Seven-year-aged cheddar in Wisconsin (or, at the opposite end of the aging spectrum, fresh cheese curds). Cheese steak sandwiches in Philadelphia. Cincinnati chili, which is served over spaghetti, and I'll take mine four-way.

The United States offers a welter of unique and sometimes overlapping cuisines. Some are drawn from European roots, some from Asian, many from other places. Often these foods get modified in their transition to the mainstream, but that's alright. The variety of delicacies that one encounters from region to region is a source of delight. Again, these are good gifts from a heavenly Father who wanted us to have more than just locusts to satisfy our hunger (remember, locusts were a clean food in the Old Testament). One of my joys in life is sampling the local delicacies as I travel around the country.

So that's all I have to say. Except—I didn't mention poutine. Well, maybe some other time.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
