

# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



INTERNATIONAL  
EDITION



**ACADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA**  
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FOUNDED IN 1953 BY ORIO VERGANI

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## L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

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WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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### INTERNATIONAL EDITION

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**On the cover:** Graphic reproduction of the painting *Still Life with Fruit and a Butterfly* by Jan van Huysum. On exhibition at the Mauritshuis Royal Picture Gallery.

# The Academy is of the Academicians: working together for renewed constancy

*We must bring Italian cuisine to the forefront of attention; it is too often left in the hands of television celebrity chefs. This is an obligation of all Academicians.*

BY PAOLO PETRONI  
*President of the Academy*

**T**he Regular Assembly of Delegates, which was held in Florence on May 30, represented a watershed not only in terms of the democratic electoral competition that took place but also for the various aspirations that were expressed during the event's many speeches and discussions. In a nutshell: a request for a "renewed constancy". The program of my presidency, which I intend to pursue with persistence and precision, includes among its primary objectives a new way of interacting with society, both in Italy and abroad. Every single Academy seems to lack visibility as part of its agenda. They achieve prestige through years of hard work and they keep their distance from scandals, political and commercial entanglements, and patronage. It takes years to build up prestige but it can be lost in a moment. Our suc-

cessful Presidencies have handed down to us a clean Academy with integrity and free from any shadows. And while I intend to maintain our absolute independence, the voice of our Academy today must play a larger and more incisive role. The strength of a presidency lies with its Academicians. To paraphrase a line from the inaugural speech of American President John F. Kennedy, "Don't ask what the Academy can do for you; ask what you can do for the Academy". That is, ask yourselves what we can do together to insure the success of our Academy. The work of the Academicians as well as the Delegates is fundamental. The participation and interests of all the members of a Delegation must constitute the main source of support for our solidarity. We do not join merely for friendship or to eat a couple of good meals, but so that we may bear the insignia of the Academy: whomever becomes a member must be aware of being an Academician at all times and as such must always try to make a personal contribution. We must never be followers but instead always constitute a motor that promotes the life and prestige of the Academy. Each one of us brings his or her own attitudes, experiences and professionalism. We are living in a time of excessive media self-promotion by the actors that populate the stage of Italian cuisine. Too much bombast, too much influence by celebrity chefs, too much television, too much advertising and too much exposure have transformed Italian gastronomy into a pure theater.

We need a return to true cuisine, to real ingredients and capabilities, patience, honesty and the humility by the many obscure protagonists of a cuisine that has fallen into obscurity, almost forgotten. If it doesn't make the news, it doesn't exist. If some cooking guru decides to put garlic in *amatriciana* sauce, butter in *pesto alla genovese*, or dust coffee on yellow *Milanese risotto* the media go crazy. But if one honest cook rediscovers a fabulous chicken that was raised as God intended and he or she cooks it the old fashioned way on the grill under a weight, delicious and crisp, no one talks about it. It is simply not news. The Academy must help everyone - both the consumers and institutions - understand that we exist not only in order to stimulate the great capacity of our chefs but also to be the faithful custodians of good Italian cuisine. Starting with this premise, in the next several months we will be working on a structural renovation of our "Franco Marenghi" Study Center. Thanks to the extraordinary competence of its new members, it will play a fundamental and pre-eminent role in defining the general outline of the cultural activity of the Academy through investigations, analyses and projects that have an historic, economic, socio-logical, nutritional, technical and gastronomic character.

The Academy needs to be at the center of Italian cuisine on the international scene. It must be considered a reference point both in terms of culture and in the development of our traditions.



# A culinary revolution

*As a domestic activity, is cooking today a progressive or reactionary way to spend our time? An interesting question.*

BY CLAUDIO NOVELLI  
Academician, Naples-Capri Delegation

**S**ome say the origin of the unstoppable degradation of human and animal nutrition, both public and private, and how we obtain our food does not matter. Perhaps it is the fault of the moon, the Earth's core or its rotation; it is a phenomenon of nature and therefore unstoppable. However it is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a series of unnecessary evils perpetrated by humans that fall under the euphemistic category of "progress". Many people think, but few are willing to admit, that progress has nothing to do with it, but it is instead a case of economic convenience. Agro-business has retained nothing of the meaning or physical extension of the Latin word *ager*: today it is all about super-concentrated cultivation, perhaps even multi-strata hydroponics.

Its catchphrase is "if it doesn't kill you it will nourish you". Thanks to the wonders of chemistry, some vitamins and proteins may be added, so why not throw in a pinch artificial flavor and some glutamate, that amazing substance that makes shampoo smell like a real apricot or green apple? At this point why not replace crab, chicken, beef and shrimp with some inert vegetable or animal fiber that has been ground, pulverized, freeze-dried, pre-cooked, rehydrated, reconstituted, colored and packaged in pleasant zoomorphic servings?

After taking for granted the survival of our species and its neighbors, the first victim of "progress" is clearly taste. It is not a quick death like the one provided by the guillotine, but an agonizing one. It expires slowly, diss-





pating and fading until it finally disappears from our memory. Lacking the original, which day by day is more difficult to find, comparison becomes difficult. There may be one or two ancient people left who complain that cabbages don't taste like they used to, that "as a child...." etc. This typical jeremiad of the elderly, delivered with the precision of a litany, is always accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders, a look of complacency, or at best a sympathetic smile. This is how we lose our historical memory, including the description of how things used to be, not back in the dark ages but maybe only 30 years ago.

They are the sorts of trivialities that big business doesn't concern itself with. Instead, in the name of a presumed equality and distorted view of community and democracy they say they will satisfy our hunger. Alas, at a high cost to us all. We only have to pay up. Not only that, but the time that we have been saving thanks to the caring assistance of "Big Sister" can be gladly employed in the "lifeless living" behind the wheel of an automobile or better still in the contemplation of television, possibly of "Big Brother". Gorging ourselves, of course, with the frantic and pervasive advertising of such products.

"More economics, more free market, less government with its shackles". They don't want to consider or allow us to reflect on the fact that if a body of laws has more or less evolved over time, there must be a reason. The

public welfare and common interest were the concepts that used to guide lawmakers. Bourgeois ideals perhaps, but seen through the eyes of an ethical State: "More freedom and less government" translates therefore into the freedom to make things even worse than they are now. It is free will run amok: mozzarella produced only in Campania with *buffala* milk? Who are we kidding? The cheese produced in Melzo and Hannover is just as good, even better - "something exquisite", as played by a fake Pulcinella in a fake alley in a fake Naples. And what about that infamous cream that is easily spread on any surface, storable at temperatures ranging from 40 to -20 degrees Centigrade and made with a complicated chemical formula that a recent European law promoted by the food industry allows them to call chocolate! It's all about economics, they say. When, during the cruel history of humankind, has economics dictated the laws of politics, religion or simple common sense? But let us return to more current themes: should we deny a license to any restaurant that even smacks of fast food? To do so would be anti-democratic and would have pernicious consequences for our youth: clandestine McChicken establishments would spring up like mushrooms simply out of a desire to disobey the law. Ketchup could be counterfeited under the label of raspberry toothpaste and the "laughing hamburger" may become the secret symbol of an underground movement. What could be worse!!!

So as a serious alternative we must discourage future generations from frequenting such establishments and keep chemicals out of our food. But how? First, we must utilize raw materials that have not been processed or modified, and learn to cook well - very well. We should let our imaginations run wild and embrace the invention of new dishes and foods as Marinetti and Fillia suggest: foods in which "experience, intelligence and imagination economically replace quantity, banality, repetition and expense". We should rediscover and perhaps revisit dishes and foods that have been reflected by our most genuine traditions that have been set aside or forgotten - or made to be forgotten by the food industry, the new "bogeyman" of the third millennium. Clearly, while raising a chicken, grabbing it, wringing its neck, plucking and singeing and eviscerating it may seem like an activity of the ancient past, we shouldn't move so far away from it. All that is needed is a good poultry shop and some inventiveness and patience in cooking the bird - with its skin still on.

So to return to our original question: As a domestic activity, is cooking today a progressive or reactionary way to spend our time? I have to conclude that it is actually a rather revolutionary way. Or, to not offend the *sansculottes* and Jacobins among us, perhaps I should say a silent, innocuous and delicious and gracious form of civil disobedience.

CLAUDIO NOVELLI

### THE ACADEMY SILVER PLATE



*Large, elegant and silver-plated, with the Academy's logo embossed on the front. This symbolic object is the recommend gift to be presented to those restaurants visited by the Delegations whose atmosphere, service, and cuisine are deemed particularly worthy. For further information and orders, Delegates should contact the Secretariat in Milan ([segretaria@accademia1953.it](mailto:segretaria@accademia1953.it)).*



# The incredible coffee bean

*The fortuitous journey of coffee, from beverage to social unifier*

BY RUGGERO LARCO  
*Delegate, Valdarno Fiorentino*

In his diary, Pietro Della Valle, traveler and 16<sup>th</sup> century scribe wrote: “The Turks have another dark colored beverage that refreshes you in the summer and warms you in winter; yet it is the same hot drink. You sip it boiling hot, not with meals but before

or after them and as a diversion while conversing. There is simply no location where it is not consumed, and everywhere you look you find little porcelain bowls filled with the stuff. The stuff is coffee, a beverage that has also become a socializing element: an event that constitutes a reason to gather together”. And where did this magical bean originate? One legend has it that an Ethiopian shepherd realized that after eating the small fruit of a wild plant, his sheep were awake and alert at night instead of sleeping. When he returned to the pasture where the sheep had been grazing he collected some of those “berries”, roasted them and ate them. He too found himself wide awake and alert. Returning to historical fact, the truth is that in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Persian scientist and philosopher Avicenna recommended the coffee bean as a remedy for kidney stones, gout, measles, and coughs (I don't know about measles and coughs, but it certainly is not advisable for people with kidney stones). Around 1500, coffee became the beverage of conviviality, passing through Arabia to Egypt and Syria. From there it moved on to Turkey and of course Constantinople, where Della Valle first wrote about it. It became popular in Europe more or less around the same time. It arrived in Germany in 1583 thanks to the botanist Leonard Rauwolf (1535-1596). It appeared in Italy via Venice because of that city's trade relations with the Orient and was popularized there in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. During the first half of the following century the first shops where coffee could be purchased and consumed began to





open. One rather unflattering testimony was provided by Francesco Redi, who wrote in his *Bacco in Toscana*: "I would rather drink poison than a cup of that bitter and evil coffee". Since he actually was a coffee drinker, he said that he wrote those words "as a poet, not a philosopher". During the same period, England was also importing and consuming coffee, which apparently cost 40 scudi per pound. It was there that the "Coffee House" was born, and although in 1663 there were only about 100 of them, that number would top 3,000 just fifty years later.

The first coffee arrived in Berlin in 1670, and in Paris in 1686. Two years earlier, in 1684, Franciszek Jerzy Kulczycki opened the first coffee house in Vienna using the sacks of coffee beans that the Turkish army had abandoned when they fled after their siege of the city.

There is another noteworthy legend that arose from that military circumstance: the invention of *cappuccino*, actually our modern *caffellatte* (half coffee, half milk), is attributed to the Friulian Capuchin monk Marco d'Aviano, who was present at the final battle. Finding the taste of the new beverage too strong, he added milk, and the resulting color resembled that of his cassock. The term

*cappuccino* has become famous worldwide, but in reality the drink itself was only achieved after the invention of the espresso machine and the milk frother. And there is more! Again, according to both history and legend, during the terrible Ottoman siege of their city the confectioners of Vienna created a half-moon shaped pastry that com-

memorated the symbol on the Turkish flag. Today that sweet pastry is ironically known as a *croissant*, (cross) and it often accompanies a *cappuccino*.

According to the philosophers of the Enlightenment, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century every European city consumed coffee, and that led to an increase in its production. Coffee began to be cultivated in the British and Dutch colonies thanks to the Dutch East India Companies. They utilized seeds that came from the port of Moka in Yemen. In 1720, Guadalupe governor Gabriel de Clieu (1686-1774) brought a coffee plant to Martinique. From there the plant spread to Santo Domingo, Jamaica, Cuba and Puerto Rico. During the same period, the Dutch brought coffee to another one of their colonies, Dutch Guyana (Suriname) from whence it moved through French Guyana to Brazil where in 1727 the first coffee plantation was established. Coffee was thus produced internationally and was exported to all of Europe and the Americas. And in our collective language, coffee moved from a mere beverage to refer to a meeting place and exchange of ideas.

RUGGERO LARCO

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# If it's not true it's well founded

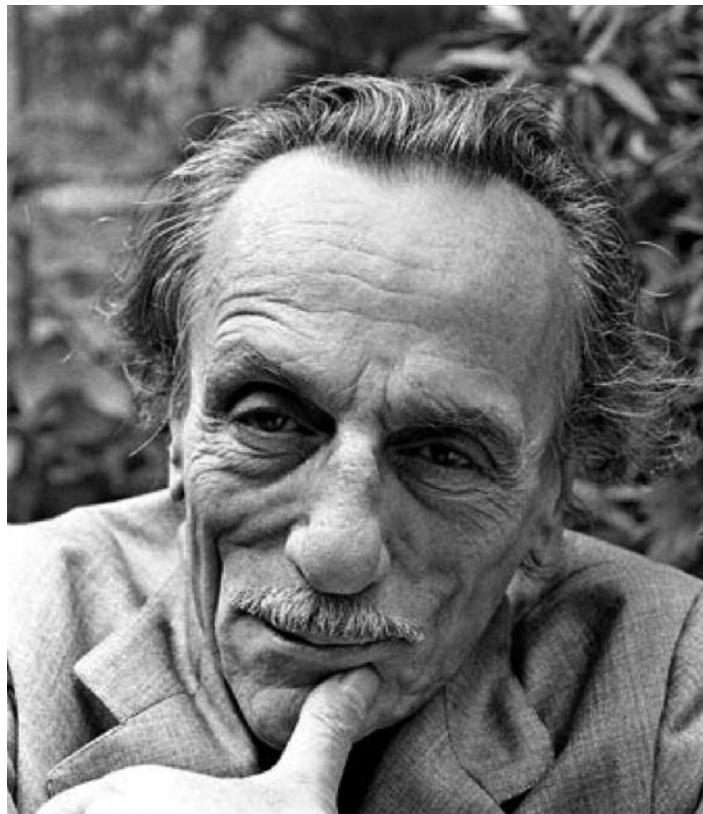
*"Belief in superstitions is tantamount to ignorance but not believing in them brings bad luck" (Eduardo De Filippo). The table is no exception.*

BY GIANNI DI GIACOMO  
Academician, Chieti Delegation

The time when we consume food is a moment of great symbolic value insofar as it stands out as an action that is fundamental for the survival of the human species. This is the reason why the human cultural world revolves around forms of behavior that encompass superstition and various rituals that make the sitting at the table an occasion full of significance. The superstition that more often than not surfaces at the table is that having thirteen guests brings bad luck. It is inevitable that when this happens one of the guests

will point it out while shunting any responsibility. The origin of this superstition is old indeed and evokes both religious and historical events. It goes back well before Jesus' last supper to the Norse myth according to which Loki, the god of evil and destruction, forced himself into the banquet of Valhalla, thus becoming the thirteenth guest. The consequence of this appearance was that the magnanimous god Balder, the son of Odin and defender of men and gods, was killed.

The superstition was reinforced by the last supper that Jesus shared with his twelve disciples. Following that event, both Jesus and Judas Iscariot met their deaths. The upshot of such events is that the thirteenth guest is destined to die within a year. Some people resort to laying the table for fourteen guests and then serving the guests who happen to be at the table. In England and Scotland, and in the United States as well, a porcelain cat is positioned on the table with the twofold purpose of keeping the jinx at bay and bringing the number of guests up to fourteen. The indirect consequence of avoiding the thirteenth placement is that table and silverware are usually sold in sets of twelve place settings. The utensils are also the subject of various superstitions: if a fork falls from the table, it may mean that problems might arise with a woman; if a knife falls, they will happen with a man; if the knives should lay on the plate in a crossed position, that could mean that one may start a quarrel with other guests at the table. At any rate, two utensils should not be crossed since





this would be a sign of the crucifixion. Wine should never be poured with the back of the hand looking down (an act of treason) as in the past special rings containing poison would be opened to discharge it thus sealing the fate of the unfortunate guest.

When one is a guest is somebody's home, be careful not to fold the napkin at the end of the meal, unless you do not mind not being invited again. No games are allowed on the table-cloth at dinner: Roman soldiers played dice for Jesus' clothes on a tablecloth readied for a meal. Never leave a white tablecloth on the table all night since it would call to mind a funeral shroud. Upsetting the pepper mill will cause you to clash with your best friend; the apple, fruit of discord, should not be eaten at Christmas. It is a bad omen to spill oil, a precious condiment that should not be wasted, as a verse on spilled oil reminds us: "Oil: if there are no misfortunes, there are condolences".

There are many superstitions connected with salt. They go back to the times when salt was a precious and expensive commodity. These superstitions reflect strong contradictions that occur in popular traditions and generate a mysterious aura around a product that is continually verging on both the sacred and the profane. "You will add an offering of salt to any offer to your god". This short verse of Leviticus clearly reveals the symbolic role of salt in religious traditions and just as in the case of oil it is easy to understand why spilling it can result in a nefarious action. At any rate, salt is a product marked by a certain ambiguity: if the disciples of Christ are presented as the "salt of life", it is also true that in ancient times victorious kings would spread salt over the land of the vanquished populations, to make them



sterile and unproductive. With the passing of time, salt became a purifying element against evil in various religions: from the rite of baptism to the rituals performed against witches. In sum, spilling salt is a bad omen and it is particularly bad to spill it at the table, because there is a credence that Judas did just that during the last supper before he betrayed Jesus. Many painters, among them Leonardo da Vinci in the *Last Supper*, portray the figure of Judas kissing Jesus while his elbow is causing the salt container to fall over on the table.

Should salt have already fallen, superstition dictates that the ill effect may be neutralized by tossing a pinch of salt over the left shoulder, the devil's shoulder, in order to blind the devil. Another strong credence is that of never passing the salt keeping from hand to hand, but to put it down on the table: the guests will pick it up with their own hand. Even the cutting of the wedding cake calls for the performance of a spell. In order to make the wedding ceremony as festive as possible, the newly wedded couple must cut the cake together, as accomplices: they both must hold the knife, the wife with her left hand, leaning on the right hand of her husband. Guests are required to eat the cake because refusing it would bring years of bad luck and marital problems. Bir-

thday cakes are decorated with little candles because this ensures good luck until the following birthday. If the candles are blown out in one clean puff the wish expressed will come true.

Fortunately, there are other superstitions that bring good luck, just like spilling wine that forces each guest to dip his or her finger in the spilt wine to wet his or her nape of the neck and thus become

the recipient of certain fortune. Eating a certain variety of fruit for the first time in the season calls for making a wish that will surely come true. What one eats on the last night of the year is also a matter of importance: first and foremost, lentils because they bring money; eating twelve black grapes is also a good omen. If not grapes, berries of another color of any kind of fruit that encapsulates them, such as pomegranates, will do.

In the region of Abruzzo, seven types of soup with seven distinct legumes must be served to bring wealth. Another fundamental element of the *Cenone* - the great Christmas or New Year dinner - is dried fruit, symbol of prosperity: in France, tradition calls for thirteen different types, in Italy seven are sufficient: walnut, hazelnut, peanut, raisin, almond, fig, and date. Toasting with champagne or sparkling wine is a must, exactly at midnight, with the dutiful loud popping of the cork, because this kind of noise, alongside that of firecrackers or similar noise makers, will chase out the evil spirits. Toasting with water? This never happens in Spain, where people believe that it is a bad omen causing, in particular, seven years of problems under the sheets. In addition, the last drink of the evening is called "Penultima", "the next to last".

GIANNI DI GIACOMO



# Culinary systems and traditional local cuisine

*Developed on the Italian model of Renaissance art schools, it is a way to protect, improve and enhance the value of traditional cuisines.*

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI  
*Honorary President of the Academy*

Local cuisines, which represent a widely diffused global reality are finding themselves coming face to face with gastronomic globalization, in which the culinary system established in France has always played a special role. This system was extremely successful, and influenced the majority of cuisines, at least in the western world, becoming a new model or paradigm that overtook and crossed over that of French cuisine and as such must be studied and evaluated.

Some of the characteristics of the culinary system developed in France that assured the undeniable success of its gastronomy (and also some of its limits) have recently been highlighted by Alain Ducasse and Joël Robuchon.

The first characteristic concerns the organization of the culinary team, first codified in detail by Auguste Escoffier. Under the command of the chef, each specialized component has a specific task and a well defined role. The second is the limitless breadth of the techniques employed - including ancient, modern and futuristic - not infrequently used in combination. The third characteristic regards the development of a body of dishes and recipes that have in large part become classics. These are the fundamentals of cuisine: the broths, fumets, marinades, sauces, gravies and original condiments, many of which are used worldwide and allow for an infinite variety of recipes that are independent from the foods with which they are combined.

The last but not least characteristic is the vast gamut of food products we have to choose from. They are chosen

for their high quality, regardless of their place of origin, be it domestic or foreign, near or far, or whether they are traditional or innovative.

These individual and independent characteristics form a system of notable efficiency for a high quality and prestigious cuisine that is largely applicable to the most diverse cultures and cuisines. It is true that this system does not possess the simplicity that characterizes and constitutes the strength of the majority of traditional and popular cuisines that is the undeniable base of their persistent success.

In the culinary system outlined above, it is no longer just the chef who cooks, but his or her entire team, according to a model that remains - and must continue to remain - uniform with or without the presence of the chef that developed it.

These characteristics the culinary system developed in France follow in the footsteps of a well known model that was created in Italy in the past and used in other arts. In the art studios of the Renaissance, the maestro conceived and oversaw the work in his studio, or workshop. He invented and chose the techniques, selected the materials and imposed his own artistic interpretation on the public. He planned and executed the most important parts of the work, and left his imprimatur on all the work of his studio, even if the details, and the numerous copies were carried out by the students. In the art workshops traditional artisanal practices were transformed into high level works of art, and while traditions were sometimes interpreted and sometimes surpassed,



the work was almost always innovative and creative.

Because it is similar to the characteristics of an "art workshop", the culinary system perfected by the French has invaded the entire world and at the same time has acquired and absorbed new knowledge, techniques and foods from other cuisines to create a unique experience and culture.

Through a technical, but always cultural exchange, the French culinary system achieved and maintains an undeniable success that allows it to deal with modern day problems and realities of a multi-polar nutritional and culinary world that is even invading France itself and that is present in other countries including Italy and that constitutes a great challenge to traditional and local cuisines.

Cooks all around the world have been very successful in interpreting the traditional cuisine of their own territory and using local products. Such success has brought some almost unknown local cuisines to the international forefront. For example, initially Baltic cuisine, and subsequently Brazilian and Central American foods. We shall have to see what others join them in the future.

Clearly regional Italian cuisines are no

strangers to the culinary system described above and they have exploited it to their advantage. As an indication one need only look at the kitchen organization and the equipment of the best Italian restaurants, and at the menus of the most successful ones, especially their "sampling" or "tasting" menus. We must not underestimate the modifications that have been made regarding traditional recipes. Although there have occasionally been betrayals worth condemning, more often we see improvements that are basically necessary in order for those traditions to survive. Every traditional cuisine had to find that difficult balance between environment, nutrition and economy. In today's constantly changing conditions the culinary system described above can take advantage of new information and technological and economic advancements. If wisely applied to our regional and traditional cuisine, this culinary system can in fact allow us to maintain the values of the past and at the same time reach the new objectives of human nutrition. In particular, it can help us promote a healthy, balanced, and varied cuisine that respects traditions and places the greatest emphasis on the quality of ingredients. These ingredients

must reflect respect for the environment and animal health on the part of the producers, and must be preserved and transformed in a sustainable way that is favorable to the health of both the producers and the consumers.

The value of each cuisine does not reside solely in the restaurants in which the celebrated masters work, but in maintaining high quality restaurant standards under which people not only learn about food and how to eat, but also keep our various traditions alive in a time of multi-polar gastronomic globalization. The timelessness, high level and future of traditional cuisines are maintained and built every day in every town and city of a region, in every cuisine whose principal objective is the quality of research and work of the restaurateurs who promote a non-industrial cuisine that is not a slave to passing fads and trends.

Rather than an obstacle, the great diversity of nutritional traditions of Italian cuisine and gastronomy can become an element of success if interpreted in a modern culinary system that has the quality of ingredients as its main priority. All without falling into the trap of fast and easy marketing!

GIOVANNI BALLARINI

## 2015 ECUMENICAL DINNER

*The convivial ecumenical meeting that brings together all the Academicians in Italy and around the world at the virtual table, will take place on October 15 at 8:30 pm. This year's theme will be Condiments: Sauces and Gravies that characterize regional cuisine. This topic, chosen by the "Franco Marenghi" Study Center and approved by the President's Council, is aimed at recapturing, through cuisine, traditions that are undergoing great changes today owing to our passage from home and family cooking to artisanal and finally industrial foods. And if at one time the use of condiments was determined by neighboring cultures, today the field is a global one and is in a state of constant and rapid change. Delegates are entrusted with ensuring that the ecumenical dinner is accompanied by an appropriate presentation of a cultural character that illustrates this important theme and that the dishes served are relevant to the topic.*

