

“DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME:” READING LUKE 22:19-20 FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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***Abstract:** According to the synoptic gospels Jesus commanded his disciples to observe the Lord's Supper to remember what he did for humankind by breaking his body and pouring his blood. The paper analyses the Lukan narrative (Luke 22 :19-20) to explore the significance of the Lord's Supper for contemporary African Christians. It contends that the Supper provokes a call to covenant relationship with Christ, invites believers to embrace Jesus' act of service and become agents of God's salvation. Furthermore, it explores the significance of meals in Africa. The paper concludes that unity, communalism, and sacrifice are features of a true eucharistic community.*

Key Words: African Christianity, Exegetical, Eucharistic Narrative, Lord's Supper, Passover.

Introduction

Meals are important events in everyday life.¹ They do not only satisfy hunger and the pleasure of eating but also create and/or consolidate a communal ambience.² In many cultures, meals also acquire a religious value, depending on the nature of the occasion on which they are served. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus ate meals in the homes of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), Simon the leper (Luke 7:36), and with sinners during his ministry (Luke 7:34). Bowen underscores the 'pastoral' value of meals in the life of Jesus when he observes that Jesus ate meals with his disciples and with sinners; provided for the hungry and enjoyed eating and drinking with his apostles and followers.³

¹ The paper includes data collected for my Master of Philosophy Thesis; cf. Godfred Nsiah, "An Exegetical and Theological Study of the Institution of the Lord's Supper: Luke 22:7-23" (MPhil Thesis, Dept. for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, 2013); [ugspace.ug.edu.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/5313/Godfred Nsiah_Exegetical and Theological Study of the Institution of the Lord%27s Supper%2C Luke 22.7-23_2013.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://ugspace.ug.edu.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/5313/Godfred_Nsiah_Exegetical_and_Theological_Study_of_the_Institution_of_the_Lord%27s_Supper%2C_Luke_22.7-23_2013.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

² In Africa, meals are served during social gatherings including funerals, where people are mourning, owing to their social significance.

³ Roger Bowen, '... So I Send You': *A Study Guide to Mission* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 48.

Marshall adds that Jesus' attitude is rooted in his cultural context. In ancient Israel, people went to the temple to offer sacrifices and to share in a common meal "before the Lord." It was considered a "religious act," characterized by praise and rejoicing, where to experience and express the communion between YHWH and his people.⁴ For this reason, the main Jewish festival culminated in festal meals.⁵ The greatest was (and is) the Passover, the context in which, according to the Synoptic accounts, the Last Supper was held.⁶

Though the four accounts of the Lord's Supper differ in some important details, they have much in common (Mat. 26:17-30, Mk. 14:12-26, Lk. 22:7-22, 1 Cor. 11:23-34). This paper analyses the Lukan account of the Lord's Supper, through an exegetical study of Luke 22:19-20. In the awareness that the hermeneutic cycle is not complete until the text becomes significant and alive in a specific culture, we further examine the relevance of the Lord's Supper for contemporary African Christians. The paper employs the Narrative Critical Method for the exegetical analysis of the text to understand the illocutionary force of the text and its perlocutionary effect on readers.

It is organized into four main sections. The first examines the historical background of the Supper and its institution. The second presents a narrative analysis of Luke 22:19-20 to discover how the author guides his readers towards understanding Jesus self-offering. Section three focuses on the perlocutionary effect of the text on the readers. The last section outlines some significance of the Supper for contemporary African Christians.

Historical Background and Institution of the Supper

The syntagm κυριακόν δείπνον (Lord's Supper), appears only once in the New Testament (1 Cor. 11:20), but the event is narrated not only in the first letter to the Corinthians but also in the three synoptics (Matt. 26:1-30, Mk. 14:1-26, Lk. 22:1-22).⁷ According to the Lukan narrative, the Supper occurred during the *πάσχα* (the

⁴ Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 66.

⁵ There were religious dimensions, expressed in thanksgiving to God, in ordinary Jewish meals which differs from the religious meals which had elements of sacrifice.

⁶ Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 66.

⁷ Δείπνον most often connotes ordinary meal to which guests could be invited.

Passover; 22: 8, 11, 13, 15), the Jewish festal meal that celebrated the liturgical memory of the exodus from Egypt (Exod 12:1-11).

For this reason, several scholars read Jesus’ Last Supper against the backdrop of the Passover meal. For example, Jeremias argues that the presence of a limited number of diners, the twelve disciples, corresponds to the number required for a Passover meal.⁸ Furthermore, he supports his position reading Jesus’ interpretation of the significance of the bread and wine in the Passover context.⁹ Marshall reiterates Jeremias’ conviction asserting that the Synoptic Gospels employ paschal features in their institution narrative.

The commonly held identification of Jesus’ Supper with the Passover has been challenged by some scholars. Wellhausen posited that ἄρτος refers to leavened bread, concluding that the Last Supper could not have been a Passover.¹⁰ However, his view was questioned by Spinks and others stating that ἄρτον can also refer to unleavened bread because it is the usual translation of the Hebrew *lehem maṣṣót* (unleavened bread or cake).¹¹ Bacon argues that the ritual observed by Jesus proceeds not from the Passover seder but from the *Kiddush*,¹² a common Jewish ritual.¹³ Jonge contends that the pattern of the Lord’s Supper conforms to that of the Hellenistic Communal Supper, consisting of a meal and subsequent symposium. He elucidates that such meals were organized periodically in clubs, societies, associations, religious guilds, and other groups for the members to

⁸ Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 59.

⁹ Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 59.

¹⁰ J. Wellhausen, “ἄρτον ἐκλασεν: Mark 14:12,” *ZNW* 7 (1906), 185.

¹¹ Bryan D. Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: The Eucharist from the Early Church to the Present Day* (SCM Studies in Worship and Liturgy; London: SCM, 2013), 8.

¹² This is a common Jewish ritual performed on the *eve* of every Sabbath and of every feast-day in which a cup of wine and a loaf of leavened bread is used with the purpose of sanctifying the day. In this ritual the ministrant is the head of the family. Nelson B. Baker defines it as the taking of bread and wine in accordance with Christ’s institution. Other meaningful names are the Holy Communion, the Eucharist, and Breaking of Bread. The use of these names is based on one’s ecclesiastical tradition. Nelson B. Baker, “Lord Supper,” in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, ed. Charles F. Purifier, Howard F. Vos and John Rea (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 1050.

¹³ Benjamin W. Bacon, “The Lukan Tradition of the Lord Supper,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 5, no. 3 (1912), 337.

give shape to their ideal of unity, community, equality and brotherhood.¹⁴

To conclude, I share the views of scholars who propose that the Supper follows the Passover because the bread and wine used for the celebration, coupled with Jesus' interpretation of the elements to be characteristic of his body and blood, indicate the semblance of the Supper with the Passover. Additionally, the rite of blessing the bread and wine by family head was followed in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Narrative Analysis of Luke 22:19- 20

Following the Jewish tradition, Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare for the Passover meal (22:1-13). While at table with the twelve, Jesus blessed the bread and wine and instituted the Lord's Supper for the disciples to observe in his memory (vv. 19b-20). The flow of Luke's narrative is significant in relating the meaning of the Supper to the passion narrative.

Thanksgiving over the Bread and Cup (v. 19a)

The narrative begins with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, where the Passover lamb was sacrificed. The immediate context concludes with series of teachings by Jesus and his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (cf. 19—21). During the meal, Luke underlines Jesus's position as the head of the 'family,' performing his required role of blessing bread and wine. He begun with thanksgiving over the bread. Luke uses the verb λαμβάνω instead of δέρχομαι (cf. v. 17) with ἄρτον (bread) without the definite article as it was in the case of the cup in v. 17. This was to emphasize the importance of the bread used in the eucharistic celebration and its relation to the body of Christ. He gave thanks (εὐχαριστέω) and broke (ἔκλασεν) the bread to refigure the breaking of his body.¹⁵ He then offers it to them to share.

As the head of the table, Jesus shared bread with the apostles to demonstrate his communal relationship with them. The words ἔκλασεν (broken) and ἔδωκεν (gave) conveys the idea of self-

¹⁴ Henk Jan de Jonge, "The Early History of the Lord's Supper," 224; accessed 25 March 2018; https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/961/279_123.pdf?sequence=1

¹⁵ The verb κλάω (break) has become the basis of a technical term for the Lord's Supper.

sacrifice as a component of the significance of the Lord’s Supper as a communal meal.

The Words of Institution (vv. 19b-20)

The institution of the Supper begins with Jesus designating the bread as his body. Luke used the demonstrative pronoun τούτο (this) to call his readers attention to the bread and cup, which are given new meaning as σῶμα (body) and αἷμα (blood). Thus, the phrase τούτο ἐστίν¹⁶ introduces the relation Luke draws between the bread on the table and the σῶμα of Jesus.

In line with the Old Testament tradition, Jesus used σῶμα identifying the bread with himself (“my body;” v. 19). Luke presents Jesus as offering not just bread to the apostles but his own self. For this reason, he continues revealing the beneficiaries of his gift: ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν. The pronoun indicates multiple receivers, with the twelve been the nucleus.

Jesus then commands the community to ‘make memorial’ to “remember him.” Ανάμνησις is a keyword in the Lucan and Pauline narratives, translated as remembrance or recollection.¹⁷ It is the connecting point between the event of Christ and Christian practice: by its continuous observance, the community of Jesus can experience the reality of his presence.

According to Ghislain the command is not limited to a ritual observance but to the imitation of Jesus’s life. To create a new praxis, a new modality of existence characterized by self-offering, Christians must remember the death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁸ Partaking of the breaking of the bread, disciples of any generation will ‘remember’ the core of Christian life: to become a ‘continuation’ of Jesus’ life.

Jesus repeated the same word for the cup (τό ποτήριον) after breaking the bread. Τούτο τό ποτήριον (this is the cup) is parallel to the

¹⁶ Some Scholars are of the view that ἐστίν can be interpreted as it ‘signifies’ rather than ‘it is identical with.’ This, however, will depend on the individual’s theological position. See, Petzer Kobus, “Style and Text in the Lucan Narrative of the Institution of the Lord’s Supper: Luke 22:19b-20,” *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991): 114.

¹⁷ John Brehm, “Anamnesis,” in *TDNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), I: 348.

¹⁸ Ghislain, Ndongji-Tshiwisa-Adidem “An African Reconsideration of Christian Anamnesis,” *Exchange* 27, no.1 (1998): 41.

verse 19a, calling particular attention to the cup with special emphasis on the content. The indicator τούτο (this) emphasizes the blood as the component of the covenant and brings his readers to the understanding that by drinking from the cup of blessing, they share in the new covenant which was ratified with the blood of Christ.

Thus, Luke affirms that as the body and blood of the lamb were instrumental in the redemption of Israel (Exod. 12:13), Jesus' body and blood offered in sacrifice in enacting the new covenant would perfect the redemption of humanity. By the new meaning given to the Passover, the Supper then becomes a covenant between him and those who partake of it. The adjective καινή¹⁹ (new) together with διαθήκη (covenant) suggest that Jesus was giving a *new* understanding to what was done in every Passover.

The syntagm διαθήκη νέα (Hebrews 12:24), indicates that Jesus' covenant is not only new in 'quality' as contended in καινή (new) but also that it is 'recent,' as a new beginning.²⁰ Read against the Old Testament background, the concept διαθήκη reveals the declaration of God's will concerning his self-commitment, promise and conditions by which he entered into a relationship with humanity. With the syntagm ἐν τῷ αἵματι, Luke helps his readers to appreciate that the cup was not the actual element for the covenant but the content. The preposition ἐν (in) used together with the dative αἵματι (blood) indicates the cause for the covenant; the blood as an element of the covenant becomes the means by which the covenant is formulated.

Luke's usage of ὑπερ ὑμῶν (for you) seem to narrow the beneficiaries of the self-offering of Jesus changing the expression from "for many" present in Matt. 26:28 to "for you". However, the plural pronoun is more inclusive than exclusive, opening the observance of the Supper to all of Christ's disciples.

When the Supper ended, contrary to the parallel accounts of Matthew and Mark, the disciples did not leave the room, but they

¹⁹ Some scholars affirm that καινός used with reference to the covenant signifies not a temporal repetition but a new, eschatological beginning. Cf. Ian Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press Limited, 1978), 806.

²⁰ John F. Walvoord, "Eschatological Problem X: The New Covenant with Israel," accessed 20 January 2017; <http://bible.org/seriespage/eschatological-problem-x-new-covenant-israel/html>

listened to further teachings of Jesus about ‘true’ greatness and persecution. With this narrative option, Luke guides his community to understand that the participation to the Supper of the Lord requires attentive listening to his words, because only those “who hear God’s word and put it into practice” (8:21) are members of Jesus’ family. Service to the ‘other’ until the gift of life and steadfastness are, therefore, the identity card of those who belong to the community of the new covenant.

The analysis has revealed that Luke is the only evangelist who ‘commands’ his disciples “to do this in memory of me” (Lk 22: 19). Comparing Mark/Matthew with Luke we realize that Luke opts for a different narrative choice: after the gift of bread and wine, the readers do not accompany Jesus towards Gethsemane but remain in the room to listen to his teaching about greatness and persecution. The ‘memory’ then becomes for the community the opportunity to incarnate “the mind of Jesus” (cf. Phil 2:5), Jesus’ perspective, feelings, attitude, humility, etc., allowing herself to be transformed by him into an eucharistic community.

In summary, the Eucharist celebrated in the community of the disciples becomes, in the perspective of Luke, the encounter with the Lord Crucified and Risen, to learn to become like Him and extend His humanity in history. This is, for Luke, the true greatness (vv. 24-30). Those who follow this path, however, need to accept to embrace the destiny of the Master, even persecution and death (vv. 31-38).

The Perlocutionary Effect of the Text on the Readers

The Lord’s Supper has become a major subject for theological discussion among scholars due to its relevance in the life of Christian communities. Ossom-Batsa in his study of the institution narrative of Mark observes that the narrative provokes a sense of amazement, belief in the efficacy of the words of institution in readers due to their previous knowledge of the teachings and miracles of Jesus. It also educates readers of the generosity of Jesus, and the reader identifies himself/herself as a beneficiary of Jesus’ death.²¹ Luke’s account presents the readers with theological implications for observing the Supper and calls on them to a relationship with Christ

²¹ George Ossom-Batsa, *The Institution of the Eucharist: A Study of the Function of Mark 14:22-25 within the Gospel Narrative* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), 260-62.

because of the sacrifice of Christ on the eve of the Passover. Similar to these, the institution narrative in Luke's Gospel suggests the call of his readers into a covenant relationship, appreciation of Christ act of service and to accept his offer of salvation.

Call to Enter into Covenant with Christ

The Lord's Supper tradition has major theological inference on the subject of covenant. Both the Old and New Testament describe the relation between God and Israel as covenant.²² In view of this, covenant serves as the biblical-theological concept used to explain the essential character of God as king or sovereign ruler.²³

Since covenants are typically between parties to create relationships that did not exist previously, both the substance and the nature of the covenant requires validity and must be valid and significant to both parties.²⁴ In the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus indicated that the substance of the covenant was His body and blood poured in covenant for His disciples, while in nature, it was to be a new covenant different from the old one.

Theologically, Christ is identified with the Passover elements; so that by His sacrifice, the new covenant would be ideal to meet all its significance. In the narratives, Luke invites his readers to enter into covenant with Christ by helping them to understand and appreciate the deep love of Jesus expressed in the gift of bread (his body) and wine (his blood). Luke contraposed opposite models of self-giving and betrayal; offering life and violence; God and Satan to express the need for such a relationship with the selfless Christ whose redemptive activity has brought liberation to humankind. They are, therefore, to live in obedience to his word and reciprocate this by extending such expression of love to fellow humans through warm fellowship and loving devotion to one another.

²² George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, "Covenant," *ABD* (London: Yale University Press 1992), 6: 1179.

²³ Scott J. Hafemann "The Covenant Relation," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 22.

²⁴ Mendenhall and Herion, "Covenant," 1180.

Appreciate the Sacrifice of Christ

In Luke’s narrative, Jesus interpreted his impending death as a sacrificial action related to establishing a covenant.²⁵ Luke affirms it was the new covenant by introducing the adjective *καινός* (new). The death of Jesus was both sacrificial and redemptive, and according to Matthew it was for the forgiveness of sin (Matt. 26:28).²⁶ The Jewish ethos with its sacrificially based worship indicates that the offering of sacrifice was necessary to remove sin and for the inauguration of a covenant.

To emphasize the sacrificial nature of the Supper, Luke situates it in the context of the Passover. In Jewish religious context, the Passover had a sacrificial dimension because of the killing of the lamb in the temple and the pouring of blood. And in Israel, blood was offered to God alone in sacrifice as demonstrated in the prohibition on blood (Lev. 17:1- 12), because of its life-giving function; hence, Jesus’s pouring of his blood for the same purpose emphasizes the sacrificial nature of his death. Luke urges his readers to appreciate that Jesus’s pouring of his blood in his narrative was a sacrificial death. To appreciate the theology of the Lord’s Supper, one needs to focus on the cross. The relationship between the cross and the sacrifice of Christ invites contemporary Christians partaking in the meal to appreciate Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.²⁷ The appreciation of the sacrifice requires the readers to become a living sacrifice and be ready to offer their lives for Jesus and the service of others as suggested by the prepositional phrase “for you.”

Accept the Salvation Offered by Christ

Salvation is used extensively in Christian theology to express God’s love for humanity. Matera postulates that no writer of the New Testament presents a complete redemptive history more than Luke.²⁸ His account of the redemptive history finds its climax in the paschal mystery which Christ associated with the Lord’s Supper. This redemptive history conveys the message of God’s salvation to the

²⁵ Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 196.

²⁶ Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 196.

²⁷ Daniel Cardo, *The Cross and the Eucharist in Early Christianity: A Theological and Liturgical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 134.

²⁸ Frank Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 95.

world. It means the Eucharistic celebration informs the doctrine of salvation in the church as it forms part of the activities that climaxed the salvation history.

Similarly, the new covenant which Jesus inaugurated at the Passover has salvation as its purpose. The reference to the New Covenant in His blood in the institution implies salvation. Luke, therefore, invites his readers to appreciate Christ's sacrificial death and accept the offer of salvation by entering into covenant with him. By exercising faith in Christ, believers enjoy the fruits, which is salvation.

Meals and Sense of Community Life in Africa

Luke's invitation to a covenant relationship with Christ is a motivation for African Christians to explore the significance of the Last Supper meal. The celebration of this Christian ritual²⁹ communicates to African Christians the sense of community life. Communalism, according to Gyekye is a virtue cherished in African communities because they believe every individual is born into the community to participate in all its culture, religious beliefs and rituals.³⁰ For Christians in Africa Adewuya shares a similar view that "one of the most remarkable and tangible dimensions of African Christianity relates to the unique notion of communality and collective solidarity that African society exhibits in all spheres of life."³¹

One characteristic feature of communal life in Africa is eating together. Boston notes that "eating a meal together is the most basic way of sharing common life."³² It shows that one is accepted to partake in life and equality.³³ Meals are communal activities in Africa; hence, families often enjoy meals together. In times of celebration,

²⁹ T.E. Ngcobo, "The Holy Communion and African Rituals: An Encounter between African Religion and Christianity," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (2020): 3.

³⁰ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996), 3.

³¹ J. Ayodeji Adewuya, "Revisiting 1 Corinthians 11.27-34: Paul's Discussion of the Lord's Supper and African Meals," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30, no. 1 (2007): 103.

³² F. Boston, *Preparation for Christian Initiation* (Kampala: Gaba, 1973), 53.

³³ J. Mutiso-Mbinda, "The Eucharist and the Family—In an African Setting", *AMECEA Documentation Service* 282 (1984): 2.

the entire community share food, drink and makes merry to achieve this purpose of communality.³⁴

The Lord’s Supper is a communal meal in which Christians celebrate Christ who offered himself as food and drink for his disciples. His self-emptying sacrifice is exemplified in the African worldview by communal cooperation of providing assistance for all members. In summarizing the significance of meals in Africa, Mutiso-Mbinda writes, “A meal is perhaps the most basic and most ancient symbol of friendship and unity. Food and drink taken in common are obvious sign that life is shared.”³⁵ A meal is always a communal affair no matter the context as was demonstrated by Jesus with His disciples in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

The communal life in Africa does not exist only between the living but includes the ancestors recognized as part of the community. There is a vibrant relationship between the spiritual world occupied by the living-dead and the physical world.³⁶ Nurnbuerger asserts that no distance exists between the ancestors and living regarding time and space,³⁷ as the ancestors share all moments and occupation with the living. Christianity shares this African worldview as observed by Ngcobo that “through rituals Christians connect in fellowship with others, as well as the transcendent, especially during Holy Communion.”³⁸

This communal relationship with the ancestors is celebrated through meals. Africans share meals with their ancestors in their daily lives and at special occasions. Among the *Akans*, when a morsel of food falls down while dishing a meal or eating, you do not pick it because it is believed the ancestors are present and should eat. Some people also deliberately throw portions of food or drink down while eating or drinking or leave some food in the bowl at night, believing that the ancestors will visit home and must get food to eat. In the pouring of libation and offering food to the dead during festivals and other

³⁴ T. Gurganious, “African religion,” 2010, accessed 9 April 2014; <https://www.spiritualliving360.com/index.php/african-religion-8664/>

³⁵ Mutiso-Mbinda, “The Eucharist and the Family.”

³⁶ Ngcobo, “The Holy Communion,” 1.

³⁷ K. Nurnburger, *The Living Dead and the Living God: Christ and the Ancestors in a Changing Africa* (Cluster: Pietermaritzburg, 2007), 37.

³⁸ Ngcobo, “The Holy Communion,” 1.

special occasions, Africans strengthen their communion. Meals are an important medium for strengthening the communal life between the living and the dead in Africa.

Meal as means for Building Unity

Meals unite people at different levels in the community. As a cherished value in most communities, unity is brought about by several factors, but meals appear to be a stronger binding feature. The maxim “unity is strength” is a statement that has inspired many families, cooperate organizations, institutions in Africa to greater heights due to the role of unity in the development process. For this reason, in all African communities, activities that ensure unity are greatly encouraged. During festivals and other social occasions, people come together to share food and drink with others. These activities do not only bring peace but strengthen their communal bond of unity and sense of belonging. The idea of unity among the partakers of the Lord’s Supper is enshrined in the institution narrative. Significantly, the Supper symbolizes unity in the church and unity of humanity as a whole. It symbolizes oneness and unity in the body of Christ. Hence, the Supper deepens the understanding of the concept of unity for the African Christian.

Meals and Covenant in Africa

Relationship among Africans are interpreted in covenant terms. And meals are usually used to seal such covenants. Adewuya noted, Africans believe that a covenant is enacted when two or more persons eat or drink together from the same bowl.³⁹ In any relationship, sharing a meal affirms the holy value attached to life and unity between the parties.⁴⁰ Among the *Akans*, communal meals at marriage and naming ceremonies celebrate the oneness in the event. Failure to partake in meals offered on such occasions is unacceptable, amounting to dislike or a sign of disunity with the celebrant. A similar affirmation is seen especially in the wedding liturgy of most churches where new couples eat the Lord’s Supper as part of their marriage rite because it is believed to be a seal of their marriage covenant. That is to say, the covenant inclination of the communal meal in the

³⁹ Adewuya, “Lord’s Supper and African Meals,” 105.

⁴⁰ Nlenanya Onwu, “The Eucharist as Covenant in the African Context,” *Africa Theological Journal* 16 (1987): 151-52.

culture of Africans reaffirm Jesus’s call on his disciples to remember the covenant relationship between them while observing the Supper.

Meals and Reconciliation in Africa

In Africa, meals seal reconciliatory activities between disputing factions. They play a significant role in resolving disputes between family members and warring communities. When couples have misunderstanding resulting in separation, meals are powerful tools used in ending the quarrel. It is useful in bringing reconciliation between parents and their children, even among estranged children of the same family. Meals are used in bringing reconciliation beyond the immediate family levels but for disputing communities. Ihenacho posits that when feuding communities agree to share meals, and they do so mainly in a sacrificial manner, there is presupposition that an era of peace and cooperation between the warring communities has begun.⁴¹ Eating together by disputing people serves as a sign of forgiveness on the part of the individual who was offended for the offender.

In the biblical account, the reconciliation of Jacob’s return to his uncle Laban after his flight from Haran was sealed with a meal (Gen 31:54). Similarly, God through the new covenant ratified in a meal setting reconciled the world to Himself. Participating in the Supper thus signifies a reconciliation of the person to God, showing that his/her sins are forgiven and with the other created in the image and likeness of God. Thus, the Supper imbibes in Africans the virtue of forgiveness both from God and from fellow humans who were offended.

Meals and Sacrifice

From the worldview of Africans sacrifice maintains an ontological balance between God and people, spirits and people, the departed and living, when disrupted have consequences of misfortune, suffering and fear.⁴² Okoye notes “sacrifice embodies the entire life of the community which it brings into the sphere and sanction of the

⁴¹ D. A. Ihenacho, *African Christianity Rises: Eucharistic Inculturation in Igbo Catholicism* (New York: Universe, 2004), II: 124.

⁴² John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophies* (Ibadan-Nairobi: Heineman, 1969), 59.

invisible world.”⁴³ Hence, their consciousness of the interaction with the invisible world. Meals forms an important part of the sacrifices performed by Africans. Different communities use different meals and food items in performing sacrifices depending on the deity and issue involve. Some Africans offer meals at the shrine and sacred places as sacrifice for blessings from the gods and ancestors, as well as of warding off evil in the community.⁴⁴ The Supper in Africa can learn from the value of African sacrificial meals.

The Lord’s Supper is a sacrifice, but not every model of sacrifice is suitable for structuring it: The theological content of the Eucharist is that of Christ’s paschal sacrifice, its liturgical form is that of a meal.⁴⁵ It significantly communicates the idea of sacrifice as an important value in community life. According to Asante, service to the Lord is to serve in his church and to serve the world,⁴⁶ and this requires a level of sacrifice as Christ demonstrated in the Lord’s Supper by his self-giving sacrifice. Africans demonstrate sacrifice using their professional skills in serving people. In the hospitals, schools, offices, prisons and various workplaces, people sacrifice time, energy and resources to support their neighbours as a form of service to their fellowmen and the community at large. These are all values perpetuated by the observance of the Lord’s Supper by Christians in Africa.

Conclusion

The Lord’s Supper and its celebration among African Christians have similar dispositions to the significance of the relationship between human beings and their God. Theologically, Christ’s broken body exemplified in the breaking of the bread underscores the sacrificial component of the significance of the Supper. The Lord’s Supper in Africa incorporates African values, symbols and ways of worship in the celebration to win Africans into the self-giving of Christ to God and his community. The Supper then, as in the words of Ngcobo “should be a meal, not just about a Jew named Jesus, who

⁴³ Okoye, “The Eucharist in African Perspective” 166.

⁴⁴ T.N.O. Quarcoome, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: African University Press, 1987), 91-92.

⁴⁵ John Chukwuma Okoye, “The Eucharist in African Perspective,” *Mission Studies* 19, no. 2 (2002): 164.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Asante, *The Call to Serve: A Theological Reflection on Ministry* (Accra: Methodist Book Depot Limited, 2002), 48.

lived in the past, but with Jesus,”⁴⁷ the originator of the New Covenant. As Oden notes, “African Christianity has arisen out of distinctly African experience on African soil,”⁴⁸ the contextualization of the institution of the Supper communicates a lot about African virtues.

The Supper, however, is yet to impact the divisions in Africa on language, cultural and religious lines. In reality, the Supper is meant to be the communion of all peoples and classes, aimed at uniting and not dividing.⁴⁹ The account thus challenges African Christians on the exclusion of some members from partaking in the Supper. If the Lord’s Supper is a communal meal and Jesus ate with Judas who was filled with evil, then it calls on churches to revisit this exclusion of some members from the Supper.

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⁴⁷ Ngcobo, “The Holy Communion,” 7.

⁴⁸ Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2007), 13.

⁴⁹ Okoye, “The Eucharist in African Perspective” 167.