

Socio-rhetorical reading of the remembrance meal in Luke 22:19-27 in the context of the church in Africa

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Abstract

Religious texts are seen by their faithful readers as having the ability to connect them with the sacred. These texts are for the illumination and transformation of the community. The relationship between the divine and human within a written text is crucial for religious understanding. For this reason, this paper will focus on the sacred texture of Luke 22:14–27 to clarify the meaning of the Lukan remembrance meal in its context and the context of the church and humanity today. In socio-rhetorical hermeneutics, the sacred texture is important when it expresses the relevance of the text to its community. It implores the reader to be interested in the way the text deals with God and religious life. A Biblical text mediates words about God. It activates and prescribes a specific view of the deity to the audience. Exploring the sacred text enables the reader to perceive the written text as the word of God intended for teaching and educating the faith community, and at the same time, it provides a norm for the community. This paper will use socio-rhetorical interpretation to examine the text of Luke 22:19–27 within the context of the Church in Africa as revealed in the text. The Lukan Jesus expects the Church in Africa to perform its duties in its immediate context. This paper envisages that a text has a transforming and illuminating ability for the faith community (the church) in Africa.

Key Words: Remembrance meal, socio-rhetorical reading, sacred texture, intertexture, Luke's Gospel, the Church in Africa

Introduction

Religious texts are believed to have a connection with the sacred, and therefore a religious fellow looks into such texts in order to experience the divine touch or insight. The relationship between the divine and human within a written text is very crucial to religious understanding. It is as a result of this that this article will focus on the sacred texture of Luke 22:14–27. This is to assist in locating the ways in which Lukan memory speaks first to its own context and then to the context of humanity today. In social-rhetorical hermeneutics, the sacred texture is very important when it comes to the relevance of the text to any community. The sacred texture implores the reader to be "interested in locating the ways the text speaks about God or gods, or talks about realms of religious life" (Robbins, 1996:120). Megbelayin, citing Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:177–178), further adds that the biblical text, understood as a text that mediates words about God, evidences rhetorical activities in the area of sacred texture insofar as the text seeks to prescribe to an audience a particular view of the deity (Megbelayin, 2001:276). Exploring the sacred texture enables one to perceive the written text as the word of God intended for the teaching and education of a faith community and, at times, acts as the norm for the community. The divine power is greatly acknowledged and respected within the written text.

In social-rhetorical analysis, sacred texture has different milieus, which comprise the deity, the holy person, the spirit being, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community, and ethics, which involve the various responsibilities that the community has to carry out in order to normalise the community life (Robbins, 1996:120–130). In order to explore the embedded sacred texture of the text in Luke 22:14–27, the various menus in the above-mentioned list of the texture will be employed in this article. The reason for this is to apply the text to the Church in Africa. Thus, the problem's statement of this paper is the reading of the remembrance means in Luke 22:19-27 in the context of Africa using socio-rhetorical hermeneutics. The reason is to see how the understanding of the remembrance meal can reflect in the Church in Africa. The use of the Church in Africa means all the denominations, irrespective of their beliefs and liturgical nuances, share the same features in the Lord's Supper (Troeltsch, 1992:594; Dewey, 2013:68; Ngcobo, 2020:3). All the Christian churches believe in remembering Jesus through the Lord's Supper.

Sometimes the responsibility of the faith community is expressed and specified in the sacred texture of the text of the scripture, which acts as a mediation between the divine and the faith community. As a result, this paper will concentrate on the sacred texture of the meal in Luke 22:14-27, as well as its Christological and sociological relevance to the church, particularly as seen through the lens of African understanding. Seeing the meal in the context of Africa validates the fact that it belongs to Africa (Gichimu, 2020:95-96).

The Lukan Meal as Sacred Meal

It is good to conceive that not all the meals that one is eating can be regarded as the sacred meal, the meal that is meant to remember the suffering and the salvation that Jesus brought into the world. Luke used the inner and intertexture of the text of Luke 22:14-27, implying that there was a specific time when the Passover meal was eaten in Israel during the time of Jesus. This, however, was a sacred meal that Israel kept for ages. In the intertexture of the text, through the study of the cultural texture of the Lukan remembrance meal, it is shown that Luke used the meal as a means by which the people had to keep on remembering Jesus. It also revealed that, it was a cultural tradition that was enshrined in the memory of every Jewish person in Israel. It was a ritual with a special function for the people involved: "to reach beyond conceptual understanding" and "reveal to the eye of the faithful glimpses of the transcendent" (John, 1992:54).

In the Lukan remembrance meal, the analysis of the text reveals that before the meal was taken, there was an invocation by Jesus (in verses 19-20). This invocation makes the meal account different from that of the other Lukan meal accounts that are recorded in chapters 5, 7, 9, 14, etcetera. A similar event took place in Luke 24:30. The process of invocation of the transcendent on the bread and wine is one method of recognising the present of the sacred in human affairs. The event is not just a remembrance of Jesus, but it involves representing him to the church at the meal (Fitzmyer, 1985:1401). The consciousness of the participant, the place of the event, and the invocation of the words of Jesus as stipulated in the Lukan meal scene, thus make the remembrance meal a sacred meal in the present context.

The Deity

In social-rhetorical hermeneutics, the deity is often represented by God or god in any given text. It demonstrates the nature of God and how God is mentioned or acknowledged within a text or texture (Robbins, 1996:120). The Lukan narrative of the remembrance meal scene lacks reference to God as a person or deity. God does not speak in the text, nor is his name mentioned except in the possessive case when Lukan makes reference to the kingdom of God. Here, God is acknowledged as having a kingdom that is different from other kingdoms. The deity here is a king who rules over his subjects.

Perhaps, Luke tactically and rhetorically refused to mention God as one of the personalities that contributed to the speech in the text, since the scene is focused on Jesus. It could be because Luke believed that Jesus is the representative of God to the new community—the community that believed in Jesus

as a result of his demonstration and proof of his claims—by giving himself, which is a gift from God (Danker, 1988:346). The significance of the work of Jesus in the text portrays and elevates him to stand in the position of God, and as such, he is seen by the new community as God since he could provide everything as God would have done to them. The position of Jesus in the community is that he is acting as a broker between God and humankind. As a result, John Pobee believes that Jesus stood in the position of God, and whatever he said was what God would have said if he were to be there (Pobee, 199:95). As patron and benefactor, as well as God's representative, Jesus performed and inaugurated a new Passover and covenant with his blood; thus, the new community saw him as both the true representation of the deity and its will.

The Holy Person

The holy person in social-rhetorical analysis is someone who has a special relationship to divine power or God (Robbins, 1996:121). The Lukan remembrance meal scene discloses that by virtue of Jesus's relationship with God, he is here portrayed as the holy person. Luke used the following argument to support his rhetorical premise. The first point Luke makes in the text is in verses 16-18, where Luke Timothy Johnson suggests that this reminded the disciples of two things: first, the Passover Haggadah, which represents the full liberation that the Son of Man will launch, and second, the essence of the eschatological banquet that the Messiah will preside over (Johnson, 1991:337). Danker adds that this statement signifies that Jesus, through this event, has come to fulfil his exodus (Danker, 1991:337). This inevitably delineates Jesus as the messiah who will eventually preside over the eschatological banquet with the household of Israel at the Parousia (Johnson, 1991:337-338).

Another point in the text that paints Jesus as a holy person is found in verses 19-20. Jesus is seen as the one who fulfilled the prophetic promise of God to Israel. As earlier noted, it is only in Luke that the phrases "given for you" and "pour out for you" are found, this is to emphasise the special relationship that Jesus had with God as the only person who was capable of fulfilling the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Lukan narrative therefore portrays Jesus as the one who mediates between God and man. The new community can relate to God through Jesus. The Lukan emphasis here is that since Jesus was capable of performing all the needed functions for humanity through his special relationship with God, therefore Jesus is the holy person par excellence in the text. Luke further contended that, given the part that Jesus played on behalf of humanity, he therefore deserves a special place in the heart of the new community (Johnson, 1991:339).

The Son of Man

Luke in this text used euphemism as a rhetorical device to invite his audience to see Jesus as the Son of Man who suffered according to God's designed purpose for the sake of the new community (Nolland, 1993:1058). It is the title that Jesus used to identify himself as human, which linked him with the community as the one who identified with their problem.

Kingsbury observes that the title simply entails no majestic implication but is intended to set forth in some measure both the identity and the significance of Jesus. According to him, "the Son of Man" proves not to be a title of majesty. Although it points to Jesus as a singularly significant figure, it does not explicate his identity (tell "who he is"). Instead, it refers to Jesus more unpretentiously as "the man" or "the human being," in other words, "this man," or "this human being." Here the usage does paint him as the suffering servant who gave his life for the sake of the new community (Kingsbury, 1990:289–290).

The inner texture of the Lukan narrative is so explicit about the use of the term in the context of the meal. Lukan material sees Jesus as the one who had a special function to carry out for the entire human race. This is revealed from the preceding verses of the pericope (19–20): in order for him to fulfil his course and his calling for and on behalf of humanity, this son of man must suffer at the hands of the evil men. Still, one cannot outrightly and emphatically declare that the title "the Son of Man" is not a type of majesty or lacks a special conceptual purpose, as expressed by Kingsbury (1990:289). However, whenever Jesus uses the term, it stands out as a technical term with great significance. It is such because, like other technical terms, it bears a precise meaning within the world of Luke's Gospel. The use of the Son of Man somehow expresses the same meaning or the same nature as such other key terms and expressions in Luke's Gospel as "the kingdom of God," "peace," "salvation," "today," and "it is necessary" (Kingsbury, 1990:290).

The role that is played by the son of man in this context is that of a messianic figure, a special figure with the capacity to inaugurate a new meal with his blood and the power to forgive the sins of his community. This usage distinguishes him from other spiritual beings who lack the ability to understand what humanity is going through or their frustrations. This is because only humans can experience suffering, and this suffering, according to Luke, had already been predicted as an event that would be of benefit to the community. In terms of socio-rhetorical hermeneutics, Jesus' position here may represent that of a holy person who shared both human and divine experiences. This singular attribute could have qualified him as the holy person par excellence, the Son of Man.

Human Redemption

Social-rhetorical hermeneutics has multifaceted and multidimensional benefits to humanity when carefully applied to any sacred text or scripture. As Christians, the only sacred text considered is the Holy Bible. According to Jeremy Punt, the Bible is nothing more than *viva voce dei*, or "the proclamation of the gospel to a particular context in which that gospel is heard with clarity, which in turn transformed lives" (Punt, 1999:xvii, *italics mine*). The first contextual benefit of any sacred text, when it is applied to the Bible, is the benefit or potential of redemptive power for the community that reads the text. The faith community, in the context of Christianity, is of the opinion that the power to redeem humanity resides

within the pages of the Bible as a sacred text. The belief is that there is always a transformation from the old life to the new, and likewise in any believing community. There is a tendency to change it from an old and unacceptable ethos to a new and acceptable ethos. It is implied that the Bible is capable of renewing the way of life in any given community.

This redemptive potential of the Bible as a *viva vox dei* (God's living voice) must have motivated Elna Mouton to assert:

Through the age—at least until the Enlightenment—Christian believers listened to, interpreted, and appropriated the Bible in a great variety of ways with a view to understanding *their everyday lives*. They were not so much interested in the Bible itself or in the *academic* or *intellectual* study of the Bible, but in the Bible as a canon, as a norm—a guiding lamp, a light for their path. Without appropriating the Bible into their needs, challenges, suffering, fears, and hopes, reading would for many be incomplete and pointless (Mouton, 2007:35).

Mouton's rhetorical argument about the function of biblical narratives alerts every reader to the Bible's undeniable power for human redemption and transformation. According to the Christian community, the Bible, as *ipsum verbum Dei* (the very word of God), indicates that prior to the coming of Jesus into the world, human redemption was in jeopardy, and the dignity of humanity was in shambles and hopeless. The appearance of Jesus in the scene, as simply pointed out by the Lukan narrative, means the deliverance of people from bondage, as earlier prophesied in the Old Testament (Hays, 1996:114–115). The redemptive potentiality of the Bible is capable of elevating humanity from morally debased to moral equilibrium; the level that enables one to have a relationship with God and humanity without distortion and discord.

This redemptive and transformative power of the sacred text, as directly implied in the Lukan text, portrays Jesus as having adequate and authoritative power to forgive sin (Mouton, 2007:42), and by doing so, redeeming humanity from bondage. Viewing the context of the Lukan Remembrance Meal Scene through Mouton's lenses alongside those of social-rhetorical hermeneutics, there is no doubt that human redemptive and transformational themes are enshrined in the text. Also, in the text, there is a special allusion to the blood that Jesus shed on the cross for the remission of the sins of the community (Johnson, 1991:339), which is the general benefit that the faith community shared with one another in Christ (Liefeld, 1984:1027) as well as the service that he rendered to humanity.

Using the meal scene enabled Luke to inform his community that Jesus invited his implied audience to table fellowship as a means of expressing his forgiveness to them and his love. This adventure piqued Joachim Jeremias' interest, prompting him to make the following claim:

To invite a man to a meal was an honour. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood, and forgiveness; in short, sharing a table meant sharing life... In Judaism in particular, table-fellowship means fellowship before God, for the eating of a piece of broken bread by everyone who shares

in the meal brings out the fact that they all share in the blessing which the master of the house had spoken over the unbroken bread (Jeremais, 1971:115).

According to Jeremias' argument, the sacredness of the meal cannot be overstated. The argument buttresses itself, and perhaps one may adduce the same conceptual framework of meal in the Ancient Near East and even in part of African society. Jeremiah's conceptual allusion to table fellowship is that whenever such an invitation arises from any two warring parties, the tendency for forgiveness of sin may always be there. The Lukan narrative in essence emphasises that the *redemption* in the Old Testament was seen as the liberation of God's people from Egypt and was later "accomplished in a way that underscores the agency of Jesus as deliverance from socio-political oppression and as the forgiveness of sins" (Carroll and Green, 1995:267).

The reiteration of the command "do this in remembrance of me" indicts and invites the Christological service that Jesus rendered to humankind, which entails the salvific offering that he gave to the new community (Schweizer, 1984:335–336). It is the duty of the new community to continue remembering the salvation that Jesus wrought for them through his sacrifice on the cross. This could imply human redemption in a spiritual sense, which was one of the aspects of Jesus' ministry on earth. Early on, Luke had already informed his audience through the mouth of Simeon that, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (2:29–32). While in Chapter 1, Lukan material emphasises that there would be someone that have to precede the Messiah so as "to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sin" (1:77).

Positioning the two texts (1:77 and 2:29–32) in the context of the Lukan remembrance meal enabled Luke to narrate his orderly account of Jesus' life that culminated in his (Jesus) going to the cross. The use of σωτηρία in feminine gender and σωτήριόν in neuter denotes that salvation that Jesus was to bring which encompassed both the spiritual and physical salvation. The invitation to keep the meal in his memory is to continue to reflect on the death of Jesus, the suffering that he encountered for the sake of humanity, and the examples he set for humanity to follow. Mouton depicts this in a straightforward manner when she adduces that the heart of Luke's Gospel is Jesus' life and death, which show humanity new ways of living and relating to one another (Mouton, 2007:47). The command makes it compulsory for the Christian community to continue to remember Jesus' death and what he achieved for humanity. The salvation he brought to humanity through his death on the cross.

As earlier pointed out, remembering Jesus's death is just an aspect of remembrance, which perhaps might be referred to as "Christological remembrance of Jesus," the aspect of human redemption that speaks of his death for the community. The

experience of Jesus's death should be witnessed in the community before one can vividly acknowledge the fact that salvation has taken place in the life of the community. The redemptive transformation and its potentiality in the community are witnessed:

through repentance and reconciliation, remembering became a hopeful act, a confession of faith in the living God of history, which opened up now perspectives on present and future *and added values to humankind and transformed the society* (Mouton, 2007:37–38, italic mine).

Rhetorically, for human redemption to come to full completion, as advocated by socio-rhetorical hermeneutics, the full logical argument has to be employed so as to reach a logical conclusion. The sense is that Luke's redemption appears to negotiate both spiritual and sociological redemption for his community.

For instance, in African Christianity, the common belief among its theologians is that human redemption does not take effect only in the spiritual realm; the physical realm has to experience the same salvation that the spirit experienced before one can fully acknowledge that he has been redeemed. This might have led Simon S. Miamela to ask whether the shedding of Jesus' blood accrued any benefit to the African community since diseases and poverty are endemic on the continent (Maimela, 1992:31). The same contemplation is posted by Kwame Bediako when he acknowledges that "Christology that is divorced from soteriology" cannot be Christology (Bediako, 1984:84). This notion is significant and paints the picture that human redemption, according to Luke and these African theologians, is two-dimensional—spiritual and physical. Looking through the argument that is put forward by Luke, it seems as though one hardly divorces the Lukan human redemption from that of the African.

Human Commitment

In the preceding section, it was argued that human redemption comes to reality when the spiritual is translated to the physical, and through this, humankind can effectively attain equilibrium in human redemption. As a result of what God and the Holy Person do for humanity, there is a need for "human commitment to the divine ways" (Robbins, 1996:127). The sacred texture of a text under human commitment invites the faithful followers and supporters of Jesus to recognise that they have a mandate that "plays a special role in revealing the ways of God to human" (Robbins, 1996:127). In the New Testament, this type of human commitment is portrayed in vivid form as *discipleship*. It depicts the response of humanity to God as a result of what God has done to human through the agency of the holy person or by God himself.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer regards Christian discipleship as "a costly call" that demands the whole being of anyone who is into it. As a result, Bonhoeffer believes that "discipleship is a commitment solely to the person of Jesus Christ, breaking through all allegations by the grace of him who calls.... Because Christ exists, he must be followed" (Bonhoeffer,

2003:45–59). In a strict sense, Bonhoeffer's human commitment envisions the ability to commit to the way and examples set by Jesus.

Looking through the pages of the Lukan narrative, Charles H. Talbert argues that the term "discipleship" means "detachment from all other allegiances and a total allegiance to Jesus, detachment from old ties and attachment to a new authority." Talbert's interest is in "attachment" which implies conditioning one's life according to the tradition that enables one to participate fully in the Christian community and encourages one to fulfil the mission potentials (Talbert, 1985:63). It involves both the principle and the concept of imitation. This, according to Fernando F. Segovia, is following the way in which Jesus walked and lived by imitating his method and lifestyle (Segovia, 1985:3–4).

Karl Barth conceives of the term "discipleship" as "*imitatio Christi*," which in essence implies the cognitive understanding of the biographical data of Jesus (Barth, 2003:2–4). This, according to Barth, makes individuals focus on Jesus without thinking of abandoning the call thereafter (9:57–58), a constant and steady movement on the steps of Jesus and the examples he set for the disciples to follow (Barth, 2003:4–5). John Howard Yoder believes that the term "discipleship" is political, which, in other words, is a subversive means of overcoming the evil of the world through the power of the cross (Yoder, 2003:18–21). Yoder goes on to claim that the church's entire mission is "the mandate to overcome evil is the superior mandate," and that it is only through this that the church fulfils its mission. The church's fulfilment of this mission allows everyone to participate in Christ's very being (Yoder, 2003:61).

Jesus' statement and demonstration undergird several implications for the disciples as duties that must be fulfilled so as to remember him *in toto*, which is centred around him (Bonhoeffer 2003:59). The same notion is carefully observed by Charles L. Moutenot, who says that Jesus introduced a kingdom into "Israel's society where a majority of its members were denied their full humanity by circumstance and by other human being" (Moutenot, 1990:299). The actuality of discipleship is a commitment to the holy person not only anthropologically but also ecologically, politically, sociologically, and otherwise, which helps to encapsulate and encompass the totality of what Jesus was to the world.

Religious Community

Another function of socio-rhetorical hermeneutics under the sacred texture "is the formation and nurturing of the religious community" (Robbins, 1996:127). Religious community in socio-rhetorical analysis emphasises a full participation of the members of the community in activities and actions that would help the people involved to mature so as to be committed to the divine will and thereby fulfilling the divine purpose in their lives and that of the community. In Christianity, the simple term that is used in defining the collection of people who formed the religious community is known as ἐκκλησία which

in Greek language means assembly. The sacred texture thus emphasises that the religious community engages in those positive values that will help sustain the members' holistic growth, allowing them to mature and fulfil the divine purpose in their lives. It is all about the relationship between the human kind and "the holy" or the "wholly other".

The term "religion" has gone through many theories and definitions and seems more controversial now than ever before. However, the definition proposed by Gerd Theissen appears more plausible and challenging, demonstrating that "religion is a response to the experience of the holy" (Theissen, 1992:258), whereas the experience of the holy or the "wholly other" are interpretations of the experiences. As a result, it implies that the holy experience and responses are inextricably linked and inseparable. The interpretation of "wholly other" or "the holy" is proportional to the particular group that is involved in the process of interpretation. The religious experience and its interpretation are determined by the people that make up the group. This probably would have alerted Theissen to further see religion as "a community of interpretation and action and a response to the experience of the holy" (Theissen, 1992:258). The religious response is affected by the way social and ethical behaviour is shared within the group.

According to Daniel Bell, it was Aristotle who first defined the word "community" as a group established by mankind having shared values. That initial definition has been refined and expanded through the years. But now the word has been seen in different dimensions based on the present experience of humanity. It is possible for one to belong to a number of different "communities" at the same time—communities of place; cultural communities; religious communities; communities of memory, in which people who may be strangers share "a morally significant history"; and 'psychological communities' of face-to-face personal interaction governed by sentiments of trust, cooperation, and altruism" (Bell, 1993:14).

The combination of Theissen's understanding of religion and Banks' understanding of community places the early Christian community's hermeneutical structure and context on the scale of an interpretive framework that allowed them to express their experience through communication. This could be one of the reasons that motivates Robert J. Banks to further add that the early Christian community was grounded in the preaching of Christ and that the whole focus was on the person and work of Christ. The early Christian community expressed their experience of the holy through communicable mediums, which was visible in their action and preaching. The kerygma was a direct demonstration and interpretation of the holy within the community. Banks further delineates the common features that characterised this community: the sharing of common goods, which was vividly evident in the redistribution of their wealth, and the fact that the community was known for its fast growth due to its beliefs and practises (Banks, 2007:326). Based on Banks, it means that the early

church community was homogeneous in its concept and composition since there was no distinction between the Jews, Greek and Gentiles, male or female.

In the inner texture of the text of the Lukan meal, irrevocable instructions were issued to the first generation audience of Jesus' religious community. The accent and the wording of the instruction demonstrate what their master expected of them. Therefore, "do this in remembrance of me" echoes and invites the whole set of duties that the master expected from the disciples. The instruction is pertinent as a result of the fact that it encompassed and involved the transfer of the asset that Jesus had to the community.

From the intertexture, the cultural and sociological concept of the initial community was inverted and subverted by their master in order that they would be able to imitate and follow after his example. Jesus preached simplicity, servanthood, and true benevolence and patronage over that which was practised in the Greco-Roman Empire. While the Empire abused political power and used it to gain support from the people, Jesus abhorred it and created "non-political ethical awareness" that helped the masses live a life that was more beneficial and non-coercive (Theissen, 2002:228–229).

Jesus' exemplary life demonstrated to his disciples, inspired them to use the same approach that Jesus used during his life. The only biography they could read was that of Jesus. Their interest was actually not only Christological-ecclesiological, but it was highly acclimatised and accentuated with what Wiard Popkes calls "socio-ecclesiological innovation" (Popkes, 2007:333). This paints a picture of the early Jesus' religious community. In this community, the individual members had to let go of their former way of life and embrace a new way in which Jesus was seen as the sole authority of the *familia Dei* (Popkes, 2007:333). The emergence of the new community brought relief to those who had been marginalised and rejected by society. The downtrodden could find refuge in this community only because it was a Christological and socio-ecclesiological community built on the principles of their master, Jesus.

All they were doing in the community was trying to remember what Jesus did for humanity and try to imitate and copy his life style especially his leadership style and his dealings with the inclusive community. This could be one of the possible reasons that makes Christopher Rowland believe that "one of the features of the primitive Christian community in Jerusalem was its practise of the community of goods" (Rowland, 1994:272). Rowland's statement characterises the nature and the practise of infant Christianity immediately and after the departure of Jesus. However, these disciples did not lose sight of the meal that was set as a sign of remembrance. Eating the meal was a means by which the early religious community of Jesus used to reflect on what Jesus had done for humanity. It was a reflective moment that helped stir the action of remembrance of Jesus.

The perspective of Theissen's explanation is that the religious community expresses and interprets the experience of the holy. If this was the principle that accrued to the early Christian community, it therefore means that they were indisputably influenced by the historical realities they witnessed during their time (Theissen, 1992:260). It is expected that the same principle will circulate and be passed down to the subsequent generation of Christians. This relationship is inevitable in understanding the sociological and theological convictions of the early Christians. Taking after their conviction means a direct movement from the early Christian movement to the present. The early Jesus community had many things in common that were acting as attractants to the people outside the world, of which the major two are mentioned by Theissen as: integrated and change-of-position axioms (Theissen, 1992:260).

The integrated axiom, according to Theissen, asserts that anyone who has "the experience of the holy" is duty bound to behave so that the frontiers between "insiders" and "outsiders" lose their absolute force. This integration means bringing those who were previously excluded into the community and incorporating them into the new community, demonstrating Jesus' mediating power to humanity. This was one of the areas in which the memory of Jesus had an impact on the early community. On the other hand, the change-of-position axiom is all about imitating the leadership style that Jesus displayed as an example to the community—the system that allowed the greatest to act as the youngest among them, which was subversive to the Empire (22:26–27). These two practices allowed the memory of Jesus to be retained in the midst of the early religious community of Jesus (Theissen, 1992:260–261). Christ's preaching and concern for the needs of the people were inextricably linked variables (factors) in Jesus' memory.

Kerygma and the Spirit of Hospitality

Kerygma here simply refers to the preaching of the salvation that is anchored on the death and resurrection of Jesus. It was the force of salvation in Christ that prompted the first religious community to preach and offer hospitality to the people that were rejected by society. Table fellowship was one of the ways in which hospitality could be offered to people in Mediterranean society (Jeremias, 1971:115). Against this background, John Heil believes that the meal scene is "an integral narrative unit in which an actual meal involving the hospitality of eating and drinking provides the main framework or a dominant concern of scene or unit and occurs as part of the narrated action" (Heil, 1995:5). The argument here is that the early religious community was preaching the power of salvation in Christ, and the meal was used as a means of reflection on Christ's love. In the course of eating the meal, hospitality was offered to many who lacked such care and services from society. Jesus used table fellowship to minister to people who had diverse needs. Perhaps the same was expected by Jesus when he told the disciples to keep the meal and fellowship in their memories.

Socio-rhetorical hermeneutics acknowledges this fact and places the religious community in the domain of ecclesiology. The Lord's Supper is a plausible step toward caring for the inclusive community within the religious community. The word "remembrance" here evokes the offering of service out of love to people, as Jesus would have done for them. Acknowledging this, David Ford argues that Christians are transformed by coming face to face with Jesus Christ. His main symbolic element is "the face," which implies both the face of Christ and also a human face. Over against modernity's anthropology of individual *dominium*, he conceives of the self in terms of facing others, of joyful participation in God and in others. In consolidating his argument, Ford turns to the Lord's Supper and says that it is a practise that subverts the false anthropology of will and right by the public *declaration* in which persons are made members of God's very body (Ford, 1999:99–104). Izunna Okonkwo seems to subscribe along with Ford by saying that the Lord's Supper in particular is one of the church sacraments that is usually regarded as both a social and spiritual ceremony, and all sacraments are designed to affect the thoughts and feelings of those who believe in them (Okonkwo, 2010:105–106). In the process of the remembrance meal, there is an expression of the love of God for humanity. This is because the initial reason that prompted the inauguration of the meal was love. The expression of love is expected to be transferred to other people.

Caring for the Poor and the Needy

The words of Philip Francis Esler are very important at this point in time when accessing Luke's interest in the poor and marginalized that:

One of the most remarkable aspects of Luke's vision of the Christian community is that, although it contained wealthy and influential members, the privileged places in it were reserved for the very dregs of Hellenistic society, especially the beggars and the physically disabled. For this reason, it is appropriate to speak of a theology of the poor' in Luke-Acts (Esler, 1987:187).

The mercy that established the Lord's Supper derives from God's generosity to the community and is demonstrated in Jesus. In relation to the sacred, one has to do what the sacred expects him or her to do. As earlier pointed out, Theissen proposes in one of the axioms that the early church used the change-of-position axiom to care for the poor (Theissen, 1992:260). If this is true, it means that no imperialist leader was visible among the early religious community of the Lukan community. The community judiciously carried out the service that had been earlier demonstrated by their master, Jesus. In relation to the sacred, one has to do what the sacred expects him or her to do. Theissen proposes in one of the axioms that the early church used the change-of-position axiom to care for the poor (Theissen, 1992:260). If this is true, it means that no imperialist leader was visible among the early religious community of the Lukan community.

Jesus cared for the poor and left them an example to follow. The echo of "do the

same" seemed so important to the Lukan community (Lk 10-37). Jesus commanded his disciples to act and show *mercy* to the needy and the poor. The word ἐλεος in original implies a process whereby there is a flow of pity as result of love from the person in a higher position to the one in a lower position.

The reiteration in verses 26–27 of the Lukan meal narrative is very crucial if viewed through the lenses of Theissen. The greater is expected to take on the role of the youngest in Christ's household in order to understand how people at the grass-roots level feel about issues that affect them. This helps any leader use empathy in ministering to the needs of the people at any level. Eating the meal aims at making the community reflect on the historical fact that brought the meal into existence; this reflection could perhaps help the community to interpret the meal in terms of a personal relationship between God and one another. Jeremias puts it this way:

The passover meditation, the kernel of which was the interpretation of the special elements of the meal in term of the events of the exodus from Egypt: the leaven bread was usually the explained as symbol of misery that was endured, the bitter herbs as representing the slavery, the fruit-purée which resembled clay as recalling the forced labour, the Passover lamb as remembrance of God's merciful 'passing over' Israel (Jeremias, 1966:219).

Jeremias' emphasis is on "God's merciful," which forced Jesus to accept the position of becoming an object of mercy so that God, in his mercy, might reach humanity. This mercy, when Jesus said to his disciple, "Do this in remembrance of me," meant the extension of it to the people who do not have this mercy both in the Christological and sociological sense of the word "mercy." This may have made Jesus' religious community the custodian of Jesus' mercy or the intermediary between Jesus' mercy and humanity. Just the same way, Jesus is the broker of God's mercy to his community. The distribution of mercy has to come from the mercy chain, so that humanity would benefit from the chain shown below:

God-----Jesus-----Religious community----- The needy

Jesus' reinterpretation of the Passover meal and attaching its meaning to himself set him apart as the one who came to liberate humanity through the offering of his life. Chris U. Manus conceives that "Even though the words of Jesus over the bread and wine reflect the Passover ritual, they must be viewed against the background of his life's vision" (Manus, 1985:200–201). Jesus' life's vision was to liberate the poor, set the captives free, and proclaim the year of liberty, as succinctly depicted in the Lukan narrative, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (4:18–19). According to Manus, the meal that Jesus instituted has a greater significance than its perceived meaning. The meaning

encompasses the whole life of Jesus, as carefully illustrated by Manus, and is as follows:

Jesus saw his mission as that of a new Moses whose task it was to deliver the people of his time from all sorts of oppression. Did Jesus not castigate all the dehumanising laws and practices and the wrong religious conventions of the people of his time — all their legalisms, religious externalisms and ostentations? Was it not because of his teaching that he was seen as a rebel and had to face public accusations with the resultant death penalty? Jesus knew that his enemies planned to put him to death. Therefore, he wanted to provide his disciples a memorial of his life and a way of remaining with them. He achieved this through a number of his involvements in the lot of the poor, the outcast, the needy and the marginalized. Jesus ate the Passover meal but also nuanced it radically by freely offering himself as victim for the cause of human liberation (Manus, 1985:201)

This is what Luke wanted his audience to be aware of: that Jesus' interest was in the totality of human salvation. That is the total restoration of humankind and the dignity that accrues to them as the people of God.

Ethics

In whatever way it remembered Jesus, the community also always bore a moral tradition that was never quite reducible to applying a code or trusting an intuition but always called forth discernment. In whatever way it remembered Jesus, the community formed character, nurtured certain dispositions, directed certain intentions, renewed minds and a common mind, and equipped a community for the vocation of being "able to instruct one another" (Verhey, 2002:26). Socio-rhetorical hermeneutics recognises that there are moral values in any given society. The relationship between humans and the sacred or wholly other is based solely on the premise of upholding the ethical code in order to keep the community morally upright. It is "the responsibility of humans to think and act in special ways in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances" (Robbins, 1996:129). It is necessary that the ethical and moral life of the Christian community be patterned in the light of the founder. This is one of the aspects in which the Christian community can remember Jesus. The emulation of Jesus in moral principle gives rise to socio-rhetorical analysis to term it "ethics."

According to Richard Burrige, any ethics approved by the Christian community must be tested in light of Jesus' character (Burrige, 2007:33). Such ethics must be built on the history and principles of Jesus. The same was done by the early Christian community. They tested their moral principles based on the kerygma, the history, and the principle of Jesus as the mediator between God and humanity (Lohse, 1991:26–29). The Bible (New Testament) eventually became the community's moral teaching tenet. Nonetheless, it serves as a moral compass for the Christian community (Verhey, 1984:4–

5). It was an instrument that enabled the community to live untainted before God (Mouton, 2007:35).

"Do this in remembrance of me" in Luke echoes ethically the way the Christian community has to remember the moral character of Jesus. A process that goes beyond just a biographical hypothesis into the domain of imitating the example of Jesus in the gospel (Burrige: 2007:73). This is the driving position that has propelled Christians throughout history to survive any moral inclusion or invasion (Burrige, 2007:74). *Imitatio Christi* is the persuasive means by which Luke wanted his community to remember Jesus. It does imply taking a moral decision that would be in consonance with that of Jesus. The Lukan remembrance meal scene displays some of the ethical dimensions perhaps those that the Lukan community had to follow in the process of remembering Jesus; a plausible way that convincingly depends on the historical and biographical code of conduct that was displayed by Jesus during his earthly ministry.

The Lukan narrative aims to refresh the reader's memory of Jesus and how he dealt with a variety of issues that came his way. Jesus' basic character was his dealing with an inclusive society and the marginalized. He was able to accept those whom society had rejected and ostracized; his willingness to accept them as they were distinguished him from the inclusive (Mouton, 2007:41–47).

Imitation of Jesus

In recent years, many scholars have come to the conclusion that the only plausible way to remember Jesus is through imitation. James Dunn believes that it was the impact that Jesus had on the lives of the people that made them 'to build a portrayal of the remembered Jesus' (Dunn, 2003:254). In this case, the rhetorical nuance of *Imitatio Jesu* is highly persuasive. In the process of imitating Jesus, there is a tendency that one may likely face some moral dilemmas; in that instance, the Verhey principle of "What would Jesus do?" (WWJD) seems very important as a determining factor for a moral decision (Verhey, 2002:12). The Lukan remembrance meal portrays that Jesus was the one who gave his life for the sake of his community. He also humbled himself and became a servant, even serving his disciples (22:24–27). This leadership style of Jesus in this context is worth emulating. "Do this in remembrance of me" ethically elucidates the imitation of the moral character that Jesus displayed in the course of dealing with people in society.

The Church in Africa and the Remembrance Meal

The imitation of Jesus by the Church in Africa as they participate in eating the bread and drinking the wine becomes the hallmark of this paper. Without the Church imitating Jesus' behaviour and action towards the poor and the needy, the essence of eating and drinking in his memory is in vain. The ethical dimension of any religious community lies within the framework of love, compassion, forgiveness, humility, holiness, righteousness, and hope, which Mouton successfully

points out in her work. These characteristics drew Jesus' life to the inclusive and marginalised people around him. His memory is full of these virtues, and through the process of remembrance, the community is encouraged to imitate these virtues (Mouton, 2007:47–48). The Church in Africa expects to do the same as it remembers Jesus.

The echo of Jesus "offering himself as a victim for the cause of human liberation" by Manus (1985:201) is so articulated in the nuances and the context of what the Church in Africa must remember Jesus for. The meaning of the meal echoes the process of seeing Jesus as the one who came for human liberation. The Lukan narrative furnishes different settings whereby Jesus displayed his virtues to inclusive and marginalised people. An example of this is in 7:36–50, where Jesus received wholeheartedly a woman who was rejected by society. This text demonstrates that Jesus explicitly and implicitly cared for the inclusive, which caused him to act contrary to the norms of his time. It was a sharp contradiction in a society built on the principles of oppression, suppression, and exclusivism. Thus, the Lukan Jesus expects the Church in Africa to act the same way as Jesus. The Church should be able to work contrary to the non-conforming actions of our African leaders. By so doing, the Church will bring peace, love, kindness, freedom and care to humanity as it participates in the remembrance meal.

Conclusion

The sacred texture of the text of Luke 22:14–27 has revealed that the sacred text is all about the sacred, or the wholly other, and how the human relates to the sacred. One way to accomplish this is through interaction with the sacred text as a yardstick for the community. The meal in Luke 22:14–27 is one of the aspects by which the Christian community relates to Jesus. In the course of this relationship, it is expected that transformation ought to have taken place in the midst of the people that are participating in this meal. This transformation therefore stands as a means of gearing the participant to be involved in discipleship and become more committed to God and to one another, just as Jesus did while he was on earth.

The sacred texture of the Lukan remembrance meal further reveals that participation in the meal means imitation and participation in Christ's being by offering hospitality and caring for the marginalised people in society. It is through these acts of imitation and participation in Christ's activities that human dignity can be said to have been restored. It is a process that has resulted in humanity achieving "honourable status as a new humanness in Christ" (Mouton, 2007:47). The Lukan Jesus requires the church in Africa to demonstrate the way of Jesus in caring for humanity. Africa will do well in all spheres of its endeavours only when the Church in Africa reciprocates the actions of the Lukan Jesus through the way and manners it interacts with humanity.

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