

Ubuntu Eucharist as Solution to the ‘Open Table Debate’ In Africa

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Abstract

The definition of sacraments and its notion is that through them God channels his grace to humankind. Despite this understanding, some churches deny some of their members access if they have not met certain conditions like being baptized, confirmed or when they have been judged with some form of sin and they are put under discipline. Some Churches in the West, practice Open Table while others adhere to Closed Table. In Africa, many Churches with links to missionary roots e.g. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and the Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola (IECA), practice Closed Table. This article considers the debate on whether the Eucharist should be open to all regardless of their status or closed and only offered to those judged as right. Although the debate is a concern of all churches worldwide, this article will use the situation in the IECA as a case study. The article assesses the consequences of closing the table and or opening the table and borrows the African philosophy of Ubuntu to argue that administration of the Eucharist should be aligned with the principles of Ubuntu philosophy in Africa, if it has to achieve its intended purpose of being the conduit of channeling God’s grace to all for the purpose of salvation.

Keywords: Ubuntu, Eucharist, Open Table Debate

Introduction

Most mainline Churches and some Pentecostal Churches in Africa do not allow some members of their congregations to participate in the Eucharist whenever they have been charged as failing to meet certain laid down requirements. While this is the situation in Africa, some Churches in the West offer an Open Table for all who are convicted with the call to participate. This has raised what is known as Open Table Debate in theological circles and in the Church with some faithful arguing for Open Table while those considered conservative insist on Closed Table.

Those conservative Churches which advocate for Closed Table require that its members fulfill Church requirements such as baptism and confirmation and being in the right standing in the Church to participate in the Eucharist.

If the definition of Sacrament is a physical sign of the invisible grace; through which God confers His graces to his people, i.e. if sacraments are understood to be channels of God's grace to God's people, why would one deny the other these very essential elements of their faith? If through the sacrament of the Eucharist the faith of a participant is refreshed why would they be denied on the grounds that they have strayed from the Church's prescribed laws? Who truly needs this grace, if not those who have sinned? Do the righteous need the grace more than the sinners? Does a healthy person need the doctor more than the sick? Isn't it at that point that the strayed member needs the sacrament the most? What happens to those who have been excluded from the Eucharist during the period of discipline?

These questions are the silent questions that could easily portray the Church as exclusive in the age of advocacy for inclusion. If the Church is considered as a family of God, then the members of the family cannot be excluded in the family meals. Exclusion in a family causes anxiety, insecurity and suspicion in those excluded. Yet those adhering to Closed Table have their position anchored on Scripture and Church traditions.

This article engages the two sides of the debate to provide a forum for it to reflect on their positions. Using the IECA's situation, the researchers investigate the Church's documents like the liturgy of the Eucharist, the Church's Statutes, Internal Regulations and Manual of Catechism to establish the basis of its position on the administration of the sacrament of the Eucharist. It surveys from the history of the Church both the practice of Open Table and the beginning of the

Closed Table. It also investigates reasons presented by the advocates of Open Table and those for Closed Table.

1.0 Open Table or Closed Table? A Christian Dilemma

Both those who argue for Open Table and those who argue against it, base their positions on Scripture, tradition, pastoral and theological or reason. In this section we present first those proposing Open Table and then those who are opposed to it.

1.1 Open Table

1.1.1 Biblical Basis for Open Table

Those who argue for Opening the Table have cited biblical texts for their argument. If the Lord's Table develops from Old Testament meals, then we should derive the manner of participation from it. When we read the Old Testament we can find narratives about meals which can give us the understanding of the Eucharist. For example, Exodus 14, narrates the Passover feast. The Passover feast believably the tradition which was perpetuated and given a new impetus on the night Jesus celebrated it with his disciples, every member of the household participated in it.

If the Lord's Supper celebrated by Jesus on the night he was betrayed has its roots in the Jewish religious meals and festivals, then it should be as inclusive as the traditional meals were. Even though in the Old Testament the Israelites were a closed group, and God's chosen people, but when it comes to the meal fellowship they were told to be inclusive as we read in Deuteronomy 10:18 & Isaiah 58:7 whereby the fatherless, foreigners, widows and the hungry who lived among them were to be fed.

The idea of God dwelling in the midst of his people and having fellowship and giving them a meal is also found in the New Testament whereby Jesus Christ God incarnate (God/man) leads us to understand that God came to dwell in the midst of his people. By dwelling among his people, Jesus Christ always provided for them and did not exclude anyone. In (Mathew 9:10-13, 11:19; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:30-32) Jesus fed the multitudes where sinners and outcast were included. Jesus also called himself bread of life in John 6:25-26. Jesus fed multitudes and all who came to him with bread, fish and wine and brought to the center of his saving mission people who were despised and put on the sidelines by religious leaders, that is, people who were

seen as sinners were welcomed by Jesus Christ. Christ invited everyone to himself in order to get saved.

1.1.2 Theological reasons for the Open Table

Theologically, the meal fellowship is at the heart of the case for the Open Table. In his fellowships, Christ instantiated a vision of a kingdom without boundaries between sinner and the saint, that all are welcomed within it. In the same line, Tanner quoted by Edmondson states that the relationship between Christ's presence at the Last Supper and his meal's ministry demonstrate the conditionality of the primary theological principle of Jesus' love for his companions. Christ's meal with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) stands as archetype of the dynamic Christ's meal ministry. The Open Table is, therefore, a means of embodying justification by faith; for we understand that Jesus Christ did not set limits between the sinners and saints, and that God's love is given unconditionally to all who believe (John 3:16).

Another theological argument is that through the sacrament of the Holy Communion as a means of grace, Jesus promises to grant eternal life and raise in the last day those who believe in Him. In the Gospel of John 6:48-58, we find soteriological and eschatological aspects implicit in it. The open table debate leads us to consider the inclusiveness of everyone to participate in Holy Communion.

Theologians advocating for Open Table also advance their argument based on the "radical hospitality". They interpret Christ's meals in the light of hospitality. They generally focus on different perceptions of Christ's meal fellowship with sinners. They argue that Jesus had dinner with tax collectors, prostitutes, and Pharisees without condition. They argue that if Jesus was hospitable to all, then we should be hospitable to all. If God is open to all, then our table should be open to all.

Farwell suggests three main arguments for Opening the Table to the unbaptized: 1) The Church is the sacrament of Jesus Christ, the primordial sacrament of God. The church ethics should be modeled on, and judged by the ethics of Jesus; 2) Jesus lived and preached in faithful expectation of the coming of the kingdom of God, in which the boundary lines between the outsider and the insider, the "sinner" and the "saint" drop away under God's gracious rule. Jesus performed his vision of the kingdom of God through a radical ethic of hospitality, eating with sinners and

outcasts; and 3) if Jesus' ministry included his vision of the kingdom of God, then ours ought to do the same.

Another argument for Opening the Table comes from Mark Stamm quoted by Phillips who states that Jesus feeding the multitudes and the story of the Last Supper are a justification for the Open Table. As Jesus public meals were hospitably and open to all, so should be the church's Eucharist.

The Open Table Debate leads us to reflect on the unconditional love of God manifested through Jesus Christ in his inclusive way. It is understood that Jesus' hospitality did not look at the social, political or religious condition of the people who sought him out. However, Jesus Christ allowed anyone to approach him, to hear the good news of salvation and to be transformed. In his hospitality and openness, Jesus offered what he had to everyone without distinction.

From Farwell's arguments, we observe that Jesus lived with everyone, both sinners and saints without setting limits. Although in Matthew 23 Jesus condemns the hypocrites because their teachings were completely different from their actions, and in Matthew 21:12-13, Jesus chastised those who had turned the temple into a market, he did not cut them completely from his social life. In all circumstances, Jesus was identified as a friend of sinners, he had no problem eating and drinking with them (Luke 7:34). Further proof of inclusiveness we find in Mark 6:34-44 where Jesus in his hospitality fed the multitude without the need to exclude sinners from the saints.

On the basis of the foregoing theological interpretation of Jesus' social interaction with people of all walks of life, advocates of Open Table propose that all people should be invited to enjoy the means of grace given by God to his church. Since the Holy Communion is a means of grace, its hospitality should be inclusive and allow those who participate in it to have communion with Jesus Christ (John 6:56).

1.1.3 Missiological reason for Open Table

We can understand missiological basis for opening the table, when we read the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) christologically. This parable illustrates the question of invitation to the feast. In this story we can understand that the father had shown his grace and love

unconditionally to his younger son who had returned home after squandering the resources and living a sinful life. In this account, the father does not dwell on the past life of the son, and that is why the son's confession of being unworthy for the feast is assumed by the loving father.

Therefore, the argument for inclusion in the feast is the recognition of equality in status between the righteous and the sinners in the invitation and in the feast. We recognize our equal status as those whom the Father longs for and embraces. The parable of the prodigal son illuminates the question of invitation, which takes us to understand the practice of the Open Table. Moreover, the parable shades light on the mission and ministry of Christ when read, not as the father who initiates the action in the parable, but as the elder son who understands and enacts the love of the Father. This unity in love allows the elder son to share everything equally with his prodigal brother, a unity that the Father desires. The Father desires for unity and not exclusion on the basis of one's past life.

The elder brother is not only willing to empty himself of everything that he shares with the Father in his pursuit and embrace of the younger brother, taking up the Father's mission, but he goes out to seek him out in order to invite him to the feast. This means that we share with the father his concern that we seek out and welcome the multitude who must return. All are God's children whom God longs for and seeks.

The story of the prodigal son teaches us that people should be welcomed and invited to join the feast rather than being excluded. Like the prodigal son, obstacles and demands should not be put in their way towards repentance and salvation, but just like the prodigal son, they should be let in, to be washed (sanctified) by the Holy Spirit. The prodigal son, despite the fact that he had recognized that he had sinned against his father and that he was not worthy to be called his son (Luke 15:18-19), on the contrary, his father was glad to receive him (Luke 15:23-24) giving him again the privilege of enjoying his communion. This is the essence of the gospel invite.

In Luke 4:16:21, in the Nazareth manifesto Jesus Christ shows that his mission also included those people who were underprivileged. Jesus also shows that his mission is to call sinners to repentance Mark 2:17, Luke 5:32. Therefore, through participation in the Holy Communion, the church in its missiological task should take advantage of bringing sinners to the table and lead

them to reflect on the saving work of Christ so that they can be forgiven from their sins and get saved.

1.1.4 Pastoral reasons for the Open Table

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in its ‘Sacramental Practices Statement’ states that:

...when an unbaptized person comes to the table seeking Christ’s presence and is inadvertently communed, neither that person nor the ministry of the church need be ashamed. Rather, Christ’s gift of love and mercy to all is promised. That person is invited to learn the faith of the church, be baptized, and thereafter faithfully receive Holy Communion.

Moreover, the United Methodist Church in their book entitled “By Water and by Spirit” we can find another pastoral reason for Opening the Table saying: “unbaptized persons responding in faith are welcome at the table and they should be counseled and nurtured toward baptism as soon as possible.” Open Communion refers to the reality of welcoming and inviting all people, including the unbaptized to the meal. The meal is not only for the initiated, because Eucharist is a means of evangelism. Circumstances can cause someone not to receive the sacrament of baptism that would lead them to the table. When a person from such circumstance approaches the table, hospitality demands that they should not be denied or turned away. John Wesley stated that Eucharist is a converting ordinance. This idea takes us to understand that Holy Communion becomes an evangelical opportunity to bring people into a fuller, living relationship with the body of Christ. Wesley sees Eucharist as a means of God’s grace before and after conversion.

Benjamin Durheim advises that the church should begin to discuss and rethink about the requirement for the participation in the Holy Communion to all baptized and unbaptized based on pastoral ground, because the church should take the opportunity to nurture and evangelize the unbaptized people by offering the hospitality to them. If in the sacraments God’s grace is present and available, it is true that this grace is not only for the baptized people but for all. Therefore, ministers should consider this as a good opportunity in their pastoral work to reach people as they explain the meaning of the Holy Communion and challenge them to convert to Jesus in order to get saved as Martin Luther said that God’s action within the sacraments brings salvation to those who participate.

1.2 Closed Table

1.2.1 New Testament and Early Church Evidences for Closed Table

Those opposed to Open Table argue for a Closed Table. They base their argument on Scripture and the apostolic traditions and the practice of the early Church fathers. For example, they quote the Didachē (9:5) which says that let no one eat or drink of your thanksgiving (meal) unless those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord, since the Lord has said concerning this; do not give what is holy to the dogs. In supporting the Closed Table the Didachē offers Mathew 7:6 as proof for the Closed Table. For the Didachē, the unbaptized are people who do not have an understanding of the meaning and value of the Eucharist. Therefore, they are unworthy to receive the Eucharist.

The apostolic fathers taught the qualification of those who qualified to participate in the Eucharist; they emphasized that the catechumen shall not sit at the Lord's Supper. For this reason, the liturgy was divided into two parts: the liturgy of the Word and the Eucharist. In the liturgy of the Word, everyone was allowed to participate but in the liturgy of the Eucharist, only those who were baptized were allowed and the catechumens were sent to go home. This church tradition tells us that in the period of early church history the qualification of participant in the Eucharist was seriously taken into account.

Lastly, in arguing again the Closed Table, Phillips quoted book seven of Apostolic Constitutions (7:25) which states that; Let no one eat of these things that is not initiated; but those only who have been baptized into the death of the Lord. But if any one that is not initiated conceal himself, and partake of the same, he eats eternal damnation; because, being not of the faith of Christ, he has partaken of such things as it is not lawful for him to partake of, to his own punishment.

Early tradition by fathers of the Church such as John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Ambrose is also used in arguing against Open Table. These fathers viewed baptism as a process of initiation. Theodore of Mopsuestia states that Eucharist is the food keeping with the birth (in baptism), that it is a completion of the movement into discipleship. For Justin Martyr Holy Communion is also restricted to the baptized, because Eucharist is the meal of those who have adopted Jesus' pattern of life. In addition, Cyril of Jerusalem identifies the Eucharist as the completion of the initiation into discipleship in which we become Christ bearers.

Another argument supporting Closed Table is by the Evangelical reformer, John Calvin whose argument is that baptism should be done before Eucharist, because baptism is a kind of entry into the church. He also says that in baptism we have a testimony that we, while otherwise strangers and aliens, were received into the family of God, so that we are reckoned among his household. The participants should repent from their sins in order to receive the Eucharist. Calvin based his teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:29. That's why he stated that bread and wine consecrated by the word of God are no longer ordinary food and wine, but are believed as spiritually holy flesh and the blood of Lord Jesus. He also emphasized on self-examination before partaking the Eucharist.

From the foregoing survey of the early Church practices in regard to who qualifies for participation in the Eucharist, we note that restrictions may have began during the period of the church fathers. During the Early Church in Luke-Acts, it appears like the Church practiced Open Table policy. We can deduce that during the apostolic time the concern of the disciples consisted in the propagation of the gospel, focusing on making new converts without placing restrictions on who should and who should not participate in the Holy Communion. However, in the period of the church fathers the concern was not only with evangelization, but that they were also concerned with the organization of the church, and they were also defending the church from heresies. In this same period, baptism came to be seen as a means of initiation into Christianity; thus excluding the unbaptized from participating in Holy Communion.

Church fathers understood that the Holy Communion was not an ordinary meal. Furthermore, this period of the church fathers leads us to deduce that in order to participate in the holy communion, it was not enough just to say that the person has faith and believes in Jesus as his personal savior and that he/she wants to strengthen his faith by participating in the holy supper, but it was necessary to pass through the process of initiation, that is, baptism before participating in the Holy Communion. This decision taken in the time of the church fathers takes us back to the debate found in the book of Acts 15 where circumcision had been placed as one of the preconditions for salvation to Gentiles who believed in Jesus Christ.

From the council of Trent the Roman Catholic Church had to decide those who could and those who could not participate in the Eucharist. Since then, the idea of exclusion in the Eucharist has been embraced and followed by many Evangelical Churches.

1.2.2 Theological Arguments

An argument based on the Old Testament covenant of circumcision is that as circumcision was the sign of belonging in the Old Covenant, baptism is the sign of belonging in the New Covenant. Therefore, baptism like circumcision should precede the Table.

Edward Phillips draws an analogy between taking Holy Communion before being baptized and sexual intercourse before marriage. According to Phillips, sexual intercourse is sacramentally unitive and presupposes sacramental union of the man and woman. He then likens this union with the union that takes place between the communicants and Christ in the sacrament. He avers that through Holy Communion, we are married, we join our bodies to Christ's body, we become part of the family, and that way Holy Communion is not an ordinary meal. Therefore it is only for the baptized Christians. Thus catechism followed by baptism must precede Eucharist.

2.0 Towards an Ubuntu Eucharist

The question of including everyone in the sacrament of the Eucharist is not just a problem of the Church in the West but it is a worldwide problem facing the Church. This problem arises whenever one tries to relate the definition of sacrament and the purpose of the Eucharist in the life of a believer and its economy in salvation. In this article we are proposing that the African Ubuntu philosophy can offer a solution to this worldwide puzzle.

2.1 Ubuntu Philosophy

The word Ubuntu derives its aphorism from Nguni; Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu, which means a person is a person because of or through others. Ubuntu is translated into English as humanness. It is understood as social philosophy based on principles of care and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness that express the fundamental interconnectedness of human existence. Ubuntu can be described as the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring. Furthermore, in Ubuntu philosophy there is dependent link between the individual and the community. The individual person is part of the community, and the community cannot exist without individual members; "I am because we are".

The individual grows up linked to the community through family ties and personal relationships. Nevertheless, in Ubuntu philosophy human beings are priceless and they can never be thrown away or discarded.

As we can see, the Ubuntu philosophy teaches inclusivity among people, that is, people should be treated with respect and dignity. This philosophy also makes us to understand and realize that people are always welcome within the community and everyone should be treated equally in the sense that social injustices can be avoided. In Ubuntu philosophy rejecting someone is a very great contempt, because people are interconnected by family ties. This means that if we reject one person the entire family and the community is rejected. If a member of the community is attacked, the entire community is under attack. The salvation of an individual is the salvation of the entire community. In the hospitality of Ubuntu, foreigners are taken care of.

Let us now reflect on the Open Table debate in the light of Ubuntu philosophy. Our basic argument underlying our introduction of Ubuntu philosophy in this debate is that Ubuntu as a cultural philosophy is a divine revelation by God Himself through the people's culture for the mutual benefit of the community. It acts as a *logoi spermatikoi* for the *evangelii preparatio*.

2.2 An Ubuntu Eucharist

God who is the universal Creator of all humanity, has revealed Himself through cultural practices and philosophies proper to those cultures. For Africans, God has revealed his will through their Ubuntu. It is for this reason we argue that this philosophy can be used in the reflection on the doctrine of sacraments and especially God's will in the application of the Eucharist. This philosophy can be applied on the administration of the Eucharist without contravening God's revealed truths in the Scriptures.

Ubuntu is an African philosophy that advances the ideals of communitarianism, unity, love for one another, and concern for one another. In this philosophy, if a member of the community is unwell, the entire community is unwell. In some African language, during a funeral, you would hear someone exclaiming, 'we are perishing'. This exclamation does not mean that many people or the entire community is dying or that there is a pandemic threatening the existence of the community, but the death of one of them is the death of the entire community. This means that one could not be saved as an individual; "I am because we are".

This understanding of the African community life when used to reflect on the exclusion of some members of the community from participating in community functions, e.g. sacrifices, worship, celebrations, is indeed an exclusion of the entire community. Even in communities where some individuals were excluded from participating in certain meals or sacrifices, those who participated, represented those who were excluded. But in the Holy Communion, no one partakes of it on behalf of another; each individual takes it for themselves thus totally excluding those who are not allowed to. Therefore, excluding one from participating in the Lord's Table is an exclusion of the entire community. Exclusion is a form of disunity, yet God wills that humanity is united. Jesus in his prayer for his disciples prays for their unity (John 17).

In African philosophy, one who walks alone and or eats alone is a witch. In some African communities, people are warned against going on a journey alone. It often concluded that, when you are accompanied by your brother/neighbor, you are safe. Eating alone or walking alone is a sign of selfishness and it is abhorred. In Kiswahili, they say, 'mkataa wengi ni mchawi' (one who rejects company or others is a witch). If this philosophy is interpreted in the context of Closed Table, then it means even those who congregate at the Table to celebrate alone are regarded as selfish and they would not benefit from the graces that the sacrament signifies. How can you benefit alone without your brother/sister?

Although in some African sacred meals, some members of the community could be excluded, there was a way in which they were included. For example among the Agikuyu people of central Kenya, there was a sacred meal known as ikaari. In this meal, women were excluded but the understanding was that the members of the family who participated in it, did so on behalf of the rest. The blessings or curses signified therein were shared by the family members they represented. This is not the same with the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, the benefits signified therein, benefits individual who have taken part in the covenant as salvation is individual.

Therefore, for the sacred meal (Eucharist) to have meaning in the context of African Christianity, it is when it is shared without excluding the strangers. The journey Christians are traveling to heaven needs company of other members of the human family. This is the essence of mission and the gospel appeal for many to come into the flock.

If the Eucharist as a sacrament is a means of grace, then strangers we intend to evangelize should be invited to feel the hospitality of Christ. The Eucharist should be used as a pull factor that attracts people to Christ. People should not be forced to enter Christianity by preaching the gospel of hell fire but the gospel of love of Christ. How can we preach Christ, the friend of the vulnerable, the marginalized, the rejected and discriminated members of the society and when they turn up for Christ, we deny them the very Christ we have announced to them? The gospel invites all who hunger and are thirsty to come to Christ to be filled. It is a contradiction to send them away when they heed to the invitation.

Ubuntu Eucharist is where everyone sits at the round table, each with their own mouth and hand to share in the food prepared by Christ the host. A good analogy can be drawn from the Luhya people's beer party. Everyone sits around the pot of local brew called malwa, each with a syphon and dips it into the pot and sucks it according to their own effort and ability. In the event that one comes who had not been invited, he/she is welcomed to the circle and everyone is willing to share their syphon to them. The circle keeps building and growing as many as they will come. This is the ideal Ubuntu Eucharist.

In Angola among the Ovimbundu, when a drink known as chisangua is served, everyone drinks it from a common container called Ombenge. The host prepares food to accompany the drinking. When food is served, it is placed before everyone and each eats to their full but with consideration of others.

In this culture, and as it is in many other African cultures, no one sits with the back facing outside. This is in case a shy orphan passes by; they should be spotted and invited to the meals in the circle.

In the Ubuntu philosophy of "I am because of other people", no one is saved alone. And therefore, we don't say, Jesus Christ is my personal saviour but Jesus Christ is our saviour. A saviour who saves my neighbour but leaves me to perish, has not saved anybody. For when I perish my entire community has perished. This philosophy is demonstrated in the manner young men respond to distress call. They all arm themselves to rescue animals being raided by an enemy. In such an event, even if your particular animals have not been touched, you are under obligation to fight and even die to rescue your neighbour's animals.

If through participating in the Holy Communion, we enhance our salvation and energize on the journey to heaven, then unless our neighbour is included, we are perishing together with them.

If we argue that the Sacrament of the Holy Communion is sacred and can only be taken by a people set apart, then remember all human beings have been set apart by the mere fact that they have been called into existence by God Himself from eternity in Jesus Christ. All human life is sacred, because God who called them into existence intended so.

Since God's revelation is instantaneous as well as progressive in nature, we note that in the Old Testament tradition every member of the family was included in the covenant. The early Christianity included all members of the family in the sacrament; it is a later tradition that began excluding others. In African traditional culture, all members of the community were included in covenants; they shared in the blessings and curses of the covenant. This then reveals to us that the tradition of exclusion is a suspect. This tradition of exclusion could be blamed on Western tradition of individualism, for it is not African, Jewish nor early Christian tradition.

Therefore, what is God speaking to us about opening the table or closing the table? God is calling us back to reflect on His own nature. God in Jesus Christ spreads out his arms at the Cross where the sacrifice is made and invites all to partake of his sacrifice. He is saying come all of you who repent and want to live a new life in Christ. A new life of including others in the circle.

3.0 Pastoral/Practical Implication

In this Ubuntu Eucharist of inclusion the marginalized, the oppressed, the vulnerable, the excluded are all included. They feel warm as they feel included in the love of Christ who came to give life in its abundance.

There is assurance of salvation for all who participate in the Eucharist. There is no judgment and condemnation of those who fall, but instead there is uplifting of one another. The Church on earth is known as the Church Militant and therefore, as any troop in war, all soldiers must fight alongside each other, encouraging one another in hardship. This is the meaning of Ubuntu Eucharist. The fallen soldiers are helped to stand and not condemned and surrendered to the enemy.

Denying people from participating in the Eucharist on the various grounds could lead to low self-esteem. They could feel condemned and hence wonder which type of God it is who rejects some and only admits others. If those longing to participate have understood the Eucharist as the means of grace for their salvation or sustenance of it, don't they feel they are being denied this very essential meal?

How do those participating in the Eucharist feel about those being denied and those denying them? One question would be, is this sacrament belonging to individuals of the Church or Christ's? This feeling could lead to demeaning the essence of the sacrament. We should possibly learn from the Ovimbundu saying about visitors: "ukombe okasi nde lende, te oku utata ciwa" which means, a visitor is like a cloud and must be well taken care of, because if you don't take good care of him/her, he or she will never come back to your house again. Doesn't denying someone participation lead to such attitude? We should reflect on these pastoral implications of each context so that no one can get lost and all can be saved and maintain communion with Christ.

We should be of the attitude that Eucharist is not for the perfect, but for those who are weak and feeble and that the benefit we gain from the Eucharist is not by the merit of the act, but because of the promises which are given to us, and provided that we receive the Eucharist by faith, it's therefore enough reason for opening the table for people to benefit from the blessings that are signified thereof given to all of us by Christ.

Conclusion

If God wants us to worship Him, He must reveal Himself. God, through the elements of the sacrament of the Eucharist, has revealed both His nature and His will to humanity. God's character is love, and love for the sinner. In the parable of the Prodigal Son we noted God's patience and unrelenting forgiveness. If God is a forgiving Father, who are we to condemn His repentant sinner who shows up for the Eucharist? On the basis of these insights, the Church should Open the Table for all who repent and are ready to reconcile with God and fellow humanity.

Using the African philosophy of Ubuntu, we have demonstrated how the Eucharist should be administered. Drawing lessons from African hospitality derived from the Ubuntu philosophy, we have demonstrated the justification for Ubuntu Eucharist as an ideal sacrament of unity.

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