Eucharistic Communion in a Time of Pandemic: Insights From *Ubuntu* in an Extended African Family

Peter Linus Omondi

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EUCHARISTIC COMMUNION IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC:
INSIGHTS FROM UBUNTU IN AN EXTENDED AFRICAN FAMILY

A Thesis by

Peter Linus Omondi

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Committee Signatures

Paul A. Janowiak, SJ, ThD, Director
Paul
4/21/22

Mary E. McGann, RSCJ, PhD, Reader
Mary
4/21/22
ABSTRACT

The eucharistic celebration is central to the Catholic faith. Deprivation of it impacts the faith of the people. Restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic are one instance in which the faith of the majority of Christians was adversely affected. This thesis postulates that such impacts arose due to an inadequate understanding of the Eucharist. By narrowing on the experience of the people of Rodi-Kopany in Kenya, the thesis proposes that understanding of Eucharistic communion, informed by the lived experience of ubuntu in the extended African family, will be helpful towards the appropriation of the theology of the Eucharist and thereby reduce the impact on faith in the face of such calamities.

Deprivation touches on the question of justice and oppression. The majority of those greatly affected are the poor and marginalized. The thesis thus uses the method of Liberation theology in the spirit of “See, Judge, Act” in catholic social teaching by applying the principles of socio-analytic mediation, hermeneutic mediation, and practical mediation as espoused by Clodovis Boff. In light of the three principles, the thesis moves into the challenges faced by people in the mentioned area, the theology of Eucharistic celebration and its implications on the people, and provides a way forward. The thesis forms part of a continuous dialogue in the theology of the Eucharist, Liberation, and inculturation.
DEDICATION

For A Eucharistic Church,
That All May Be Welcomed to the Table of the Lord
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INTRODUCTION

In its final document, the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region emphasized the significance of the Eucharist in Christian living. According to it, “participation in the Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian life; it symbolizes the unity of the Mystical Body; it is the center and culmination of the whole of the Christian community.”¹ The same document insists that the faithful enjoy the right to have Eucharistic celebrations as established in the liturgical books and norms.² However, one wonders how the faithful can benefit from this right, while for many, the very right of access to the Eucharist is questionable.

In light of the above statement, this paper espouses that depriving the Christian community of the Eucharistic celebration impacts the faith of its members. The impact is manifested in laxity in faith and reduced participation in church activities. Regulations put forth by the government and religious institutions to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus provide instances in which people’s faith was adversely affected by Eucharistic deprivation. A survey conducted by Bibiana Ngundo, a lecturer at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, in collaboration with Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA),³

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² Ibid.

³ Bibiana M. Ngundo, and Jonathon L. Wiggins, “Survey of the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Catholic Parishes in Kenya (February 2021),” Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), (Washington, DC: Georgetown University), 7; Bibiana M. Ngundo is a member of the Little Sisters of St. Francis in Kenya. She carried out this research during her time as a visiting scholar at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), in Washington D.C.
indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the priests’ and parishioners’ morale. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate dictionary* defines morale as “the mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty) of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand.”

It further talks of morale as a “sense of common purpose with respect to a group.” When the mental and emotional conditions necessary to hold adherents of any religious grouping together are dead, the group is no more. This survey observed a decrease in volunteers in response to charity and a dwindling reception of the sacraments.

The Eucharist is an act of thanksgiving; it embodies the people of God gathered and is the central act of Christian worship. Deprivation of all these, without doubt, leads to the loss of core values that unite any faith community. My thesis is that the COVID-19 pandemic was such an instance. Churches were closed, and despite a recent re-opening, churches have been unable to undo the damage done to the faith in the lives of many. For Alice Sambu, a social scientist, and others, there exists a correlation between contact time and faith.

Stringent measures used to control the spread of the virus, and decrease contact time among the faithful, weakened the faith of the Christian community in religious doctrines, practices and traditions. Sambu indicates that a relatively low yearning for a return to normalcy exhibits this laxity among the people. The CARA research affirms this view.

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5 Ibid.


Indubitably, such a state creates a chasm in the Christian community. If a community of Christians is to grow as a Eucharistic Church, the chasm must be filled.

I argue that this missing gap is an authentic understanding of the Eucharist that makes it possible to have communion despite being in a state of “Eucharistic deprivation.” The family viewed “as an arena of encounter and not simply a warehouse that interests a person ‘because of the objects stored there,” makes it the desired link for an authentic understanding of the Eucharist at such moments. Therefore, in this paper, I shall be drawing from the merits of the extended African family, enlightened by the Zulu concept of Ubuntu (Humanity, i.e., “I am because we are”), to enter into an already existing dialogue on active participation in the liturgy. The idea of family ties is not unique to the people of Africa; therefore, in using it as an entry point, we can engage with other cultures as well.

This thesis first notes the fruits and challenges of my own experience of Eucharistic deprivation in the local context in Rodi-Kopany, a village in Homabay County, located in the Western region of Kenya, when the government outlawed all public gatherings. In its scope, it narrows down to an individualized experience in a particular setting. However, I also acknowledge that this experience of Eucharistic deprivation is not just mine but is also that of a small sampling of Catholics with whom I made informal contact. Through the lens of our experience, I will look at the plight of many Catholics in remote and/or marginalized areas for whom the habitual

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8 Janowiak, Paul. The Holy Preaching: The Sacramentality of the Word in the Liturgical Assembly (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000), 24, referencing Semmelroth, Church and Sacrament (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1965), 82. Janowiak talks of such an encounter as encompassing every dimension – the vertical, the depth, and the horizontal. It is an encounter that embraces the relationship between God and God’s people, the reality of Christ’s presence within the community as the body of Christ, and its witness to the salvation experienced in it and offered to the world is one proclamation of redemption.
deprivation of Eucharistic celebration is part of their lived experience. I will highlight several of the Church’s teachings and understandings on the Eucharist, both in its celebration and as a way of life, and explore how these offer a way forward for Catholic communities. Finally, I will provide some pastoral recommendations for ways that families, Small Christian Communities, parishes, and schools can continue to grow in eucharistic faith despite the current pandemic of the Coronavirus and other such impediments. As part of this, I will look to experiences in Asia and Latin America of building local churches and ask how these might offer new insights to Kenyan communities.

This study suffers from several limitations. The ideal would be to gather information from people on the ground. Secondary sources may not adequately respond to the question of the degree of impact on the faith for any given community. However, I have opted to use secondary sources due to time and distance constraints. Recognizing that Eucharistic deprivation challenges the global church in several ways, partly due to the shortage of priests and situations such as a pandemic, I have opted to narrow on the Ubuntu concept and the family as a practical solution. As a solution, the Ubuntu concept and the family are close to the day-to-day experience of the respective faith communities. I have narrowed my scope to the experience of my own people at Rodi-Kopany Parish in Homabay Diocese, Western Kenya. In the face of the people of God being deprived of the Eucharistic celebration, as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, I ask how they can grow in being a Eucharistic Church. In this study, I aim to demonstrate that the extended African family, nourished by the concept of Ubuntu, in dialogue with the Catholic Church’s teaching on the Eucharist, provides a basis for an authentic understanding of Eucharistic
participation at such moments. Embracing the familial paradigm alleviates the impact of deprivation.

With the experience of a people deprived of Eucharistic Communion as a starting point, I will employ Clodovis Boff’s method of liberation theology, as argued in Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations,⁹ to analyze the challenges posed by Eucharistic deprivation qualitatively. In the spirit of “See, Judge, Act” in Catholic social teaching, liberation theologians speak of three principles of mediation: the socio-analytic mediation (see), the hermeneutic mediation (judge), and the practical mediation (act). Eucharistic deprivation is both a socio-cultural and pastoral issue. Many of those affected tend to be people at the margins of society, and as such, it also becomes a liberation issue. Using the method of liberation theology, I will draw from the actual situations in which Christians find themselves, whatever these conditions may be. I enter into this research with an awareness that it is an individual’s (or group of individuals’) right and freedom to assemble and worship. This ‘right’ forms part of group identity.

The socio-analytic mediation part of the methodology will shed light on instances of Eucharistic deprivation, the factors surrounding them, and the approaches Christian communities and devotional groups have used to maintain a sense of Eucharistic nourishment. For this, I will rely mainly on secondary sources. By understanding the issues raised, I will apply hermeneutic mediation to ask the fundamental question concerning what the Church teaches about Eucharistic communion. Here, I will draw from magisterial teachings, reflections of theologians,

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and Church documents. In the light of this broader Catholic tradition, I will use hermeneutic mediation to look at Eucharistic deprivation from its multiple dimensions. Practical mediation recognizes that liberation theology “emerges from action and leads to action.”

My intention here, informed by the problem at stake, theological reflection, and Church documents, is to lay a concrete practice that would be liberating. I espouse embracing the concept of *Ubuntu* and the African extended family dynamics as a possible solution. The thesis will show how one can arrive at a relational, dialogical, and participative Church, embodied, practised, and informed by insights from *Ubuntu* and the extended African family. Authentic Eucharistic communion allows for its experiences to permeate the limits of Eucharistic deprivation.

Numerous Church documents, particularly those of the Second Vatican Council, have continually emphasized the need for the faithful to actively and willingly participate in liturgical worship for greater benefit. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* highlights that “fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations … is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy.”

Similarly, *Musicam Sacram* calls for care in selecting ministers and a need to encourage suitable active participation of the people in the liturgical worship.


between the church magisterium, theologians in all branches of theology, and the lived experience of the faith they serve. They see active participation as a *conditio sine qua non* for any faith community’s growth and nourishment. The COVID-19 pandemic notwithstanding, we are already in grave danger as a Church if the issue of Eucharistic deprivation is not given paramount importance and urgent attention. With the number of COVID-19 cases gradually going down and churches re-opening, we are faced with a situation that was never anticipated. Churches in many places are emptier than before, and people are reluctant to return. People may be cautious, and indeed people are. Going back to pre-pandemic ‘normalcy’ may not be possible at all, or at least will take some time. Just as a person who broke a leg and wore a cast for six months cannot just run the same way as before the accident right after the cast is removed, so it is for many whose lives were altered by the deadly virus. This study argues that the period of inactivity caused a lapse. This lapse or the chasm is a consequence of people getting accustomed to Eucharistic thirst, a longing, and a lack of what is needed to thrive. The remedy is in providing an alternative understanding of Eucharistic communion as facilitated by the reflections of theologians, magisterial teachings, and Church documents. This understanding has to be informed by and made evident through people’s everyday experiences, manifested in the concept of *Ubuntu* and the extended African family.
CHAPTER ONE

CHALLENGES TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN EUCHARISTIC LITURGY

There are many challenges to active liturgical participation. As mentioned earlier, we will focus on the restrictions the COVID-19 pandemic required. This pandemic opened the church’s eye to a deeply rooted challenge in its self-understanding of the Eucharist. Therefore, I will discuss how Christians have been deprived of the Eucharist as a whole. Eucharistic deprivation is not a one-time event but has been the case over the centuries. In painting this broad picture, we will examine how the Church’s theology speaks to this issue.

1.1 COVID-19 Restrictions and Their Challenges

The 2019 novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was declared in March 2020.⁠¹⁠ Governments all over suspended public gatherings of all sorts, and consequently, many bishops followed suit, with the dispensation from attending the public celebration of Mass. Kenya was no exception. In the media, terms like “Mass is suspended” or “Easter is cancelled” became the typical news headlines, mainly because all these were taking place around one of the most important Christian feasts or celebrations: Holy Week and Easter. Soon after, many churches embraced the broadcasting of liturgies on television and the internet; however, it is unclear how many of the faithful were able to tune in. The Kenyan Region of Rodi-Kopany is

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exceptionally remote if one looks at it by world standards. Basic amenities like roads, water, electricity, and even the internet would be considered a luxury. The implication was that suspending public worship meant that churches in this area were shut down. The words of the Most Reverend Mario Delpini, Archbishop of Milan, succinctly describe the predicament of the Catholic faithful in Rodi-Kopany and in many parts of the world, even those who had the resources to view the broadcasts. For Archbishop Mario, “the difference between participating in the Mass in the church and watching it on TV is like the difference between sitting next to a bonfire that warms up, illuminates, brings joy, and watching a picture of the fire.” If watching a picture of the fire can be as satisfying as the fire itself, then the archbishop is mistaken. However, many people would attest to the contrary.

Kenya has a population of about 53.77 million people (ca. 2020), according to WorldData. It is highly international and is the home to people of diverse nationalities and races. The majority of Kenyans are Christians, accounting for approximately 70 percent of the population. Other religions are distributed in the remaining segment of the population in decreasing order: Muslims, African Indigenous religions, Hindus, Sikhs, et cetera. The Roman Catholic Church accounts for slightly more than half of the Christian community. The church comprises twenty dioceses, four archdioceses, one vicariate apostolic, and one military ordinariate. Most Catholics are practising, and gathering as a community is essential for their identity.

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The pandemic was unexpected, unprecedented, and chaotic. It plunged the world into a state of crisis. The Kenyan government closed all entertainment places, bars, and other social spaces in response to the situation. The Church was more or less enlisted in this category, effective in late March 2020, when the World Health Organisation declared the virus a pandemic. The government also demanded of all within its borders a social distancing of 1.5 meters in all places. In response to these guidelines, all churches and places of worship were initially closed, interpreting the government’s measures as a prohibition of public religious worship of whatever kind. However, the restriction was soon mitigated, allowing the churches to open with age restrictions, adherence to the social distancing rule, wearing masks, hand sanitizing, and temperature checks of all individuals entering a Church. The government further ordered Church attendees to register for contact tracing if a member manifested symptoms.

From the CARA study, it was evident that throughout the pandemic menace, morale decreased “somewhat” or “a lot” among priests, parishioners in general, and all those engaged with parish work. The same study also reported that the number of staff members and volunteers since the pandemic significantly decreased. Worse still, the survey also indicated that the number of sacraments offered was drastically low. Faith manifests itself in deeds as Scripture says, “faith by itself if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (Jas 2:17, NIV).

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If we take these numbers seriously, there should be no doubt that the pandemic negatively affected people’s faith. Faith among Catholics is manifested primarily through adherence to liturgical activities. The liturgical activities tend to propel corresponding charitable acts towards one’s neighbor. Conclusively, one can deduce that the vivid expression of one’s faith is in volunteer work. Participating in sacraments, which are “an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace,” as St. Augustine would describe it, is also a key indicator of faith. The study indicated that the number of people coming to confession/reconciliation and those participating in Small Christian Communities had decreased “somewhat” or “a lot.”

Adichie Gloria, an academic researcher in the fields of religion and peacebuilding from the University of Nigeria, would describe the impact of COVID-19 as literally bringing world events to a halt. For her, the church is just one among many segments that make up our worldly experience. As CNN Religion Editor David Burke noted, “[the] COVID-19 pandemic has impacted religion in various ways, including the cancellation of the worship services of various faiths and the closure of Sunday schools, as well as the cancellation of pilgrimages, ceremonies, and festivals.”

For many Christians, the pandemic challenged the spirit of Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi. Adichie highlights that a number of the preventive measures

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taken to curb the virus were quite inconsistent with the *modus operandi* in the various faith communities. Sanitizing hands, inasmuch as it is a remarkable health procedure, is not the ordinary way of living for the Kenyan people. As a sign of peace in numerous African liturgies, shaking hands is common practice with significant value. The sign of peace had to be suspended. The mode of receiving the Eucharist was also modified. Instead of receiving Communion on the tongue, one had to receive it on the palm.\(^{10}\) Meaning in life is achieved through the coherence of human activities. However, what we have come to deduce in the challenges posed by the pandemic is that such coherence was conspicuously missing. Many Christians could hardly build a connection between “the law of what is prayed,” “the law of what is believed,” and the “law of what is lived” and thus ended up with a disjointed life. When these three cannot correlate, faith succumbs to crises.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a series of crises in the life of the faithful. Sambu and others highlight one of these crises, which I believe is perhaps the greatest. Humans throughout history have shown affection through physical closeness. Families are held together by this bond of intimacy. Sambu refers to this closeness as “once a source of spiritual solidarity.”\(^{11}\) However, in the face of the pandemic, that same closeness “now comes with the high risk of spreading infection.” How is the faith, once manifested through reaching out to one’s neighbor, defined in light of these new developments? Loving or caring for one’s dear ones during the COVID-19 pandemic demanded that one keep to himself or herself as much as possible.


possible. Common wisdom says that one never knows who has the virus; the only solution is to thrive by avoiding the other as much as one can for fear of the unknown. The most vulnerable people in a society are the people to be avoided most. Sambu indicates, quoting Wielmers and others, that “older people, young children, and the sick amongst other vulnerable people are at more risk for serious complications and death from Covid-19.”

Some observers have argued that practices such as faith healing have impacted people’s faith during this pandemic. They feel that such practices have aggravated the impact of COVID-19 on faith. In an article, Fredrick Nzwili quotes Simangaliso Kumalo, an associate professor of religion and governance at the University of KwaZulu-Natal-Pietermaritzburg, warning that the widespread belief that Jesus cures every sickness poses challenges for managing epidemics. Belief in Jesus curing everything is reasonable and perhaps understandable in the Christian faith. However, it can have dire effects if taken at literal value, as evidenced in some faith traditions. For long, Christians in various parts of Kenya saw the war on the pandemic as a war on their faith. Nzwili indicates in quoting Kumalo that for these Christians, “the corona is not a mere virus, [being children of God], the virus would not infect them, or if it does, they would be healed by Jesus, the physician.”


1.2 Other Instances of Eucharistic Deprivation in Communities

To broaden our understanding of Eucharistic deprivation, I draw insights from Pope Francis’ homily on the Feast of Corpus Christi, June 6, 2021. In it, he says that “a church of the pure and perfect is a room with no place for anyone.” This he contrasts with a Church with open doors, which for Pope Francis, “gathers and celebrates around Christ, [and] is a large room where everyone – everyone, the righteous and sinners – can enter.” The Pope urges the Christian community to be all-embracing and open its doors to all. Thinking of Eucharistic deprivation as a norm would be an injustice. Such injustice is made worse if it is imposed. In the same homily, Pope Francis implored his listeners not to forget that “the Eucharist is meant to nourish those who are weary and hungry along the way.” It is food for the journey and not a reward for the righteous. How can we be a body of Christ when some of us are suffering, some have access to the Eucharist and others do not, and those who have no access, who are deprived, happen to be poor. This thesis acknowledges Eucharistic deprivation in modern times. However, it also recognizes that Eucharistic deprivation has been with humanity for ages. In the history of the Church, there are those who have been deprived of Eucharistic participation for they were part of a persecuted church.


\[15 \text{ Francis, Homily on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body, and Blood of Christ (June 6, 2021)}

\[16 \text{ Ibid.}

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Throughout history, we also have faithful Christians deprived of Eucharistic participation due to impositions brought about by dictatorial regimes and, at times, due to the shortage of priests. In such situations, it would be good to pay heed to the summons of Pope Francis through his post-synodal exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*. In the exhortation, the Pope calls for a broadened vision regarding the shortage of priests and Eucharistic deprivation by extension. Priests have an undeniable role in the Eucharistic celebration, conferred on them through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Reducing the Eucharist to the functional structures of the church and its members would be very limiting. The Eucharist has a greater significance in the life of the faithful than as manifested in the distinction between the clergy and the laity, which emphasizes the cultic role of priests. Obviously, only the priest can indeed say: “This is my body” or “I absolve you from your sins”\(^\text{17}\) as mandated by the very nature of the sacrament of Holy Orders. However, emphasizing such distinctions, or focusing on them as the major starting point, falls prey to the church’s functional structures that call its members to different roles in Eucharistic celebration. The Pope, through *Querida Amazonia*, desires that we realize that there is more to the Eucharist than the exclusively priestly roles, and the laity play a crucial role in these sectors.

Eucharistic deprivation can, at times, be all too common for some Christians. Of special attention are Christians at the margins who, due to distance, find it hard to participate in Eucharistic celebrations regularly. However, poverty can also be a factor. Though highlighted by a lack of priests, the challenge of many Catholic Christians in Kenya is usually exacerbated by their incapacity to have a church of

their own or have the resources for the upkeep needed to have a priest in proximity. In response to the challenge of Christians at the margins, the documents of the Amazon synod provide fruitful insights. This synod signals an incomparable change in the understanding of the church and the world regarding the pursuit of justice and peace. Through it, we witnessed participation in “an ecclesial event marked by the urgency of the theme that calls for opening new paths for the church in the territory.”

Christians at the margins are often considered more or less irrelevant or, at best secondary. In the Amazon synod, dedicated to those at the margins, the margins became the center of the church’s attention.

The Amazon synod was an invitation to the whole church towards an openness to the working of the Holy Spirit. In it, there was an encounter with a new ecclesiological paradigm. A eucharistic communion that nourishes has the people gathered in prayer as its central focus. Uniquely enough, in the Amazon synod, there was a focus on the unique need and gift of the church in a particular part of the world. It was also a broadening of the traditional structures of leadership and authority and, as such, allowed them to respond to concrete crises in the individual churches. Appreciating the gift of the priesthood to the church and that the discipline of celibacy “is not demanded by the very nature of the priesthood,” the Amazon synod proposed having the “viri probati,” literally translated as “approved men,” admitted to the priesthood. This proposal would have sounded out of place to most Catholics a few

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years ago but made sense in the synod. It was possible to imagine another priesthood other than the “male celibate” traditional understanding of priesthood. The “viri probati,” according to the Synod’s final document, are “suitable and respected men of the community with a legitimately constituted and stable family, who have had a faithful permanent diaconate and received an adequate formation for the priesthood.”

Most significant was the synod’s embrace of cultures, emphasis on a rite for the indigenous people, and the role of women in defining the trajectory of the church. The church needs openness to diversity, a crucial identity of its membership. With this background information on the Amazon synod, it becomes evident that the solutions to most of the challenges faced by the church at the margins may not necessarily be drawn from outside the margins but rather from within itself. There are men and women of excellent reputation in all regions and cultures. The church needs to take root and be incarnated in these cultures, with leadership representing the demography of the given place. The role of theology, through contextual analysis, is to highlight these dynamics and consequently provide a probable solution.

Eucharistic deprivation is not a new phenomenon. Until the fourth century, participation in the Eucharistic liturgy was technically illegal. It was with the Edict of Milan in the year 313 that Christianity became a public religion. The catacombs, designed initially as burial sites, became places that could be used for worship. In his doctoral thesis, Rudolph Kraus attributes this use to the sense of “freedom and

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security” they offered. Eucharist in the catacombs can be inferred based on the inscriptions and paintings later found therein. Historical data indicate that catacombs were not places of worship but burial sites. Therefore, for Eucharist to have been celebrated in them, it would be at least during the death anniversaries of the dead or when permitted. However, when viewed in the light of persecutions, they provided safe hiding places for Christians who could not live their faith openly due to security reasons.

Deprivation of the Eucharist comes about because of many factors. Just as restrictions due to COVID-19 made it hard for Christians to have access to the Sacraments for weeks, months, or even years, persecutions of Christians during the reign of emperors Decius (249-251 AD), Trebonianus Gallus (251-253 AD) and Valerian (253-260 AD) made it hard for any Eucharistic gathering and as such, strictly speaking, can be considered a moment of Eucharistic deprivation in history. For such Christians, Eucharistic deprivation became a norm of life in the said period, and whenever they were caught, they were also tortured or even martyred. Many of the early Christian martyrs were persecuted for gathering for the breaking of the bread, i.e., for celebrating Mass. St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, who ruled during the bloody persecution of Decius, met his death in the persecution of Valerian in 258 AD. Others who met their death under similar circumstances would be Sixtus II and St. Lawrence, who were burned on a gridiron when their Christianity was discovered.

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1.2.1. **Impact on Kenyan Marginalized Communities**

Perhaps the synchronicity between my childhood experience and the Amazonia encounter is why I am drawn to it. Born in a village setting in Rodi-Kopany, where it was hardly possible to access a priest, thinking of alternative ways of experiencing Eucharistic communion was inevitable. The laity, particularly catechists, came to be of great significance. The church’s identity was (and still is) in the form of Small Christian Communities, also known as Basic Communities in other cultures. In such a setting, Pope Francis mentions in *Querida Amazonia*:

“Recognizing the many problems and needs that cry out from the heart of the Amazon region [and I would extend this to any faith community], we can respond beginning with organizations, technical resources, opportunities for discussion and political programs: all these can be part of the solution.”

The same document highlights that “in the Amazon region, there are communities that have long preserved and handed on the faith even though no priest has come their way, even for decades.”

How is this situation different from that of the Christian community in Rodi-Kopany? And how is it different from the challenges posed by COVID-19? Perhaps the difference may only be that the challenge is more acute in the Amazon region. According to Pope Francis, the sustainability of the faith was not because of a large number of priests in their midst but “because of the presence of strong and generous women who, undoubtedly called and prompted by the Holy Spirit, baptized, catechized, prayed, and acted as missionaries.”

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24 *Querida Amazonia*, art. 62.

25 Ibid., art. 99.

26 Ibid.
played in Kenya by the lay catechist and the family in faith formation and sustainability.

The Amazonian encounter highlights a single case among many. As the post-synodal document states: “Today the Church can be no less committed. She is called to hear the plea of the Amazonian peoples and ‘to exercise with transparency her prophetic mission.’”

I would like to add that by stating that the plea of the Amazonian people can be found everywhere, the same can be said of Eucharistic deprivation. Perhaps, what is needed is a broadened vision. We need not restrict our understanding of the Church to her functional structures, that has failed by emphasizing priesthood to the detriment of other ministries. The encounter with the challenges posed by COVID-19 should be the catalyst to redefine the church’s structure and its paths for ministries. The Church in Rodi-Kopany depends significantly on the laity. It better serves the faithful if civil and local authorities recognize such laypeople entrusted with various ministries in the church.

The church in Rodi-Kopany, like any other Church at the margins, comprises mainly women and children. Despite being the majority, they are rarely consulted or involved in decision-making. In a church that faces a challenge with the number of priests, suggestions to have women ordained to the priesthood are common. However, this thesis would embrace a more emancipatory approach that empowers women. The thesis, therefore, advocates for a need to have the voice of women heard by having women consulted and participating in decision-making. As Pope Francis indicates, the ordination of women is somewhat reductionist. Though the priesthood is hierarchical, this function is not meant to be superior to others. Using it as a form of emancipation

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27 Ibid., art. 19.
“would lead us to believe that women would be granted a greater status and participation in the Church only if they were admitted to Holy Orders.”\(^{28}\) It lays importance on the priesthood rather than on women’s rights as equal members in the Body of Christ. The Amazon Synod’s final document calls for a need to create “broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church.” The Church can manifest this presence by having more women consulted and participating in decision-making and by admission to various ministries in the church. Though women are singled out in this statement, I believe the message extends to most, if not all, the ministries played out by various members of the Church. The church anywhere should have the face of its congregation. The church at the margins should thus have the face of the people at the margins.

The experience of the people of Rodi-Kopany is typical of any church at the margins. Hunger and thirst characterize such a church. Its faithful are thirsty for the eucharist, representation, leadership, and the necessities for sustenance. These thirsts and hunger thrive because of the failure to appropriate the Gospel message, which needs to take root and shape in terms familiar to the local people. Understanding the Eucharist exclusively in terms of the Body and Blood of Christ limits its capacity to take root in various cultures and peoples. This thesis espouses a broadening of understanding that allows the role played by the various members in a Eucharistic celebration to shine. Many Christians at the margins are greatly indebted to the faith formation received in the hands of the laity. A Eucharistic understanding that places this into account may be the way forward.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., art. 100.
1.3 Towards a Eucharistic Understanding that nourishes

The absence of the Eucharist means being deprived of grace. According to Karl Rahner, we need to recognize it though it is ever before us, implying a possibility of missing it. It has to encompass our being [whether or not we heed it, for only then does it] become visible so that our eye may fall on the food [Eucharist] of the Church.²⁹ The Eucharist becomes an event manifesting the Church’s inner dynamism, a sign of the grace already present within the Church. In making this bold statement, one would not like to confine God’s grace to the celebration of the Eucharist. Strictly speaking, we cannot do that. Rahner is striving to enable the Christian community to realize that the grace of God is everywhere, and the universe is grace. God works in ways beyond our capacities to contain, and it is significant to acknowledge that it is possible to find solace and strength from our faith in other ways. The Eucharist has a primacy of place in the Catholic tradition; the emphasis of this paper is to uphold that same position but in a manner that allows it to nourish.

The challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic was that of disintegration. The Eucharist gathers us into a community of faith, and it is in that gathered community that the word is shared, and bread is broken. “Christ redeemed the whole person, and he wishes to restore in each of us the capacity to enter into a relationship with others.”³⁰ This capacity for integration is what the pandemic has almost made impossible, pushing the Christian community into doubts on some of the fundamental teachings of faith and consequently leading the congregation into crises.


³⁰ *Querida Amazonia*, art. 20.
Like the Amazon region, Kenya is host to many peoples of various tribes, races, and nationalities. Each of these peoples possesses its own cultural identity and unique richness that can benefit the wider church. We also realize that despite the crises created by Eucharistic deprivation, many faithful Christians have continued in their quest for holiness and evangelization. This quest has been sustained even while lacking the essential access to Eucharist and the sacramental life. Through the experience and testimony of these Christians, we have been made to realize that if we continue to keep an intentional desire to receive the abundant graces that only the sacraments can provide, the Lord will help us cultivate hope and joy in our souls.

It should not be shocking to us that in the sustenance of faith in the remote areas, the laity have played a crucial role through proclaiming God’s word, teaching, organizing the communities, presiding over liturgical celebrations, seeking different ways to express popular devotion, and developing multitudes of gifts that the Holy Spirit continues to pour out upon the faithful community. A Eucharistic understanding that nourishes would perhaps be that which builds on these gifts. Pope Francis’ post-synodal exhortation on the Amazon calls for the development of that rich variety.\(^{31}\) The Eucharist will be genuinely appreciated as the “source and summit” of Christian experience, only in drawing from this rich diversity that makes up the community of faith.

Priests, as ordained ministers, are necessary for the celebration of the Eucharist and as ministers of other sacraments, but this does not mean the laity cannot regularly assume essential responsibilities in animating (giving life to) liturgical celebrations. It is beautiful to have more ordained ministers who can celebrate the

\(^{31}\) Ibid., art. 92.
Eucharist. However, an emphasis on the cultic Eucharist alone as the means of animating Eucharistic celebrations is a narrow understanding. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* speaks of the various modes of presences of Christ in the liturgy: the community gathered, praying and singing; the Word of God proclaimed; in the ministers of the Word and Sacrament; and in the sharing of the Body and Blood.\textsuperscript{32}

The Eucharistic species of the Body and Blood of Christ has primacy of place, but a broader understanding of the Eucharist that nourishes calls upon the faithful to pay closer attention to other modes of Christ’s presence and draws fruition from them just as they would from the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharistic species.

Therefore, the way forward is to promote an encounter with God’s word, God’s people gathered, and God’s ministers of the word and sacraments, as the document asserts. The ministers of God’s word and sacraments need not necessarily be priests. Ministry does not necessarily imply ordination and should not demand it. The way forward would be a growth in nourishment through various kinds of lay service, and this needs education – biblical, doctrinal, spiritual, and practical.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has made evident that parameters barring access to the Eucharist, in its traditional understanding, focus solely on the species of the Body and Blood of Christ. This traditional way of expressing and manifesting the Catholic faith, strictly speaking, need not be to the detriment of the faithful. However, the need to broaden such encounters could be eye-openers, as witnessed in the case of the Amazon region.

In the example of Rodi-Kopany, a parish in Western Kenya, we have realized that Eucharistic deprivation is neither uniquely a Kenyan problem nor strictly brought about by pandemics. Since its inception, eucharistic deprivation has been part of the church, particularly among the first Christians who had to take part in Eucharistic celebrations in the catacombs and in private homes, many of whom were martyred whenever they were caught gathering.

Specifically, many people at the margins have to go through experiences of eucharistic deprivation in their day-to-day encounters. In this, we singled out the case of the Amazonian region and Pope Francis’ post-synodal exhortation on the challenge of the Amazon region. The Pope calls for a broadened understanding of the shortage of priests and Eucharistic deprivation by extension. Could it be that the issue at stake is broadening the understanding of the Eucharist? The next chapter thus draws on Church teaching on the Eucharist, moving on to the reflection of theologians using “hermeneutic” mediation as a methodology, and drawing a fruitful way forward from such mediation. The eucharistic encounter should be that which nourishes. An encounter that nourishes can only be achieved by adequately understanding the Eucharist when it is manifested in a gathered, celebrating community, “praying and singing.”

33 Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 7.
CHAPTER TWO

THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE EUCHARIST THAT NOURISHES AND SUSTAINS THE COMMUNITIES

Since time immemorial, coming together to celebrate the Paschal Mystery has been part of the Christian tradition. At such moments, as indicated in this chapter, Christians met to commemorate Christ’s victory and triumph over death. Praise and thanksgiving have been an integral part of these celebrations, and in them, Christ promises to be with his faithful, for he says, “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with them” (Mt 18:20 NIV). This chapter’s core is to provide a Eucharistic understanding that nourishes. It hopes to counter the challenge of the faith posed by Eucharistic deprivation amid the pandemic.

The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, recognizes that the church “has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery.”¹ Celebrating the Paschal Mystery is an act that celebrates both the victory and triumph of Christ over death. Moreover, it is an act of praise and thanksgiving to Christ for his redeeming act in history. “To accomplish so great a work”² of redemption, Christ makes himself always present in his Church in manifold ways, especially in her liturgical celebrations, ever nourishing her. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states that:

He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power, He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes, it is really Christ


² Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 7.
Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is present when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20 NIV).³

The challenge posed by deprivation is failing to recognize the various modes of ‘presences’ of Christ in Eucharistic liturgy. Shocking though it may be, we have to accept as a fact that many devoted Catholics hardly appreciate the Eucharist as an act of praise and thanksgiving, manifested in their failure to recognize anything other in the Eucharist, but the eucharistic species, as Body and Blood of Christ. On the same line, I call to question the implication of the concluding rite for the faithful. What does it mean when the liturgical celebration ends, and the community is sent out in mission? A reflection on the concluding rite, particularly on the dismissal, allows the Christian people to recognize that they are a people on a mission, i.e., stewards of all creation. Nuanced by such an understanding, authentic understanding of the Eucharist will thus not be limited to the species of bread and wine. However, it incorporates the various modes of presences of Christ in the liturgy, acts of praise and thanksgiving the faithful community is engaged in as they worship, care for our common home as prescribed in both the creation story to be stewards of creation and the dismissal rite that calls on all Christians to proclaim the Gospel by their lives.

According to liturgical theologian David Power, the Eucharist as a symbolic act can be considered at four levels of significance.⁴ Firstly, there is the symbolic significance of bread and wine as shared at a common table. The majority of

³ Ibid.

Christians have remained stagnated at this level. If not helped to outgrow it, the challenge of Eucharistic deprivation becomes a danger to faith, as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, as related to social, economic, and cultural realities; thirdly, as celebrated by a community of mutual service that overcomes social distinctions; and finally, as proclaiming and representing Christ’s saving death and abiding presence. Power insists that nothing of the meaning of the first level, the significance of food and drink, is abolished in accommodating the most profound meaning of representing Christ.\(^5\) Denis Edwards, a professorial fellow in theology and author in the same field, supports David Power’s idea. For him, we can begin our understanding of the Eucharist at the first level, but with our relationship as a community ever in mind.\(^6\) In embracing the relational dimension of the Eucharist, even though one may retain the understanding of the Eucharist at its basic level, there is a capacity to supersede it by focusing on the commonality of the meal shared. This thesis intends to pay particular attention to the relational dimension of the Eucharistic celebration. In laying such an emphasis, one realizes that if the Christian community is to achieve the “full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy,”\(^7\) appropriating the celebration as communal is mandatory.


\(^7\) Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 14.
2.1 The Manifold Presence of Christ in Eucharistic Celebrations

Christ’s presence in the liturgy is a central theme of any discussion on the Eucharist. This thesis, therefore, finds it reasonable that to build a better understanding of the Eucharist, it remains crucial to discuss modes of Christ’s presence in the liturgy and their implication on the faith of individual Christians. It was no surprise that the council fathers took up the theme of sacramental presence in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium. However, it may be surprising to think of how the council treated the topic. Rather than emphasizing the notion of “real presence in the species alone,” it was exceedingly ingenious to deal with presence in various modes, i.e., in a community gathered, praying, and singing; in the Word proclaimed and preached; in the minister of Word and Sacrament; and in the sharing of Christ’s Body and Blood. I will strive to discuss these presences in-depth in this section.

Christ in the Community Gathered, Praying, and Singing: The community is at the core of any liturgical worship. The liturgy “stands as a visible embodiment of the substantial unity or division of the hearts and minds of Christians [in a given community].”8 In Standing Together in the Community of God, Paul Janowiak insists that this unity or a lack of it need not be seen as being only among theologians and bishops, but also in the practice of the Sunday assembly, within the worshipping body itself.9 It is in this community as it gathers, prays, and sings that the presence of Christ manifests itself. If a community lacks this essential unity, its members begin to drift

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9 Janowiak, Standing Together, 2.
apart. It should always be within the community’s jurisdiction to avoid arriving at a state when the divisions or circumstances that lead to division cease to matter.

“Ceasing to matter” is like being in a venture while at the same time aloof from it. It is what the Book of Revelations refers to as being lukewarm: “I know your deeds; you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to vomit you out of my mouth” (Rv 3:15-16 NIV).

Christ is present in the sacraments, especially “under the Eucharistic species.” However, this presence in the sacraments “must be held in necessary and creative tension with the actual liturgical celebration.” The liturgy is neither a thing on its own nor a private matter; it is a collective action that involves people gathering, praying, and singing together. This mutual sharing is what Henri de Lubac calls a “real continuity.” “Real continuity” and “real presence” are like the two faces of a coin, distinct but inseparable. In the light of this awareness, one wonders where the dichotomy between “real continuity” and “real presence” arose in our eucharistic encounter. The Catholic doctrine upholds the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species, and the modern Catholic has come to know that the Eucharist finds its meaning in the community. At the same time, the Church upholds the four modes of Christ’s presence to his faithful through its Constitution on Sacred liturgy. Could not these four modes of being present to the church be “real presence” in four modes? This thesis strives to affirm this proposition. Indeed, one can emphasize one of the modes, but as the Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, insists on the

10 Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 7.

11 Janowiak, Standing Together, 3.
inseparability of the body from its parts (1 Cor 12:12-27 NIV), so can one not separate the union between Christ and his people. The assembly of the faithful is not the head of the body. And the Body does not exist without the head. The head and body, though distinct, are not separate. The two, i.e., the head and body, are united into one body, the totus Christus.

In saying, “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20 NIV), Christ is emphasizing the significance of a people celebrating together. The Eucharist is about a relationship between everyone and everything, as a sacramental people. “We receive communion as a sacramental sign that expresses the reality of our communion in the totus Christus, the fullness of Christ, the head with the members.”12 However, the pandemic challenged this togetherness. Is it possible to realize this togetherness beyond the limits of space and time? Is it possible to realize this togetherness at the level of basic units of communal living? This chapter shows that it is possible to build a better understanding of the Eucharist, even with the challenges the pandemic has brought forth. The next chapter will look at its communal dimension through the concepts of ubuntu as lived in the African family and attempts to offer practical solutions to these challenges.

Christ in the Word, Proclaimed and Preached: The Word of God is a living word. The Lukan Gospel best exemplifies this notion. Jesus is quoted as declaring after reading the text from the scroll handed to him that “this text is being fulfilled today even as you listen” (Lk 4:21 NIV). The public reading of the text acquired a ritualistic understanding. For that reason, “all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him” (Lk 4:20 NIV). In this encounter, something is happening beyond the mere

12 Ibid., 39.
reading of a static text. The text acquires new meaning in the “here and now” of the
life experience of the community. Every time the Word is read and proclaimed, new
life is breathed into it, taking shape, and forming the assembly. Therefore, the Word
of God is sacramental by its very nature in taking this shape and form. The Word
becomes not just a static word but an embodied Word. Saint Augustine defined a
sacrament as “the visible form of an invisible grace.” To be visible implies making
what is signified perceptible to human senses. No wonder, in the minds of the
reformers like Karl Barth, the Word of God, would “mean Jesus Christ present to his
people.” Without such a presence, “neither Scripture nor preaching opens towards
God’s eventful Word.”13 Or better still, as the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
asserts, Christ is present “in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy
Scriptures are read in the Church.”14

The Word, read and proclaimed in the assembly, manifests the presence of
Christ. It makes Jesus present, for Jesus is the Word incarnate. Paul Janowiak,
emphasizing this outlook, would say that “a word that is heard, believed, and
appropriated ‘renders Christ present’ and articulates the Word as a grace-filled
proclamation uttered by God precisely for us and to us.15 The essence of a sacrament
is in its capacity to create meaning. The Word read and proclaimed in a liturgical
setting is sacramental. It finds its meaning in the assembly. The Scripture, in itself,
contains gaps or blanks. If read in the absence of a context, it loses much of its

13 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 1/1, trans. G.W. Bromiley, G.T. Thomson, and Harold Knight
(Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), 208.

14 Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 7.

15 Paul Janowiak, Holy Preaching: The Sacramentality of the Word in the Liturgical Assembly
(Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000), 166.
significant value. However, when the assembly engages it in a liturgical setting, the
assembly co-creates the text, rendering it a “new hearing” and a “new meaning.”

The sacramentality of the Word has been of great concern for many, especially
since the mid-twentieth century. For example, the Second Vatican Council’s
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, made it one of its core
agendas in recognizing a fourfold ‘presence’ of Christ in Eucharistic liturgy. Despite
this, many devoted Catholics still hardly appreciate the centrality of the Word in
Eucharistic celebrations. It is, therefore, fair, and even appropriate, I think, to ask a
very similar question on the sacramentality of the Word, namely, “What do we expect
of sacraments?” and “How is this manifested in the Word?”

Thomas Long, emeritus professor of preaching at the Candler School of
Theology in Atlanta, talks of the pulpit being “a hungry place.” It is a hungry place
because many come to the assembly yearning for the word of God. Paul Janowiak, a
professor of liturgical theology at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, while
expounding on the same, reminds us that if we are to talk of the Eucharistic liturgy as
an act of praise and thanksgiving, it is at the pulpit that “a true offering of praise and
thanks takes place.” As a “hungry place,” the desire of the faithful is for an
encounter with Christ on material terms. The people of God desire what provokes a
tangible response that acknowledges and experiences their materiality. Perhaps, it is
on such grounds that Janowiak talks of the “text and the proclamation of the word in
the liturgy” as being “never static and generic, but specific, personal, and

16 Janowiak, Holy Preaching, 166.
17 Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 7.
18 Ibid., 185; Quoting Thomas Long, The Witness of Preaching (Louisville, Kentucky:
participatory.”19 The Word must be appropriated in the concrete life situation of the faithful. For, it is only under such instances that the richness and grace of God, the presence of God, and participation in divine life are made accessible to the faithful. As “the visible form of an invisible grace,” the Word becomes manifest in the liturgy. The Holy Spirit, who is ever at work in the liturgical assembly, makes this possible by making the risen body of Jesus palpable, touchable, and human.20 In the words of Mary Catherine Hilkert, the Word of God in the Scriptures “becomes God’s word when it is proclaimed and heard in the church in the power of the Spirit.”21

In any liturgical setting, the Word is not only proclaimed but it is also preached. Preaching presupposes a community. And as such, a preaching event can never be individualistic, regardless of how much an individual may personalize the experience. It is always a social event. The preaching event “is what it is, because the individual lives within and is profoundly affected by a historical community.”22 Likewise, preaching uses language, and language is never private property. Language is communal property. Appreciating the communality of the preaching event makes it possible to draw meaning from it. Culture plays a crucial role in meaning-making. The “cultural artifacts do not stay still … they exist in time, and that they are bound up with personal and institutional conflicts, negotiations, and appropriations.”23

19 Ibid., 93.


21 Mary Catherine Hilkert, Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination (New York: Continuum, 1997), 22.


Scripture always makes sense in a context, and as such, interpretations of texts will vary from one context to another. The preacher must always consider such insinuations. To think of culture as a matter of one’s affections is wrong and misplaced. You never “like it or dislike it; you exist in it, and the things you like, and dislike exist in it too.”

**Christ in the Ministers of Word and Sacrament:** The rhythm and harmony of the revelatory presence of Christ in the liturgy gather specific energy in the person of the minister of Word and Sacrament. The minister bears a sacramental sign and symbol in his /her role. In the person of Christ, he/she gathers the faithful into worship and aids in meaning-making. The minister is among the faithful as both a proclaimer and hearer of the good news. This integral relationship with the faithful enables him to serve the gathering function *in persona Christi capitis* because he acts in *persona ecclesiae*.

In *Naming Grace*, Hilkert eludes to the role of the minister of the Word as “sent to the poor not to announce good news they have not heard,” but rather, “to be among the poor to hear the good news they experience when they listen to the scriptures from the context of their lives and struggles.” Transcribing the biblical events into the life of the faithful is a common misconception many ministers of the Word tend to have. The minister’s role should be meaning-making in the light of the Scriptures. According to Karl Rahner, “the Holy Spirit runs ahead of the preacher”

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26 Hilkert, *Naming Grace*, 52.
and dwells within creation and human history, “renewing the face of the earth.”

What Rahner is telling us here is that the starting point for any act of preaching is the human experience. The Spirit dwells in creation. The Scripture should enable the faithful to recognize that Spirit dwelling among them.

Often, we have encountered persistent emphasis on a literal reading of Scriptures, as separate from the lives of those who experience them, as if the Word of God were to be discovered only in biblical passages. Others have had absolute over-reliance on commentaries by Scripture scholars. True to the fact, these sources play a significant role in understanding the scriptures and should never be ignored. However, in the first place, it is worth recognizing that the place of human experience in preaching is paramount. The homily is “not about God, but reveals God.” In short, the homily is not an academic discourse. The minister’s role is to allow God to be made manifest in the lives of the faithful. “Where was God in all of the life encounters?” is the question at stake.

It is important to realize that the goal of all preaching is freedom, wholeness, reconciliation, and human flourishing. The pulpit as “a hungry place” should never escape us. We can never close our eyes to the pains and sorrows of our people: death, disease, poverty, homelessness, among many problems and challenges that form part of human experiences. With these challenges, they come to ask, “where is God in all these?” God’s Word is creative. Are the people in the pews able to attest to it? The role of the preacher should never be that of separating the Word of God from His

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27 Ibid., 43.


29 Hilkert, *Naming Grace*, 44.
actions, for the Word brings about what it declares.\textsuperscript{30} The table of the Word leads us to the table of the Eucharist. To think of the Eucharist strictly as a meal would be misleading. The minister’s primary sacramental representation is to gather the community into communion with Christ rather than simply confecting the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{31} The whole event is sacramental, and Christ is present in and with the community at every celebration stage.

It is a misconception to think of revelation as something other, totally alien to everyday encounters. Revelation takes place in historical human experience in this world. However, it also “summons us from what we take for granted in our limited world.”\textsuperscript{32} The very structure of human experience might be described as revelatory, according to Edward Schillebeeckx, since human beings learn by a process of discovery. He locates revelation not in the transcendental depths of the human person but rather in history. Human history, he notes, always involves interpreted experience. Hilkert sees in the mystery of preaching both a proclamation of God’s Word and the naming of grace in human experience, leading her to make a very bold statement that “the Word interprets us.”\textsuperscript{33} The Word interprets the human experience. The Eucharist is a human experience relived in the here and now. In this experience, the priest acts as a minister of both Word and Sacrament. Therefore, it becomes appropriate to think of the priest as the representative of Christ in liturgical celebrations. However, just as Janowiak notes, let us keep in mind that “this way of thinking is true, as long as we

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 47.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Janowiak, \textit{Standing Together}, 151.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 49.
\end{itemize}
remember that one represents Christ by representing the church, for the church is the fundamental sacrament of Christ.”

Likewise, it is essential to note that preaching is not a matter of retelling the story of the past, no matter how creatively. Preaching always has Christ as its subject, and his fulfillment of the promise heard in these stories.

**Christ in the Sharing of Christ’s Body and Blood:** Not only is Christ present in His minister, in the assembly gathered, praying, and singing, or in the Word preached and proclaimed, but He is present, *especially under the Eucharistic species.* The presence in the Eucharistic species is called “real” not to exclude the idea that the others are not “real” too, but rather to indicate a presence *par excellence* because it is substantial. Through it, Christ becomes present whole and entire, God and human. However, the presence of Christ in this instance is not a physical presence in history or his glorified Body but sacramentally.

One of the most significant challenges among many Christians is whether the Body and Blood of Christ need to be real food. My response will be in the affirmative. Jesus himself insists in John’s Gospel that “my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink” (John 6:55), even risking the loss of those who had been close to him. Growing in a context where an invitation to a gathering usually includes being invited to a meal, the intrinsic relationship between the Eucharist and a meal may not be hard to

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perceive. Consequently, this relational dimension of sharing a meal may shed more light on the meaning of the Eucharist.

Xavier Léon-Dufour believes that the choice of bread and wine as the elements for the eucharistic meal is intentional. In the biblical world, bread stands for basic food, without which there is no life. Bread is a gift of God and is meant to be shared, above all with the hungry (Is 58:7; Ez 18:7 NIV).\(^{36}\) Just like in the incarnation, Jesus decided to be fully human for our redemption, so he chooses ordinary bread, the bread of daily life. This bread is broken and shared, a perfect metaphor for his relationship with humanity. The image of the one bread makes even greater sense when understood in the light of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, in which he says: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17 NIV). Therefore, bread as a symbol of a community is important and intentional. It is the symbol of daily sustenance.

Wine is associated with life. Again, drawing from biblical sources, Jesus, while referring to his role as the Good Shepherd, says, “I came so that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10 NIV). Wine represents God’s given abundance of life.\(^{37}\) Any complete meal always involves both eating and drinking. As Denis Edward reminds us, “Eating and drinking bread and wine together remind us of our grounding in the whole interconnected pattern of fleshly life, hunger and thirst, nourishment and refreshment.” In presenting the gifts, the presider in the Eucharistic liturgy always acknowledges the bread and wine as being “fruit of the earth and work of human hands.” The liturgy incorporates the whole of the human experience. The

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37 Ibid., 197.
bread and wine bring to mind the farmers’ hard labor in sowing, plowing, and reaping. It brings to mind the processes involved in having it in a form we can partake of as a meal and creates a sincere sense of praise and gratitude. The Eucharist relives Christ’s active engagement in human history but is also a rejuvenation of the lived experience of humanity in daily life. It is thus a synergy of both God and humankind acting in human redemption, and this symbolic exchange is well played out in the symbols of bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ. On that accord, David Power insists that “it is important that a community of Christian people receive food from a common and blessed loaf made from the soil of their land and from the toil of its inhabitants, and from a cup radiant indeed with the sun but pressed out by tired feet.”

2.2 Extra-Eucharistic Presence of Christ

This thesis uses the term “Extra-Eucharistic” to refer to instances of Christ’s presence outside Eucharistic celebrations. These instances may not be eucharistic in the strictest sense of the word but are eucharistic in their very essence. Is it possible for faith communities to experience the sacramental presence outside of the Eucharist? In this section, I will take a keen look at the Liturgy of the Hours (Christian Prayer), Lectio Divina, the Liturgy of the Word, and Catholic Charities in an attempt to extend Eucharistic presence. Such a discussion of extra-Eucharistic

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39 Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster inc., 2012), s.v. “extra”; The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “extra” as outside or beyond. The term extra-eucharistic is thus a term used in this context to refers to those instances of Christ presence to the people in prayer or worship that are not within the limits of Eucharistic celebration per excellence.
gatherings leads to the appreciation of its core goal as raising the minds of humanity to God, evoking in them holy and wholesome thoughts, helping them give thanks in time of favor, and bringing consolation and constancy in adversity.\textsuperscript{40}

The public and communal prayer of the people of God is rightly considered among the first duties of the Church. The first Christians always adhered to praying together as a sense of duty. In the Acts of the Apostles, we hear that they “remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42 NIV). These prayers grew into the Liturgy of the Hours, the \textit{Lectio Divina}, the Eucharist, and, consequently, acts of charity that arose as a fruit of their communal prayer. Christ was ever-present [and is still present] to such a community when it comes together, proclaiming the Word, singing, and praying.\textsuperscript{41} As indicated in the \textit{General Instruction to the Liturgy of the Hours}, the testimony of the early Church shows that individual faithful, by themselves and as a community, also devoted themselves to gathering for prayer at certain hours. The practice soon gained ground in various areas of devoting special times to prayer in common.\textsuperscript{42} The Scripture is full of instances at which Jesus participated in these prayers. What Jesus himself did, he also commands his disciples to do. The example and command of the Lord and his apostles to persevere in continuous prayer are not to be considered a mere legal rule. Prayer expresses and identifies the very essence of the Church as a community.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours (GILH)}, 100.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Sacrosanctum Concilium}, art. 7.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{GILH}, 1.
Of special mention is the *Lectio Divina*, which Marjorie Thompson and others define as a “traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation, and prayer intended to promote communion with God and increase the knowledge of God’s word.” In Christian tradition, sacred Scripture was always read both publicly and privately. The liturgical reading of scripture is of the greatest importance for all Christians because the Church herself first offers it, and not by the decision or whim of a single individual. However, as we have seen, private reading was also necessary for personal growth. In some way, reading tended to bear great fruition, particularly when coupled with prayer. Reading encouraged more intense devotion.

Pastoral charity is made possible through Christ’s work already in us. In the first letter of John, we hear that “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 Jn 4:16 NIV). These words of John define the disposition of the Christian faith towards charity. It is a kind of summary of the Christian experience. And as the Gospel of John indicates, what greater love can there be than to give up one’s own love for one’s neighbor? (Jn 15:13) Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He anticipated his death and resurrection by giving his disciples, in the bread and wine, his very self, his body and blood as the new manna (cf. Jn 6:31-33 NIV).

Simply said, charity is intrinsically connected to the Eucharist. Without charity, there

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44 *GILH*, 140.

is no Eucharist. And Christ is charity per excellence. Love of neighbour is thus shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by Jesus. “It consists of the fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person I do not like or even know.” This possibility can only occur based on an intimate encounter with God, an encounter that has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. This understanding of communion with Christ and one another defines the eucharist.

2.3 Becoming Part of Christ’s Integral Self-offering in the Liturgy

The law of prayer grounds the law of belief, as the dictum “lex orandi, lex credendi” affirmed. To become part of Christ’s integral self-offering, we need to testify to his presence and activities in and through the liturgy. To accomplish the work of salvation, the Church believes Christ is always present in all liturgical celebrations. The Church also teaches that the sacraments are perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to our human nature. “By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church adds that “it is principally his own Paschal mystery that Christ signifies and makes present” in the liturgy of the Church.

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46 Deus Caritas est, art. 18.


49 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1084. (Hereafter cited as CCC).

50 CCC, 1085.
The Greek word *leitourgia*, from which the term liturgy is derived, literally means “work for the people.” It is a literal translation of the two words “*litos ergos*” or “public service.” Whether we opt to embrace its connotative meanings as a “work for the people” and/or a “public service” or not, the place of the gathered Body of Christ remains to be of great significance in any liturgical setting. It is also central to liturgical worship, as articulated in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, that desires a “devout and active participation by the faithful.”

Edward J. Kilmartin talks of worship as participation in Jesus Christ’s covenant relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He emphasizes participation because it is necessary for a proper understanding of the liturgy, and it has to be active and fully conscious. Christians need to know what they are participating in, and it has to be done actively and willingly. He adds that the liturgy “proclaims and celebrates the economy of divine self-communication, indicating that participation in the Paschal Mystery involves personal relationships between Christian worshipers and the divine Persons.” He sees Christian worship as a response to love, a love that manifests itself in the Father’s gift of the Holy Spirit poured out to the Church. In backing Kilmartin’s idea, Simon Chan talks of the gift of the Holy Spirit “as a gift to the Church…[that] enables the Church to return love to the Father, through the Son.”

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51 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, art. 6.


This dynamic interplay is well manifest in the *epiclesis* during the Eucharistic celebration. I need not overemphasize the centrality of Mass in espousing liturgical understanding. Some talk of the Eucharist as being the liturgy *par excellence*, a notion I entirely support.

When we put all we have discussed in mind, Kilmartin’s notion of liturgy best fits an integrative understanding of liturgy. As Jerome Hall notes, Kilmartin talks of the liturgy as “primarily the exercise of the life of faith under the aspect of being together in the name of Jesus for the realization of communion, the sharing and receiving, between God, community, and individual, in a coordinated system of ministerial services.”54 If we take this in its strictest meaning, liturgical celebration, therefore, becomes for the worshipers an opportunity to discover themselves as members of a community who receive the meaning of their lives from the Father’s love. The celebrants support one another in faithfulness so that they can live out their whole lives. This understanding is the essence of the liturgy. It is a meaning-making event that defines our very being.

Broadly, the liturgy proclaims the sacramental life of the Church. Thomas Aquinas and Augustine emphasized that the Incarnate Word gives power to sacramental words in their sacramental teaching.55 Such a stance is acceptable to many, if not all. Likewise, the close relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Church is indisputable. While emphasizing the significance of this relationship, Simon Chan rebukes any attempt to discredit it in stating that the close relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Church should never be thought of as an invention of


Having this intrinsic relationship between the Church and the divine Persons in mind, I can confidently affirm that the divine Persons need to be present in any liturgical celebration to make it valid. This outlook conforms with the Church’s teaching.\footnote{Chan, “The Liturgy as the Work of the Spirit,” 42.} It is hardly possible to imagine a liturgy as merely a human gathering or action. Christians, as a people, depend on God entirely and are sustained by God’s presence. And from the scriptures, we hear Christ proclaim that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20 NIV). Such a proclamation makes explicit the presence of Christ in any act of worship. But since we know that the Holy Spirit is the one that kindles in us the grace to know Christ, then without too much ado, it is evident that the Holy Spirit must also be present.

Becoming integral to Christ’s self-offering in the Eucharistic celebration demands its appropriation as the triune God’s involvement in human salvation. The eucharistic celebration is a participation in the action of Christ himself, of his sacrifice for us, of his paschal meal, as shared originally with his apostles, and of his very Passover from death to life. The Holy Spirit enables it to take place. The liturgy, as a whole, provides an opportunity to make present the Paschal Mystery of Christ for a community that is celebrating it today. In Kilmartin’s analysis, “the classical Eucharistic Prayers,” taking the Roman Canon as an example, “describe the mystery

\footnote{Chan, “The Liturgy as the Work of the Spirit,” 42.}

\footnote{CCC, 1088.}
of Christian worship as participation in Jesus Christ’s covenant relationship with the Father in the Holy Spirit.\footnote{Hall, “The Mystery of Christ in Us,” 75.}

The Church, the sacrament of God’s offer of a personal relationship with humankind and of Christ’s acceptance of that offer, actualizes itself in every liturgical celebration, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist.\footnote{Hall, “The Mystery of Christ in Us,” 81; Citing Karl Rahner, \textit{The Church and the Sacraments} (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 79.} Every Eucharistic celebration makes the mystery of Christ and the Church really present. At such moments, the Christian faith experiences God’s self-communication in Jesus, whose life is the perfect revelation of God’s self and in whom God’s self-communication is perfectly accepted in human life. But we can also say that God communicates self to the world in Christ through the modalities of Word and Spirit. The Word incarnate accepts self as the Father’s Son in the Spirit. The personal acceptance by which the Father claims the Incarnate Word as his image, and by which the Incarnate Word takes himself as the Father’s beloved Son, is the Holy Spirit.

\section*{2.4 Eucharist as an Act of Praise and Thanksgiving}

The Eucharist expresses gratitude for creation, in the offering of the fruits of the earth, and for God’s work of redemption. It does this by invoking the name of Christ over the gifts. It thus confirms the doctrine of the one God creating and redeeming the world through the one Word.\footnote{See Power, \textit{The Eucharistic Mystery}, 109-10.} Prayers used in liturgical worship draw inspiration from the earliest Christian experience. The \textit{Didache} is one such example, and it can be traced to the second half of the first century. In it, we find a series of
prayers that parallel the Jewish table prayer, the *birkat ha-mazon*: a prayer of blessing for God’s holy name, a prayer that, after recalling God’s creation of all things, including food and drink, gives thanks for the nourishment given to us in Christ, and a prayer of intercession for the church that ends in a doxology. A part of this goes as follows:

And after you have had your fill, give thanks thus:
We give thanks to you, holy Father, for your holy name which you have enshrined in our hearts, and for the knowledge of the faith and immortality which you have made known through your child Jesus; glory to you for evermore.  

You, almighty Master, created all things for the sake of your name, and gave food and drink to humankind for their enjoyment, that they might give you thanks; but to us, you have granted spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your child Jesus. Above all, we give you thanks because you are mighty; glory to you for evermore. Amen.  

David Power notes that the first prayer echoes the Jewish theology of the divine name, a theology closely linked to creation. The glory of the name is made manifest in creation as well as in God’s saving acts. In the second prayer, which is also taken from the *Didache*, the link between creation and the divine name is made explicit: God is praised for creating all things for the sake of the name. The prayer moves from God giving food and drink for human enjoyment to become a thanksgiving for the nourishment of eternal life given to us in Jesus.

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62 Ibid.

63 Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery*, 84.

A eucharistic prayer, less familiar to many but of great significance here, is the anaphora of Addai and Mari. It offers praise to God for creation and thanksgiving for the work of redemption and then continues with a prayer for the church that includes an invocation of the Spirit over the bread and wine. Like the Didache, this prayer is based upon a Syriac theology of the name of God, as its opening makes it clear:

Worthy of glory from every mouth and of confession from every tongue and of worship and exaltation from every creature is the worshipful and glorious name of thy glorious Trinity, Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, who didst create the world in thy grace and its inhabitants in thy loving kindness and didst save men in thy pity and wroughtest great grace towards mortals.\textsuperscript{65}

The prayer continues by joining in praise with myriads of holy angels who “glorify thy name” and then leads into the Sanctus. There is a lovely balance in this opening prayer between, on the one hand, God’s creation of the world and its inhabitants out of compassion and, on the other, God’s Salvation and grace given to us out of divine mercy.\textsuperscript{66}

There is little of creation in the Roman Canon. In Eucharistic Prayer II of the revised Roman Catholic liturgy, creation and redemption are held together in Christ: “the Word through whom [God] made all things, whom [He] sent as our Savior and Redeemer.” Eucharistic Prayer III begins: “You are indeed holy, O Lord, and all you have created rightly gives you praise … you give life to all things and make them holy … from the rising of the sun to its setting, a pure sacrifice may be offered to your name.” And in Eucharistic Prayer IV, God is addressed as the “Source of life


[and] and have made all that is, so that you might fill your creatures with blessing, and bring joy to many of them by the glory of your light.” This brief survey of liturgical sources suggests that the memorial of the Eucharist is traditionally understood as an act of praise and thanksgiving for God’s creation. And as Denis Edwards suggests, it can be argued theologically that the “Eucharist is intrinsically a memorial of creation and redemption together.”67 This argument aligns with those of Karl Rahner, who sees creation, redemption, and final fulfillment as distinct aspects of God’s one act of self-bestowal in love.68 For Edwards, the concept of the Eucharist as keeping memorial of creation is of fundamental importance, particularly for us in this age when concern for the environment is at its peak.69

The act of praise and thanksgiving extends to other areas in our lives. God is ever engaged with creation. Jesus affirms this when he says: “My father is working until now, and I myself am working.” (Jn 5:17 NIV). The Ignatian Examen is a call to acknowledge and express gratitude to God, who is ever at work in our lives. Its essence is to achieve a more satisfying life. The Eucharist accomplishes this by building a closer relationship with Christ, who is ever-present to the faithful community. The life lived in light of the Examen may not necessarily be a better life, but it is always an “abundant life,” that is, “life to the full.” (Jn. 10:10 NIV). The Examen as an opportunity to build a close relationship with Christ may be termed eucharistic. It focuses on one’s relationship with God, with self, with a neighbor, and with the world. It is always comprehensive, for it evaluates all aspects of life.

67 Ibid., 205.


Similarly, gestures of prayer, particularly at meals times, express the Eucharist’s understanding as an act of thanksgiving. Saying of the Grace (Thanksgiving) at the time of meals unites the individual Christian with multitudes of other Christians in remembering Christ’s feeding of the community in Eucharist and throughout life. It is also an opportunity to celebrate God, thus a kind of presence and mindfulness. Any eucharistic celebration calls the faithful to remember the history of their salvation, and at meals, when they pray, they remember who provides for them. And as in the dismissal rites that send the faithful forth into a mission, prayers at meals redirect their hearts to be more sensitive to the whole of creation.

2.5 Eucharist as a Motivation for Our Concerns for the Environment

The dismissal, “ite, missa est,” in Eucharistic liturgy is of great significance for us as we look at the Eucharist as a “motivation for our concerns for the environment, [and] directing us to be stewards of all creation.”

It was initially translated in classical Latin to mean “go, the dismissal is made.” However, in common practice, according to Anscar Chupungco, it came to be associated with dispersing the faithful into mission and thus acquiring a new meaning of “go, and be a missionary,” a view he notes to have no theological foundation.

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Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’* asserts that “it is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation.”\(^{73}\) In it, grace manifests itself tangibly “in unsurpassable expression when God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures.”\(^{74}\) Irrespective of where it is celebrated, “the Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation.”\(^{75}\) Pope Francis’ assertion is very much in tune with those of David Power, who associated the Eucharist with a commitment to justice in an article written long before *Laudato Si’*. He describes the central sign of the Eucharist as “the communion of diverse members of the church in the elements of bread and wine, around a common table, sharing in the things of earth.”\(^{76}\) It is this commitment to justice that challenges our perception of the Eucharist. Is it still the Eucharist when people cannot commune at a shared table? Is it still the Eucharist when we disregard our mandate to care for each other and God’s creation? In *The Meal That Reconnects*, Mary McGann calls for a need to “identify how a renewed Eucharistic eating practice can reconnect and heal our broken relationships with the earth, human family, and God.”\(^{77}\) For, strictly speaking, that is the Eucharist par excellence, a situation that the pandemic made inviable.

In an address in 2001, Pope John Paul II said that humanity has “disappointed God’s expectations.”\(^{78}\) The remedy was an “ecological conversion,” which has made

\(^{73}\) Ibid.

\(^{74}\) *Laudato Si’*, art. 236.

\(^{75}\) Ibid.

\(^{76}\) David N. Power, “Eucharistic Justice,” 860.


humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading in recent
decades. According to the Pope, the ecological conversion would imply changing
our ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, and acting. For Christians, this conversion will
need to be deeply rooted in their life of faith. Based on the observations made so far,
the Eucharist may serve better as the source for and an expression of their ongoing
ecological conversion. An authentic understanding of the Eucharist will aid in
establishing the link between the Eucharist and the way we think, feel, and act
towards the natural world. And perhaps, it may also be the opportunity to revisit the
modes of our eucharistic celebrations to better aid in this ecological conversion.

The Genesis command, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue
it” (Genesis 1:28), may also be eucharistic. In Pope John Paul’s encyclical letter,
*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, we are made aware of the Second Vatican Council’s teaching
that “the celebration of the Eucharist is at the center of the process of the Church’s
growth.” The call to be fruitful and multiply is not just a command but also a
blessing. It is a responsibility to be stewards of God’s creation. God could have made
all creation by Himself, but he invites humanity to be part of creation as co-creators.
God invites humanity to work alongside God. The Eucharist manifests a sense of
thanksgiving and can be seen to be directly linked to the Genesis command of caring
for God’s creation.

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Relationship to the Church*, art. 21, Vatican Website, April 17, 2003, accessed March 05, 2022,
The Eucharist is also a call to embrace practices of caring for God’s earth, with, in, and through Christ. In *The Wellspring of Worship*, Jean Corbon introduces a humanity that has always been on a quest. He mentions that “we find the patriarchs constantly digging wells within the Scriptures.”81 The patriarchs searched for what matters the most and strove to ensure that they had access to it wherever we went. They acknowledged this and responded appropriately to that hunger. Facing a similar challenge thousands of years later, they asked, is it not our time to dig wells? But which wells?

The biggest challenge of our time is that we are ever in a state of denial and continually refuse to orient ourselves in the direction of the “living source.” Corbon highlights this so well: “they say that they thirst not; they say that this is not a well, that this is not water. They say that this is not a well of water as they have imagined it to be, and they say there is no water.”82 How can such humanity in a continuous state of denial be oriented to the authentic source of the living water, the wellspring, as Corbon prefers to call it? Despite being in a state of denial, humanity, irrespective of how sure of themselves they may be, “cannot but continue to be still expectant, for to stop thirsting would mean they were already sunk in the sleep of death.”83

Thirsting is our inherent attribute, placed in us by our creator, who, instead of simply waiting for our response towards him, takes the initiative to meet us wherever we are, “besides our pathetic wells.”84 It is from these pathetic wells that the journey


83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.
for authentic unity begins. From there, we may “traverse the Scriptures in search of wells and reach the Gospels. There you will find the well beside which our savior was resting, wearied by his journey when a Samaritan woman came to draw water from it.”85 Meaning is found in creating a connection between the lived experience and the Scriptures. Scripture enables humanity to come to terms with the reality of human experience. The liturgy serves to bring the two together.

The central symbols of the Eucharist, the bread and wine which become the Body and Blood of Christ, are fruits of the earth. They are simple food and drink that are rooted in creation itself. Humanity continues to thirst for God’s presence, but it never occurs to the faithful that Christ could be in creation, in the work of human hands. Striking also is our capacity to embrace the God-man in Jesus Christ. As a distinctive feature, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the eternal word — and only the word, not the Father nor the Spirit — enters on behalf of the divine Trinity into creation as part of creation. God freely and lovingly surrenders the trappings of divinity in order to become one with and part of the material world (Phil 2:6-11 NIV). God becomes creation, and creation becomes God. To better appreciate the Eucharist, we must see in the blessed sacrament the earthen, material, fragile and finite web of creation we are a part of, and God lovingly chose to enter.

Food unites. We may think of food bringing humanity into communion by sharing at a common table, but food indirectly creates what Sergi Bulgakov calls “natural communion.”86 Humanity enters into communion with other creatures, the

85 Ibid., 22.

life-giving earth, and God through food. Chinua Achebe notes that “a man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so.”87 Togetherness is all people need, but this togetherness extends to the whole creation as common members in the earth’s ecosystems and in love poured out by God in creating the universe.88 As Achebe indicates, there is more to eating than just the food, and as does Mary McGann, who calls for eating with empathy and intelligence as we discern our place in the world.89

The economy of creation and the interdependence among created beings are sustained by mutual self-giving. The Eucharist is a memorial of Christ’s self-giving. He dies that created beings may have life, and likewise, the whole event of sharing a meal implies the death of some of the creatures for the nourishment of others. Empathetic meal-sharing is always aware of the costly venture it is to have a meal. Thus, every meal should remind those partaking in it of the creatures that had to lose life that we may live and the labors of fellow humans that make it possible to partake in such a meal. A meal always calls people to be mindful. The Eucharist as a meal reminds us of the paschal mystery and that this same event is replicated in creation. Therefore, in union with Christ’s suffering, the Christian is called to care for creation. It is a call to pay attention to things that facilitate the possibility of such a meal,


88 See Fritzof Capra, *The Web of Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 34; Capra points out that ecological communities, or ecosystems, consist of organisms linked together through feeding relations.

89 McGann, *The Meal That Reconnects*, 4-5.
though at times, always taken for granted. As McGann says, being mindful enables us to realize that “the food which is the source of our creaturely health and delight is precious; it is never cheap, nor is it convenient. Rather it comes at the price of life given for the sake of a more abundant life.\footnote{Ibid.}

In the sense of gratitude and care for God’s creation, the Eucharist invites the Christian community to offer the fruits of the earth in union with Christ’s self-offering. As Christians today, we should begin with gratitude to God for the gift of Christ. In the book of Deuteronomy, we encounter the Israelites offering the first fruits of the land to God because of gratitude: “And now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, Lord have given me” (Dt 26:10 NIV).

2.6 Conclusion

Making a shift from the objectification of the Eucharist, this chapter has shown that Eucharist is innately relational. It has also shown that every element of the Eucharist points towards Christ. In Eucharistic celebration, every Christian needs to remain focused on Christ to draw greater fruition. Consequently, the chapter highlights numerous ways of Christ’s presence with the faithful. It, however, remains a challenge whether the Christian family feels and recognizes the modes of presence. As was noted earlier, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy highlights four ways in which Christ is present in the eucharistic liturgy: in the minister of the Word and Sacrament, in the Word of God proclaimed and preached, in the people gathered, praying, and singing, and in a unique way in the sharing of the Body and Blood of Christ. An overemphasis on any of these is an injustice to the body of Christ, as
shown in the chapter. Such injustice could lead to crises in the face of challenges such as those posed by the pandemic.

Moreover, the chapter indicates that this same Christ is present to his faithful in numerous other ways. He is present to those gathered in prayer: in the liturgy of the hours (Christian prayer), the liturgy of the word, *Lectio Divina*, and other forms of Christian prayers such as the Examen and prayers at meals. Christ is present and participates in Christian charity. Rather than feeling deprived of the Eucharist in moments when such encounters are not possible, the chapters offer alternatives to Eucharistic fulfillment.

And finally, drawing from the dismissal rite in the eucharistic celebration, the chapter indicates that the term “*ite, missa est*” (go, the Mass is ended) needs to be seen as a call to mission. The eucharist is a call on Christians to go out into the world and care for each other and the rest of creation. It is a call to be mindful and re-imagine how we use our God-given mandate to subdue and have dominion over created beings. The next chapter is a marriage between the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Church’s teaching on the Eucharist. In the light of these two, it attempts to provide practical solutions for greater eucharistic nourishment amid a pandemic.
CHAPTER THREE

THE WAY FORWARD: A FAMILY CHURCH ROOTED IN UBUNTU

The biggest challenge in eucharistic deprivation is in its routinization, a term that the *Merriam-Webster dictionary* defines as “reducing to a routine.”¹ Consistently missing out on Eucharistic celebrations makes eucharistic deprivation a routine. The faithful get accustomed to not participating in Eucharistic celebrations and consequently not receiving communion. Routinization can lead to marginal thinking. In a way, it has indeed led to marginal thinking. Marginal thinking, in this instance, refers to a very narrow outlook on things. Therefore, it is not strange to hear one ask: “If I do not receive daily communion, am I still a Catholic in good standing?” In making such a statement, one communicates a sense of doubt in faith that arose from the individual’s failure to receive Eucharistic communion. But it also highlights one’s understanding of Eucharistic communion.

However, routinization can also revitalize things that we often take for granted, though essential. It is like a double-edged sword that cuts both ways. Its adverse effects notwithstanding, repeatedly performing certain acts has been proven beneficial. It is common knowledge that if one desires to excel, it is necessary to practice. A eucharistic understanding that nourishes demands from the faithful a willingness to learn, unlearn and relearn. There is a need to let go of belief systems that do not help and acquire a better understanding that allows one to face whatever kind of crisis one may meet.

There is a need to re-imagine a better understanding of the Eucharist in striking a way forward. This thesis advocates for a heuristic model for its simplicity and efficiency and because it is experiential. I will draw from the understanding of ubuntu as it plays out in the African sense of the family. These two concepts are familiar to a majority of African cultures, and in particular, the people of Rodi-Kopany in Kenya, to which the thesis lays specific emphasis. I will demonstrate a close link between the concepts of ubuntu and the African sense of family and how the two play out in the lived experiences of Small Christian Communities in Kenya. Though springing up spontaneously in the African context, Small Christian Communities were also present in other parts of the world. Therefore, the thesis will draw out similarities between Small Christian Communities in Africa and those in some parts of Asia and Latin America and highlight the contribution of the family and the laity in defining the church dynamics, especially as lived out in the Small Christian Communities.

The paper, therefore, synthesizes the significant reflections in post-Synodal documents on the Church in Africa and Asia, thoughts on the extended African family, and the concept of ubuntu. Informed by insights drawn from these experiences, it shall subsequently make some helpful recommendations or provide a way forward on how these concepts and faith groups are significant in building a broader understanding of the Eucharist that can permeate the challenges posed by pandemics or other instances of eucharistic deprivation.

3.1 The African Notion of Ubuntu

The term ubuntu can be widely understood to imply human existence in its essence. It constitutes one such significant attempt at extending our grasp and
understanding of the relational idea of personhood, our connectedness as human beings, and the totality of our environment. Thaddeus Metz, a humanities research professor at the University of Johannesburg and author of numerous journal articles on many African issues, refers to *ubuntu* as a worldview that has been interpreted as giving the highest regard to relationships.²

The prevalent notion of *ubuntu* is in its collective meaning – that I am a person only through other people. However, Jonathan Chimakonan and others term this notion as a misconception.³ For them, this notion is not properly *ubuntu* but rather a better rendition of *simunye*, a term commonly used among the Bantu speakers, which means ‘we are one.’ Chimakonan argues that it is essential not to confuse the two concepts, as *ubuntu* does not deny the importance of individuals and their rights but merely emphasizes the importance of community. This notion underlines that, if well understood, a community becomes liberating in our approach to eucharistic deprivation. Chimakonan stresses that the mere fact that *ubuntu* is not equal to *simunye* is an important and under-emphasized aspect of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* values unity in diversity. The valuing of ‘otherness,’ of diversity, is inherent in an ethics based on *ubuntu*. There have to be different persons for relationships between them to be valuable and valued.⁴

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³ Jonathan O. Chimakonam and Louise du Toit, eds., *African Philosophy and Epistemic Marginalization of Women* (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Books, 2018), 43; Jonathan O. Chimakonan PhD, is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Calabar, Nigeria. He is also a Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. His area of specialty is on African Philosophy and Environmental Ethics. He has authored a number of books and written numerous journal articles on the area.

To better grasp the *ubuntu* concept, we may draw some meaning from John Mbithi, a man whose name has become synonymous with African philosophy and theology. According to Mbithi, one’s self-awareness is not formed by splitting oneself into two but rather by becoming one-in-many – dispersed as it were among those around one. In that regard, it is only in communities and not as isolated individuals that moral reflections happen. This understanding would mean that the ‘moral compass,’ understood as what gives an individual direction in ethical decision-making, is formed by the community and not within the individual. In other words, the notion of *ubuntu* is best understood in its application to ethics and morality.

However, experience has shown that humanity is not only moral but also social, economic, cultural, etc. As such, *ubuntu* applies in every aspect of human life. It is what it means to be human. Liwane Nombeko, a Research Scholar at the University of Witwatersrand, introduces us to look at the notion of *ubuntu* in a slightly different manner, i.e., in its broader application. According to her, the concept is often explained through the maxim ‘*umntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu*’ in Xhosa, which translates to ‘I am a person because of other people.’ This maxim enables us to realize that the values of community and solidarity are integral to our human identity, i.e., *ubuntu*. To be human in the African context generally implies respect for human dignity. A person with no regard for human dignity is not human and is treated like a beast and may be ostracized if it so demands. Therefore, the implication of the

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8 Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 47.
The concept of *ubuntu* is not only in its moral applications but in the totality of being human. *Ubuntu* stands for personhood par excellence. Fundamental human values such as solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity, and collective unity are all implied in the *ubuntu* concept. A common misconception is that respect in African culture is one-directional, when in fact, in *ubuntu*, respect is reciprocal irrespective of race, ethnicity, class, age, and gender. In other words, *ubuntu* requires one to respect others so that s/he too may be respected.

The notion of *ubuntu*, when practiced in the life of any given community, can be a liberating approach to the problem of eucharistic deprivation. The COVID-19 pandemic has driven humanity to extreme individuality for their own survival with little regard for others. One could indeed become isolated from human relationships due to the fear of transmitting or being infected by the virus. However, *ubuntu* challenges our human perception of survival as requiring isolation from the community. With *ubuntu*, a person is open and available to others; s/he affirms others and does not feel threatened by the health status of others. Instead, s/he strives to embrace. A person with *ubuntu* has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs to a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, tortured or oppressed, neglected, unattended or marginalized. Through *ubuntu*, we are led to recognize that human beings are only human in their interdependency with other human beings. Social belonging, mutual responsibility and service, connectedness, solidarity, caring, and sharing are all important values constituting our very being.

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9 Ibid.
Our modern-day experience of life, particularly in a capitalistic society, is that of competition with each other. An ubuntu understanding of society has had its elements of competition. However, in ubuntu, progress and success, key aspects that characterize any competition, are not meant for self-enrichment but the enhancement of society. The vulnerable, such as children, the sick, the dying, and the aged, will never be alone because ubuntu does not see them as a burden to society but rather contributors to society's enhancement by asking it to become a community of compassion. Ubuntu is the unwritten social security of societies without advanced systems of government care. A deep culture of sharing marks the ubuntu concepts from a broader perspective. It defines the way of life among most people of Africa. Compassion is not marked by how much an individual or a community has but how the community shares whatever it has, irrespective of how little it may be. Compassion is always extended to anyone, even strangers. This line of thought makes it possible for the modern society and the life of faith to draw great benefit from the concept of ubuntu. Compassion is a Christian value, but it is also profoundly or innately African. The challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that such experiences of compassion have suffered considerably in society.

The concept of ubuntu is of great significance when life is looked at in its totality. From our understanding of the Eucharistic celebration, we arrived at a derivative that the Eucharist sends Christians on a mission to care for each other and created things through its dismissal rite. The African idea of life and communal living is characterized by wholeness. There is never a dichotomy between religious life and secular life. Everything is sacred. The African worldview holds that what is perceived as either religious or secular is one thing; they are not separate. Therefore, in the spirit of the Eucharistic mission, the African will be inclined to care for the whole creation.
Mogobe Ramose, a South African philosopher, best expresses this idea of wholeness when he says:

Wholeness is the regulative principle here since what is asserted is that the single individual is incomplete without the other. It is both understood as being humane, respectful, and polite towards other human beings, which constitutes the core or central meaning of the aphorism: *motho ke motho ka batho* [a person is a person because of other people].

Luke L. Pato, a South African Anglican bishop, adds to this dialogue by arguing that true humanity lies in the network of mutually interdependent relationships between individuals, families, and the community. The African understanding of community includes people outside an individual’s immediate community. Pato articulates that a community means belonging and participating positively in activities that make being truly human possible for others. It is a dynamic relationship of existence-in-relation. To illustrate the African concept of *ubuntu*, Battle quotes Desmond Tutu as saying that “no real human being ... can be absolutely self-sufficient. Such a person would be subhuman.” He explains that humanity belongs to a network of delicate relationships of interdependence as humans. Human beings are nurtured into loving, affirming, and accepting family trends and, as such, also extend such trends to others by loving, affirming, and accepting others. As humans, we need each other, and that is the reality of the

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14 Ibid.
human experience deeply rooted in the African concept of *ubuntu*. It is the undeniable truth of life.

### 3.2 The Family in the Light of Ubuntu

In its Latin root, the word *familia*, which is commonly translated to mean “family,” has the connotation of a family that is made up of a father, mother, and children, or a household under one head, regarded as a unit. However, the American feminist scholar and theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether holds that the Latin word *familia* means something very different from the English word *family*. For her, *familia* refers to persons and things under the sovereign control of the male head of household or *paterfamilias*. Be that as it may, there is a common agreement among linguists and scholars that the term *familia* is at the root of the concept of family. In the African context, the term family is always associated with its closely correlated term, “kin” and “kinship,” denoting people who share common ties. In the contemporary modern world, the term has been broadened to include many other variations that make it too complex for a single definition to be encompassed in a single definition.

George Murdock, a renowned sociologist, describes the family as “a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least one of whom maintains a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.” Modern-day family life may throw this definition into jeopardy.

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Murdock’s description is not practical for today’s understanding. It is common knowledge that families cannot be restricted to a shared residence, reproduction, or even to the sexes of its members. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, striving to move away from defining the family according to the sociological construct, holds that the family “is the original cell of social life … the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life.”18 It is possible to define a family in terms of its functionality or fecundity, an approach the Catholic church has taken. Still, we realize that this can be too utilitarian and misses the point that the term family can be so elusive as a human phenomenon.

This paper is more drawn to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition, for it offers a more nuanced and perhaps more inclusive portrayal of family.19 It defines the family as a household. A household tends to include servants as well as kin. It also looks at the family as “a group of people united by certain convictions or a common affiliation.”20 The description includes people not related to one another by blood, marriage, adoption, and even people who do not share a household. The underlying factor that underpins this definition is sharing some form of common ties or union. In defining family as a household, Merriam-Webster Dictionary extends the notion to include human beings and animals (pets), and property as parts of the family. However, the definition does not offer any clue as to the origin and organization of the family.


20 Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. “family.”
It is, therefore, helpful to recognize that the extended African family is this present author’s deliberate choice amid many possibilities. This choice is based on a personal experience as an African, having been bred and nurtured in the context of an extended African family, and deeply convinced that such a family embodies the value system advocated for in the *ubuntu* notion of living as a human family. The modern era notion of the family can be loosely applied to different forms of social life. In this dialogue, it is necessary to avoid a restrictive understanding of family as necessitating marital bonds or having children for its recognition. Extended family means all living, consanguine kins that are closely knit together. It also implies that structurally each member can always trace his or her lineage either patrilineally or matrilineally. More often than not, the extended family includes parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, etc.21 The extended family also includes distant kin who live far away from each other for one reason or another.

The African family denotes a broader concept and meaning. As Donatus Oluwa expresses in his doctoral thesis, the family is a vast network of kinship, interrelatedness, solidarity, and communalism.22 He rightly claims that “the kinship system is like a vast network stretching laterally (horizontally) in every direction, to embrace everybody in any given local group.”23 An African family, simply understood, would mean that each individual in a given neighborhood is a brother or sister, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather, cousin or brother-in-law, uncle or aunt, or


something else to everybody else. That means everybody is related to everybody else. The kinship system also extends vertically to include the departed and those yet to be born. Oluwa further asserts that “the extended family is the bedrock of existence and sustenance.”

This understanding of the family as broad and inclusive is in line with the *ubuntu* notion. Only in terms of the Other does an individual become conscious of his/her own being and his/her duties and responsibilities towards himself and the other. The family defines this interrelatedness between people living in a given location and at times extends even beyond the boundaries of a given area to include the in-laws. It is impossible to conceive “being” in itself alienated from the extended family. To exist is to belong to the extended family. An African understands himself or herself in terms of the other. His or her existence is defined in terms of the other. And as such, the *ubuntu* maxim, “I am a person because of other people,” perfectly defines a person. Individuals are made aware of these dictates of life right from birth. Their existence is drawn from the otherness of others, particularly from the extended family. This intertwined understanding of an individual in relation to others in a community is significant in appreciating human co-existence with each other and with other creatures. If universally embraced and appreciated, this co-relation may alleviate the crises that tend to be defined by individualism or a struggle for survival and the disregard for human values. In Africa, it is not strange to hear that “it takes a village to raise a child.” The expression means that even that which may sometimes be assumed private in modern-day lived experience, such as matters that concern one’s family, is not necessarily so for most African cultures. The interrelatedness is once

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24 Ibid.
more seen as essential in the raising up of the next generation. Life is lived communally and in solidarity with others, while individualism is abhorred as it signals the breaking up of families.

It is not out of futility that the Church has tended on many occasions to associate the image of the family with the church in Africa. However, It is also important to maintain that this image of the family is not a monopoly for the church in Africa. Various communities in the world have profoundly cohesive family values. In using Africa as a prototype, we are enabled to extend this same value to the rest of the world among all peoples of every nation. Informed by the failure in the adaptation of other images of the church for the African people, the synod of Bishops for Africa insisted on a new understanding of the Church in Africa when it says, “Africans can be more easily enabled to experience and to live the mystery of the church as communion by utilizing to good advantage the African understanding of the family, especially as regards the values of family unity and solidarity.”

The thesis draws from the same image to emphasize Eucharistic communion and the care for each other that is demanded of all people as they partake in a Eucharistic celebration. In drawing from African values, the church in Africa may be aided in learning from its failures. Consequently, a remedy may be found that is “truly Catholic, truly African,” which can transcend the challenges posed by moments of deprivation.

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26 Insight drawn from Paulinus Ikehukwu Odozo, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014) in which he brings greater theological clarity to the issue of the relationship between Christianity and African tradition in the area of ethical foundations. This thesis narrows down the same concept in its application to Catholics in their encounter with Catholic liturgy.
The popes, notably John Paul II, have supported the African Church in its embrace of the image of the family for its ecclesial identity. In his apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II celebrates the fact that “not only did the synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the church as God’s family as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa.”27 He further notes that “the synod fathers acknowledged [the image of the family] as an expression of the church’s nature particularly appropriate for Africa.”28 The pope thereafter went on to urge African theologians “to work out the theology of the church as family with all the riches contained in this concept, showing its complementarity with other images of the Church.”29

This thesis calls for more theological reflection on the church as an extended family collaborating with the Universal Church. It strives to see how the African church may benefit from the richness of this image when in crisis with the rest of the world. Theological deliberations on using the image of the family in ecclesiology have been part of a continued conversation in the church. The understanding of the Church as an extended family will undoubtedly contribute significantly to deepening the faith of the people of Kenya and the rest of the world. The image will enable Africans to hear the Gospel with cultural undertones. As such, rather than contributing to moving people further away from the church, as the pandemic has done, it will promote the interrelatedness of all human beings, particularly for Christians scattered


29 Ibid.
worldwide. And according to Donatus Oluwa, this image of the extended family “will give fresh impetus to the Gospel as it will now be proclaimed within the context of an African image.”\(^{30}\) The image will make the appropriation of the Gospel message easier.

### 3.3 Ubuntu at Practice at the Small Christian Communities

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are not a new phenomenon for the church in Africa. During the 1971 Synod of Bishops in Rome, the Africans in attendance noted that Small Christian Communities already existed in Africa.\(^ {31}\) And they developed quite independently of what had happened in Latin America. One cannot say for certain where the modern groups began. They sprang up spontaneously throughout the world at roughly the same historical period by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians gather on their own initiative to form communities – usually small ones that priests and religious sisters and brothers often support. But the membership and the leadership are predominantly made up of the laity. This kind of church is a replica of the sort of church that was the only form of gathering for Christians in the early centuries. But it is not simply the repetition or a retrieval.\(^ {32}\) On that account, with deep conviction, the Small Christian Communities become the kind of church we may need to instill for modern Christians. As a church rooted in the people, it has succeeded in being faithful to its origins and interdependently interactive in the world in which it lives.

\(^{30}\) Chukwu, *The Extended Family in Africa*, 84.


A key characteristic of Small Christian Communities, as witnessed among the communities in Kenya, is its principle of the preferential option for the poor and its use of this principle as a defining factor in its operations. However, it is worth noting that poverty was not a defining factor at the inception of Small Christian Communities. Aylward Shorter, a missionary in Kenya and one of the proponents of Small Christian Communities in Africa, clarifies that “the rationale of these Small Christian Communities was not poverty as such, but the fact that they represent a given life-context within which Christians are called to live their faith.” Therefore, having a church rooted in the experience of the people it serves is paramount. The modern church seems to be in a crisis of poverty because it misses this rootedness. It would be fitting if religious practices responded to such concerns in a world surrounded by poverty, wars, diseases, and such experiences. It is only on such accord that as the world faces challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, inevitably, the same world is mandated to draw from the inspiration that made Small Christian Communities a viable option for the church in Africa and the Latin Americas in the 1970s.

The usual setting of the Small Christian Community is a home, usually comprising a dozen adults and some children. Unlike the typical worship in any Catholic liturgy, the Small Christian Community is informal. In the gathering, the members share their stories, which are sometimes personal, sometimes from the town where they live or from the places where they work. It is their social story. In light of the Gospel, they connect their stories and those in the Scriptures. These stories enable them to link up with each other and with Christ. The Word and the world are

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intertwined into a singularity, creating a livable meaning. In *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities*, Bernard Lee refers to Small Christian Communities as “centers of meaning for Catholics seeking to live their faith – to live their lives – meaningfully.”

Typical Small Christian Community meetings often move from the Liturgy of the Word to some form of table fellowship. The meeting may sometimes include a sharing of bread and cup, not Eucharist, but a table experience that remembers that Catholic culture is eucharistic, within or outside the Eucharistic celebration. As mentioned earlier, Small Christian Communities can be likened to the experience of the early Christians. The Christians here also meet in homes. The churches are more or less house churches. In fact, as Benard Lee indicates, house churches were “the normative basic unit of church life until Constantine and Theodosius gave Christianity the status of state religion in the mid-fourth century.”

The Letters of Paul the Apostle and the Acts of the Apostles, on which Africans draw great pride, form a higher percentage of the Christian Scripture, and these were written to Small Christian Communities, the house churches. However, they are not the formal SCCs as we have them today.

According to Robert Pelton of the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, Communal reflection on the Scripture is central to Small Christian Communities. A Small Christian Community may differ in kind from others. However, the activity of

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35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 7.

biblical reflection unites most, if not all of them. And for those in Africa, Small Christian Communities are a kind of extended family of Jesus. As indicated by Pelton, the commonly accepted image of Jesus is that of an “elder brother.” However, he is also the divine “ancestor,” according to a mentality that views ancestors as integral to the living family community and regards God as the ultimate ancestor and source of all beings. In the rural areas, the Small Christian Communities frequently follow family and kinship patterns. In urban areas, the Small Christian Communities stand a better chance of serving as surrogate families because, sadly though it is, family institutions and values are at a disadvantage in the urban context.

Karl Rahner rightly contends that “the church of the future will be one built from below by basic communities as a result of free initiative and association.” A review of the way of life and modalities of Small Christian Communities indicates that it is the way of worship for the modern church. Therefore, what is demanded of the church is to make every effort not to hold up this development but to promote it and direct it on the right path. And as we have seen, Small Christian Communities, unlike the institutional church presented to the African people by the missionaries, emerged from below. The profound interrelatedness that Small Christian Communities have with the family and the common bond manifested in the understanding of family in the African church rooted in the ubuntu concept makes it the viable church amid crises such as those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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38 Pelton, *Small Christian Communities*, 36.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

Living the *ubuntu* experience is a notion that has been propagated by many African leaders, both religious and secular. Uniquely, the African church is exceptionally gifted in living the *ubuntu* experience. It is not only a notion propagated in theory but that which is deeply rooted in the cultural dynamics in every part of Africa. The *ubuntu* concept informs the family structures. It is on such accord that Desmond Tutu, the celebrated archbishop from South Africa and renowned pan-Africanist, declares:

Somewhere deep within inside us, we seem to know that we are destined for something better. Now and again, we catch a glimpse of the better thing for which we are meant – for example, when we work together to counter the effects of natural disasters and the world is galvanized by a spirit of compassion and an amazing outpouring of generosity; when for a little while we are bound together by bonds of caring humanity, a universal sense of *ubuntu*, when victorious powers set up a Marshall Plan to help in the reconstruction of their devastated former adversaries; when we establish the United Nations Organization where the peoples of the earth can parley as they endeavor to avoid war; when we sign characters on the rights of children and of women; when we seek to ban the use of antipersonnel land mines; when we agree as one to outlaw torture and racism. Then we experience fleetingly that we are made for togetherness, for friendship, for community, for family, that we are created to live in a delicate network of interdependence.\[^{42}\]

Tutu envisioned what humanity needs most in a moment of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic is only one such instance. At such a moment, the human sense of interdependence needs to manifest itself the most. The whole idea of the *ubuntu* concept is that we are “bound together by bonds of caring humanity,”\[^{43}\] as Tutu expresses. However, such a bond seems not to have been explicitly conveyed during the pandemic. Faith manifests itself better in charity, i.e., in caring for each other, which was challenged during this health crisis. In the event of a missing


\[^{43}\text{Ibid.}\]
manifestation, one is drawn to question the practicality of such a faith, let alone its existence. Therefore, the experience encountered during the pandemic and its aftermath provides grounds for doubts in faith among the Christian community.

3.4 Insight from Inculturated Practices in Asia and Latin America

This chapter’s deliberations based on the *ubuntu* concept and the extended African family have shown that a church deeply rooted in family values as informed by *ubuntu* is the way forward to appropriate the Christian experience in Kenya. The *ubuntu* concept embraces a relationality that though informed by family ties, extends beyond the limits of family ties to welcome the stranger. The Kenyan church does not exist in isolation; it is part of the universal Christian body. As the way forward for the church, the local church must perceive its relationality in terms of the universal church. Christian humility bids the African church to recognize that the values espoused by *ubuntu* and family life are not only African but are universally human. However, such values must be grounded in a context and informed by a given people’s cultural dynamics to be human. Kenya provides such cultural dynamics with the appreciation of a need to build its grounding based on the experience of other cultures.

The church in Asia and Latin America can be singled out as practical examples of churches that have strived to be relational and informed by the values of the local people. Encountered in these churches is the greater involvement of the laity. These churches are not only for the people but are churches with the people. Despite the positivity accrued to Asia and Latin America, the thesis recognizes that these areas also have limitations. One cannot easily transplant experience in one context into another. Like in Africa, it is also clear that Asia or the Latin Americas do not
constitute a single cultural unit. However, in the light of these dynamics, the experiences of the people in these areas provide entry points into the kind of church we want.

The Vatican II’s pastoral constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes) talks of “the joys and the hopes, the grieves and the anxieties of the [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, [as] … the joys and hopes, the grieves and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”\textsuperscript{44} The kind of church that meets the demands of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and meets other similar challenges in the modern church demands that it be rooted in the existential situation of the people. Such a church must be “truly linked with [humankind] and its history by the deepest of bonds.”\textsuperscript{45}

Perhaps, a genuine response will be to recognize that the church as we have it today started its first stage in the Graeco-Roman world in Western Europe and the Middle East. There, Duraiswami Simon Amalorpavadass, an Indian theologian known for his contribution to inculturation and interreligious dialogue, points out that “the spirit of the Gospel permeated the cultures of the place, transformed and enriched them by giving them new impetus, new meaning, new orientation, and new possibilities of expression.”\textsuperscript{46} Amalorpavadass rejects the existence of anything one


\textsuperscript{45} Gaudium et Spes, art. 1.

may call “the Christian culture.”  

47 For him, the Christian culture is the culture of Western Europe or America. However, this is not in their modern or latest forms but in their most anachronistic, decadent, and degraded forms.  

48 Clinging to such a culture will be to miss the point, for these practices that modern-day Christians in Africa hold as inviolable have been rejected even in the mentioned places (i.e., Western Europe or America). And so, he proposed a localized outlook to the Christian experience based on the Indian culture. But “is there anything we may unambiguously call Indian culture?”  

49 Amalorpavadas asks. Therefore, the same challenge persists. However, these challenges should not push the Christian faithful in Africa into despair or disbelief. There is always a light at the end of the tunnel; in hope, the church strives on.

The Church in Africa can draw great insight from India. Like India, Africa cannot talk of the African culture generically. Even if we narrow it down to the level of a country, there does not exist such a thing as the Kenyan culture. The African or Kenyan culture(s) are not one but multifarious; the cultural differences between regions are significant. The solution to the Kenyan crisis of Eucharistic deprivation can only be arrived at by asking fundamental questions about the people's life experiences. The Indian church recognized a need for a local church based on the culture of its people. The culture of the people in India, like anywhere else, is not static and closed. A church based on the culture of the people does not thrive only on preserving and perpetuating an ancient heritage. The Indian Church had (and still has)

47 Amalorpavadas, "Indigenization and the Liturgy of the Church," 164.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.
to be a living and dynamic reality. It had to be a Church open to all influence and contributions assimilating specific values and rejecting others. Likewise, the Kenyan Church has to be this kind of church that can filter and select what values to appropriate for itself and what values to reject. Authentic eucharistic understanding must be deeply rooted in the cultural values of the Kenyan people. Amalorpavadas indicates that to achieve indigenization in the face of the multiple cultural dynamics of India, the Church, though modern, had to “remain wedded to ancient religious values of the people.” It has to revere and appropriate the traditions while at the same time looking to new ways of responding to current issues.

Appropriating the church for a given people demands that the church considers all the realities that constitute human existence at any given time. These realities shape the lives of societies and nations, which mark the world’s history. The Indian Church, just like the Kenyan Church, is a church faced with lots of socio-economic challenges. There are the problems of hunger and disease, ignorance and illiteracy, unemployment and frustration, struggles of men and women for liberation from all the forces of slavery and alienation, wars and world peace, social justice, and the integral development of humankind, contemporary culture, and its all-pervading effects. The only solution to these challenges is “solidarity [among people] and involvement in all issues and problems, and entry into the dynamism and adventure of human history with all that they imply, and in all that they demand.” Many in the Kenyan situation felt that the church was not so present to them at their moment of

50 Ibid., 165.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.
greatest need. Chapter one indicated that the decline in faith was made manifest through the reduction in the reception of the sacraments and low morale among both the clergy and the people. However, as the paper indicated, the presence of Christ is manifested everywhere in humble service as a testimony to the Gospel and Kingdom values. A Eucharistic understanding that nourishes should enable this understanding to become more explicit in the life of the people.

Routinization marks the experience of many Christians. From the Indian church, it is clear that it is not enough to announce the Word, call people to faith and conversion, gather the believers for worship in the celebration of the Eucharist, and form them for a life of witness and service in charity. But at every stage and in every form of ministry, the Church must adapt herself to her country and region, to the milieus and traditions, to the forms of cultural and religious expression, to the present concerns of contemporary society.53

Some key adaptations have defined the form of worship in the contemporary Indian Church. It has strived to create an Indian atmosphere in worship through postures, gestures, forms of homage, silence and songs, objects and elements used in the service, and such things.54 Embracing such an approach is practical for any church anywhere, for it draws from the affective, embodied aspects of the person and the community.

53 Ibid., 166.
54 Ibid.
The elements witnessed in India were also replicated in China, Vietnam, and Korea. The Chinese Rite Controversy and the Roman position regarding ancestor worship strikingly stand out in China. In this sector, the relationship between Rome and the churches in China was often tested, and the church’s nature as *communio ecclesiarum* forced to hang in the balance. The lesson learned in this crisis was that decisions could not be made without serious consultation with the Chinese Church and Chinese Christians. It is also clear that a certain degree of autonomy of the local churches is necessary if the Church is to thrive and if the people have to feel integral with the universal Church.

China has heavily influenced Vietnam, primarily through its Confucian culture, an influence that is extended to Korea and Japan. This influence is evidenced or made more visible, particularly in the cult of ancestors. The Chinese Rite Controversy and the Roman position regarding ancestor worship affected Vietnamese Catholicism. However, one can distinguish between the two in terms of their founding influencers. Among the Chinese, these were the missionaries, and for the Vietnamese, the local bishops. In these, I draw three insights: (1) Inadequate knowledge of the local culture is potentially very dangerous, (2) rivalries among the parties involved can be harmful to the process of inculturation, and (3) a healthy communion ecclesiology for inculturation is essential. The Vietnamese Church attributes its success to inculturating the veneration of the dead in the attempt to

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57 Phan, *In Our Own Tongue*, 122.
observe these conditions/insights for an integral evangelization. In an African Church for the African people, it should be the Church’s role to define its proper way. However, it is also safe to conclude that liturgical inculturation is never a simple matter of appropriating rituals, sacred texts, and religious symbols of non-Christian religions for Christian use. It is not a matter of uprooting practices from one culture and transplanting them elsewhere. Instead, liturgical inculturation must not be carried out apart from ongoing interreligious dialogue and the shared work of integral liberation. Pope John Paul II best indicates this:

Liturgical inculturation requires more than focusing on traditional cultural values, symbols, and rituals. There is also a need to take account of the shifts in consciousness and attitudes caused by the emerging secularist and consumer cultures which are affecting the Asian sense of worship and prayer. Nor can the specific needs of the poor, migrants, refugees, youth, and women be overlooked in any genuine liturgical inculturation in Asia.

There are lots of similarities between African and Asian experiences. Looking up to Asia as an elder brother, the African church can draw lots of insights that will aid it in appropriating the specific values of the Christian experience. Language is core in defining a people, and this is well brought out by Jacob Kavunkal, who states that “in contrast to its counterparts among whom the language of superiority, triumphalism, and exclusiveness is a defining identity, the Asian church is identified by a language of relatedness, service, dialogue, and harmony.” The ubuntu concept that is deeply African emphasizes this same relatedness, service, dialogue, and

58 Ibid., 127.


harmony. The African Church can draw from its own sources to achieve a Eucharistic experience that is truly a communion. The Asian church draws more on its pastoral experience than theological orthodoxy. By focusing on context and people, one becomes aware that the challenges faced are not unique to oneself but is shared among other churches. Its solution should also be shared, implying a need for dialogue with the people (especially the poor) and various religions and cultures. In Asia, the local church is essentially a communion, rooted in the Trinitarian image it takes for its identity. 61 It is a communion among the Asian bishops and, through the bishops, the Asian Churches. It is a communion strictly based on the experience drawn from the people and context of Asia. But the local churches are also related with the Universal Church in Rome through the See of Peter, who serves as a symbol of its universal sense of unity.62 The Church in Asia stands out as a church deeply interested in every dimension of human experience. It is a church that focuses on a people marked by a diversity of beliefs, cultures, and socio-political structures, i.e., the church as such embraces the epitome of unity and harmony, both in the individual and in the society as a whole. The Asian Church is not merely church-oriented but could be defined as being world-oriented, in the sense that it opens itself up to a broader perspective that transcends its own limitations. The Asian church is holistic in that it has as its object the whole realm of human experience.63

Like the Asian church, the African church can draw great insights from the Latin American Church. The insights are well manifested, particularly in the role


62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.
played by popular religions and the family, its observance or adherence to the sacraments irrespective of the social contexts of the people, and the role played by the Small Christian Communities, which, as mentioned earlier, as they were springing up in Africa, the same was happening in Latin America. The Church in Latin America is built based on theology from below, i.e., of the suffering and oppressed people. Clodovis Boff emphasizes “treating the poor as a *locus theologicus*” for it to be liberation theology.\(^6\) Boff’s general definition of liberation theology defines the Church’s experience in Africa and Asia, considerably characterized by issues of oppression, poverty, and diseases, and currently striving to uplift itself from the aftermath of slavery and colonization. This thesis uses the terms Hispanic or Latino, terms commonly used interchangeably to refer to the Latin American people.

The striking feature of the Latin American church is the element of relationality. Relationality, as indicated before in this paper, is also profoundly African. By drawing from the similarity of these experiences, meaning can also be achieved, and as such, the void created by Eucharistic deprivation is filled. The element of relationality in the Latin American church is made manifest in the sense of it being familial. Worship involves the whole extended family, which plays a crucial role in determining its core characteristics. The family determined the date and time for celebrations. Children who required oversight and care had to be brought to Church because the family needed to be together, making them vital participants in the Eucharistic celebration. This element of togetherness is still evident among

Latinos, irrespective of the very apparent individualism in the modern-day Church. In *La Vida Sacra*, theologian Eduardo Fernández outlines this familial relationship as to why Hispanic Catholicism could sustain itself even when there was distance between itself and the official Church. Fernández highlights that “within the individual family there would be home altars, and in the Latin American villages that had a familial structure, there were processions and various public religious devotions.” The familial bond was not just within the Catholic church, but its strong emphasis was retained and played a significant role even when Hispanics converted to Protestantism. The latter focused on the laity and individual’s life transformation. Fernández further indicates that Protestant churches’ emphasis on the role of the laity, coupled with family ties, was able to have a better hold on many Latinas/Latinos.

In reality, many Hispanics do not go to church or receive the sacraments regularly. Yet, they can be very insistent on having their children baptized in the church. Hispanics also want to be married by a priest, and they want to be buried with the blessing of the Church. However, the same Hispanics may not like the obligation of public religious practice. Issues of Eucharistic celebration, strictly identified with the Mass, have been of great concern. As highlighted in Chapter one, religious gatherings were strictly forbidden during the pandemic, and as a consequence, many Christians encountered a crisis of faith. The faith of the Latinos is not necessarily measured by Mass attendance. The Hispanic experience indicates that other


67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 11.
parameters can be used as measures of faith. People still find it essential to have their children participate in the sacraments. They desire to receive Christian burial for themselves and their family members when they die. Therefore, as Fernández indicates, “for a Hispanic to say, ‘I am a Catholic but do not go to church’ does not need to imply a lack of reverence for or a sense of alienation from the church.”

In comparison to the Latin American church, the African church should, above all, thrive based on its diversity. It is hardly possible to speak of the Latino church as one bloc. The issue is not primarily language. Therefore, in bringing all the Latinos together, one realizes that all these diverse people retained a certain element of their cultures in worship expressed in the liturgical rituals and religious expressions that form part of their liturgy. There was a certain degree of difference between a wet and a dry Mass. Even when people could not participate in the liturgy, the “dry” Mass, i.e., one celebrated by a layperson, remained core, demonstrating a clear example of popular religion.

Popular religion, therefore, is an expression of inculturation, a privileged one indeed. It deals with religious expressions and values, criteria, conduct, and attitudes that spring from the Catholic doctrines played out within a cultural matrix. It is made out clearly that popular religion should not be equated with certain practices or devotions, for it provides a structure of meaning for those who are dominated by social order, not their own. The notion “popular” is not because it is affirmed by many but because it originates from the people, i.e., those dominated by the social order. Fernández indicates that popular religion “is both the context for the celebration of the

69 Ibid.
Hispanic sacramental liturgy and an authentic source of belief.”⁷⁰ In these “devotions,” the Christians find an authentic tradition of the holiness of materiality and the human body. Indeed, sacraments would have no basis if not because they make the Christian experience tangible. Fernández adds that for Christians, “the most spiritual of realities can only be experienced or known in and through the materiality of their bodies.”⁷¹ Of even greater significance is the role played by popular religion in enabling self-identity. It can be seen as a kind of liberation. To highlight this point, Eduardo links popular religion to providing a structure of meaning for those dominated by a social order, not their own.⁷² In giving and deriving meaning from the cosmic or created world, one is therefore enabled to draw a kind of intertwined relationality that makes it hard to isolate oneself from the rest of creation. Instead, one builds a greater appreciation of created things. As an act of thanksgiving for creation, popular religion becomes very eucharistic. Therefore, the African Church can draw great inspiration from the Hispanic popular religiosity.

Of significant influence for the African church, women play crucial roles in the Hispanic culture. They are the keepers of tradition and Hispanic culture. They also play the role of passing on that culture to later generations, for they had a significant role in the education and upbringing of the children. Women had key roles in constructing home altars and preparing meals, especially meals served to people in connection with various rituals of popular religion. These popular religions remained very significant in defining the modality of worship, an item that has enabled the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 4.


⁷² Empereur, La Vida Sacra, 5.
Latino Church to flourish today. This role played by women is still of great significance to the modern Church, and as such, women can be of significant influence in defining the future of the church.\textsuperscript{73} On the same issue, but in a different context, the final document of the Amazon Synod calls for a need to listen to women's voices, consult them, and have them participate in decision-making.\textsuperscript{74} Therefore, such a global and united cry for an inclusive church is not new. In fact, it is of great interest to/for the African church, which predominantly comprises women and children. The Church cannot neglect these voices and insights if it is to thrive.

Culturally organic ways of communal gathering are also vital. In this light, the role of \textit{palaver} in African culture cannot be overemphasized. The \textit{palaver} is a custom of meeting, creating, and maintaining social links. It is at such meetings that the community resolves issues affecting it. People tend to share food and drink at such gatherings, a communal meal. Such meetings were also a characteristic of the Hispanic community. The kitchen table is seen as an apt symbol of how familial patterns are operative in the lives of Hispanics. People planned community celebrations around the kitchen table, prepared for certain domestic forms of prayer, offered counsel to those in need, and generally exchanged conversation. The kitchen table, thus, becomes the \textit{locus} of deep interpersonal relationships that binds the community together.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 37.


\textsuperscript{75} Empereur, \textit{La Vida Sacra}, 36.
3.5 Conclusion: Channeling a Way Forward

This thesis has indicated that the family rooted in *ubuntu* is the way forward towards a Eucharistic church that nourishes. It draws its thrust from the broader understanding of family. This understanding of the family is diminished when limited to a family comprising only a father, a mother, and children instead of all kins and even non-blood residences of a particular locality. It thrives in the spirit of relationality as espoused by *ubuntu*. The *ubuntu* concept allows for both horizontal and vertical relationships to be maintained. At the horizontal level is the human relations among the living, in their care and concern for each other. And at the vertical level is the relationship with the divine, with ancestors, the living dead, and the unborn. The thesis has also indicated that relationships are not restricted to human beings but extend to all created things, united in the spirit of interdependence. God has mandated humanity with the responsibility to care for and be custodians of creation. A broader understanding of the Eucharist insists that it is not only the Eucharistic species that may be termed eucharistic. But Christ is sacramentally present in other modes that manifest the real his presence, such as the people gathered praying and singing, the Word of God proclaimed and preached, and the minister of Word and Sacrament.\(^7\) The thesis further indicated the presence of other eucharistic devotions such as daily prayer or even acts of praise and thanksgiving. Caring for creation, for example, is an act of praise and thanksgiving to God for the various gifts to humanity.

This chapter drew from the affective dimension of transmitting the Gospel message by building a profound correlation between the Eucharist and family ties,

\(^7\) *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 07.
*ubuntu*, and Small Christian Communities. This affective dimension is significant in its capacity to enable appropriation of the Gospel message and, consequently, the whole Eucharistic celebration. The challenge posed by COVID-19 can be narrowed down to limitations in any given population appropriating the Gospel message. Using profoundly African images enables Africans to appropriate the Gospel message. And as indicated, the idea of the extended family is not a monopoly of the African people. Therefore, the benefit can be extended to the universal church by using such images.

This chapter also emphasized the spontaneous springing of Small Christian Communities. Papal documents and reflections of theologians have tended to highlight the family as the domestic church. The basic communities or Small Christian Communities are manifestations of this domestic church because Small Christian Communities in Africa are predominantly made up of members of a particular family. If humanity is to live their Church experience as a family informed by the *ubuntu* concept, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic that restricted public gathering ceases to be a threat to the Christian community. This understanding informs the basis of this thesis.

Moreover, the same thesis has indicated that leadership in such meetings predominantly comprises the laity, supported by priests and religious brothers and sisters. The laity also has played crucial roles in defining the church in Asia and the Latin Americas. The African church can draw insights from such churches toward a eucharistic communion for and by the people. In particular, the Kenyan Church can more strongly appraise the dedicated service of lay catechists. Pope Francis, while recently instituting the ministry of Catechists, refers to the ministry of Catechists in the church as “an ancient one… [that] may be traced back to those “teachers”
mentioned by the Apostle in writing to the community of Corinth. As mentioned in Chapter one, many regions experience a shortage of priests. The need for priests and acute poverty can be detrimental to living as a eucharistic church. The Catechists are thus the visible image of the church available to people in many places in Africa. They teach and preach, prepare people for the sacraments, preside at liturgical gatherings, and are the administrators of sub-parishes or mission stations that are located miles away from the parish. Pope Francis has continuously advocated for a more intentional formation of Catechists. This thesis embraces this as a way forward. The church of the future is from below, a church of the poor. An intentional effort should thus be made to support it.

The central argument throughout this work is that in the face of Eucharistic deprivation, as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the extended family nourished by the concept of ubuntu becomes the face of the church towards a Eucharistic understanding that nourishes. Many people could not build a link between their traditionally held opinions on faith and worship and the near encounter of rejection and alienation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, they were adversely affected. This effect has been manifested through reduced participation and attendance in church activities.

The thesis, therefore, explored insights drawn from the experience of the majority of Christians in Rodi-Kopany, Kenya, in dialogue with the Catholic Church’s teaching on the Eucharist to build a broader understanding of the Eucharist. The thesis also explored a deeper understanding of the concepts of ubuntu and family, as lived by the people of Africa, to build an image that can be extended to the broader Christian community. Drawing from the encounters of inculturation in certain parts of Asia and the Latin Americas, the thesis affirmed that it is possible to broaden our understanding of the Eucharist and that such a broadened understanding meets the threshold demanded in eucharistic encounters irrespective of challenges. The churches in these areas (i.e., Asia and Latin America) have a great history rooted in inculturation and Liberation. The church in Africa, striving to affirm itself amid various challenges such as the pandemic, poverty, and religious intolerance, can benefit significantly from the experiences in these churches.

Specifically, this thesis has singled out the Small Christian Communities to show the practicality of a Church based on the concepts of ubuntu and family. Small
Christian Communities arose spontaneously in both Africa and the Latin Americas at around the same time, perhaps due to the unique experiences of poverty and oppression. Unlike the Eucharistic liturgy, which tends to be centered on the availability of the priest, the laity predominantly lead Small Christian Communities. And as the thesis has indicated, a Eucharist centered on human relationships, communion, and the people of God ‘gathered, praying, and singing’ is a Eucharist that can be lived and celebrated under any circumstances. Therefore, pandemics or wars, poverty, marginalization, or even the scarcity of priests, may not have such an adverse effect on the faith of the people and, to some extent, may become inconsequential.

The thesis challenges the conventional understanding of the Eucharist. It embraces inculturation by drawing insights for African communities from various cultures, i.e., those of Asian or Latin American origin. But notably, it draws insights from the African concepts of ubuntu and the extended family to make the Christian experience “palatable” for the African people. “Fully conscious and active participation in the liturgy” appeals to the heart. Using African images makes it easier for the Gospel message to take ground on African soil with the cultural dynamics of the African people. This thesis strives to facilitate the appropriation of the Christian experience by enabling a capacity to counter the challenges of crises in faith through enhancing a better and more liberating understanding of the Eucharistic. It uniquely contributes to promoting resistance to such crises in faith. Crises are not a one-time experience, and therefore, this thesis is a work in progress. It opens an arena of continued dialogue on the challenges posed by Eucharistic deprivation and how to handle the inevitable crises that will face Christian communities of faith will meet.


Hermeneutic Mediation – Understandings of the Eucharist that Can Nourish and Sustain Communities


General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours (GILH).


https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html


Practical Mediation – The Way Forward: A Family Church Rooted in Ubuntu


Chukwu, Donatus Oluwa. “The Extended Family in Africa as a Model for The Church: Towards an Ecclesio-Missioncentric Theology of Inculturation for


