

TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

AUTHOR: ENHART MPETE. I.C

MEALS IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

AN INVITATION

TO

"DINE IN THE KINGDOM."

Moderator

REV. FR. AELRED LACOMARA, C.P.

FEBRUARY. 2003

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This long essay is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, religious studies

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family who began this good work in me by bringing me up in Christian faith. Particularly I want to dedicate it to the family members who passed away at the moment when I began working on this long essay. They shared with me their love and care and now God has called them to his kingdom to share with Him into eternity. They were source of inspiration to me with their words of encouragement and good examples of their family life.

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I owe debt of gratitude to my friends, particularly Joseph Mwaura of the Marianist Community for his positive and friendly support. And to all my friends and members of the Rosminian International House of Formation in Ngong, I say thank you for your support during this work.

DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that the material used in this long essay has not been submitted for any academic credit in any other institution or university. Everything has been done as required by the academics.

All sources have been cited in full.

Signed.....Enpete.....

ENHART MPETE I.C.

Date: 7/2/03

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college Supervisor.

Signed.....Aelred Lacomara, C.P......

FR. AELRED LACOMARA C.P.

Date: 7/2/03

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Meals are a common feature in Jesus teaching as presented by Luke. They demand a response from those who partake in these meals. The response at times may be bitter, but knowing the greater good, Jesus invites people to these meals. They call for conversion and a turn towards something greater than mere eating. Jesus in Luke's gospel uses meals to convey and show us the way to the kingdom of God, a kingdom that is compared with a wedding feast.

This is an artistic creation of Jesus because meals speak to human persons in a profound way and catch human attention more easily and allow us to reflect from our ordinary things, something that will be of lasting benefits.

'Dining in the kingdom' may seem strange or inappropriate, because it looks unrealistic from the point of view of the reality of hunger and poverty in most of our societies today. We are not saying that people should go hungry in order to come to the knowledge of the kingdom, but it is a chance to make a 'leap' to that level of thinking. In the meals, Jesus declares his forgiveness to those who from a social view point are considered out of the community, and also invites those 'righteous' men to a change of attitude because they thought of themselves as having plenty to eat and neglected those who went without food. Jesus transforms these moments to the level of God's dealing with people and how we should treat each other as we journey towards Him. We may say that all are in need of 'eating' at different levels.

The main theme of meals in Luke's gospel deals with the attitude of both the host and the guests during meals. The behaviour of each is in itself an invitation and a challenge.

This essay is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with an overview of the biblical understanding of meals. It looks at meals from the Hellenistic point of view and their development into the Jewish culture, Old and New Testament. Also we try to see how meals are in Luke's Gospel. In chapter two we probe into the Lucan use of meals and how they lead us to the understanding of the journey we are to undertake towards the great celebration in the kingdom of God. Here a number of meals are highlighted to help us reflect on what they ask of us and how they invite us to that great banquet. Coming to the third chapter the interest is more towards a pastoral oriented understanding of meals; particularly focussing on the African values related with meals and how an African Christian can relate these traditional values to a greater appreciation of our celebration of Eucharist. This part is a personal reflection. Hopefully this will provide a good approach to the invitation 'to dine in the kingdom' with God. God has prepared the meal already. He is there waiting for his people to come and join him in the celebration.

Chapter I

Biblical Background of Meals

1.1 Introduction

The whole essay is about meals. Meals related to their cultural background, their geographical area, social-political relationships and their basic religious affiliations. Meal touches all these areas of human existence, but the diversity of these meals is as wide as humanity itself. But at least there is one common activity to all humanity namely, “human beings eat to live”¹ Regardless of what they eat and how they eat; all human beings eat to live and to be part of social political and religious groups.

In this chapter we want to look at the biblical background of meals. We wish to move from this point of view to a better understanding of meals in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospel of Luke. We take up this approach because we believe that meals as we have them in the secular sphere have much to contribute to the understanding of meals in the bible and that “meals embody, translate and

¹ Gillian, F.H., *Meals*, In: Metzger, M.B – Coogan, D.M., eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, New York 1993, p. 601.

reinterpret scriptures”² This is indeed what meals do in the Gospel of Luke. It is quite interesting to notice how the idea of eating runs through the whole bible from the garden with the first parents of all humanity until today. “Biblical meals, hence, express an intensely dialogical and historical view of religious understanding, in which human response is an approach to the divine status of the original revelations.”³

Jesus gave himself up at a meal. As we will see, in the next chapters, this kind of self-giving is of the highest level of love and hospitality and it opens to new horizon, a horizon of divine nature. The prevailing culture of Jesus’ time emphasized the importance of meals and they had them for different occasions and purposes. Through these meals, many things were done and taught. Jesus grew up in this environment, but the meals especially as we will see in the Gospel of Luke are quite unique and they lead us to a higher understanding of the whole communion with God. They do not remain within the limits of the culture of the particular people.

Jesus is the fulfilment of the promise of the heavenly banquet. In order to announce and prepare people for that invitation, the use of meals was inevitable. He uses eating moments to disclose and prepare humanity and welcomes them to share ‘the beyond’ of simply eating as a social aspect.

This first chapter unfolds briefly the meaning and implications of meals in Hellenistic culture, in Jewish culture, in the Old Testament, in the New Testament and in the Gospel of Luke itself. In all these we see variety of food and eating

² Metzger, M.B – Coogan, D.M., eds., *The Oxford Companion To The Bible*, New York 1993, p. 506.

³ Ibid.

manners, which in one way or another influenced Jesus in his use of meals in his mission of leading people towards the kingdom of God.

1.2 Meals in Hellenistic, Greco-Roman culture

So much can be said about meals in this particular society. But one of the remarkable aspects of meals in the Hellenistic culture is the social status of the people at the meals. To know how important or less important a person was, for the Greco-roman, the position one took during meals could indicate. This was determined by the position one holds in the society. For example a rich person or a prominent individual could recline next to the host on the right hand side. This straight away meant that the poor and the less fortunate in the society had no room to dine with a particular group of people. This is what Pharisees never understood when Jesus invited or told them to invite those whom the society rejected; people who had no position in the society at all. Hellenistic meals concentrated much on the status of the people and not so much on dietary laws. What this meant was that, the poor, the lame, the crippled of Jesus' time had no place in this society when it came to meals. It was inconceivable to the Greco-Romans to see such people reclining on the right hand side of the host. If they did so it meant that they had much to share with the host. The immediate example is the beloved disciple who reclined on the right side of Jesus and he had the opportunity to ask Jesus the one who would betray him. He had an opportunity to listen to Jesus closely and share it with Peter and the rest. "Naturally one invited his friends, and rich neighbours to a banquet; thus he would be sure of receiving an invitation in return."⁴ We see from that cultural background that some aspects of meals had begun losing their meaning. Hospitality

⁴ J.F. Ross, *Meals*, **In:** Thomas, S.K. – John, H.G. – May, S.T., eds., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of The Bible* Nashville 1962, p. 316.

had become a matter of prestige and search for reward. Abraham and Sarah as we will see in the Old Testament, gave a meal to unknown visitors unconditionally, a true hospitality, which rewarded them a hundred times (Gen 18:1-15). This is an issue and a big question for us today to reflect. When we think of the sort of people we invite to dine with us in our homes, communities, what sort of criteria do we use? It is good to reflect on our day-to-day life. Who sits in our dining rooms and shares meals with us? We will see later in chapter three on the aspect of a call to invite others, especially from the African point of view.

Generally, Hellenistic culture had big banquets, especially those held for the kings. It was in such like meals that the kings could decide to award those who work in his empire for the food they prepared or even punish those who lead the king to shame in the banquet. We see these great meals even in the bible. For example the meal held when king Solomon came into power seemed to be great beyond compare. "His summer meals were served in such a garden refreshing with fountains and with shade from vines, pomegranate orchards, and mulberry trees."⁵ This scenario gives us a clue how these banquets were. It was in such like banquets that a learning process took place. (*Symposium*). So to dine with them meant to join those intellectually upright.

1.2.1 Greco-Roman Sacred meal

Greco-Roman culture had some meals purely for religious purposes. Though everyday meals may have a religious sense, they were some which directed their attention to the religious sphere. By understanding these meals, we will be in a better position to understand the Jewish and eventually Christian sacred meals. Their

⁵ Madeline, S.M., – J. Lane, Millers., *Encyclopaedia of Bible Life*, New York. 1944. p. 301.

meals, especially the 'cup' began by expressing union with their gods. They performed libations as a way of associating themselves with gods before they even began their *symposium*. Even in the Platonic *symposium*, people made libation, sang chants to the gods. Zeus one of their gods had to receive the first cup.

1.2.2 The religious Banquet

Banquets were not ordinary meals. They were formalised with some sort rituals. The setting and the people making up that banquet would determine whether the banquet is simply of social importance or religious. For example the Jewish Passover, the Christian Eucharist and Agape, the Greek and Roman meals could not be mistaken to be some other meals rather than religious celebrations.

All the meals mentioned above were greatly influenced by the Greco-Roman traditions. We hear about reclining, the setting, the manner of eating, the participants etc. All these direct us to think of them as having an influence from the Greco-roman and have a strong religious sense.

All these meals do not end simply being joyful moments, but some take on an eschatological tone as we have it in (Lk 14:15). "Blessed is the one who will dine in the Kingdom of God." So here the messianic banquet is a symbolic and festival meal, with all the qualities taken from the fancy Greco-Roman banquets, to signify the joyful moments and immortality of the end time or the after life. This applies to all things when God brings to their purpose all that he had created.⁶

What is of interest is that religious banquets especially when adopted by the Jews, had a relaxed ritual and rules. For example in some instances women and slaves could seat together with men at meals (informal banquets). This was unusual

⁶ Dennis, E.S., *Meals in Jewish Culture*, **In**: David, N.F., ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4, (K-N) New York 1992, p. 653.

with the Greco-roman celebrations, because in some moments, especially during the second part of the meal (drinking), there were some immoral misconduct with maids or among men themselves. This is what we would call today homosexuality. So they had to avoid as much as possible the presence of women and children.

1.3 Meals in Jewish culture

For the Jews, meals became something of importance in determining one's cultural background and religious affiliation. Whether cultural or religious, their meals had many rituals attached to them. *John L. Mackenzie*, describing some of these rituals, emphasizes "the ritual of washing before taking part in a meal, a practice linked with the pharisaic group of Judaism."⁷ This meant that whoever came from outside of the house had to wash up to the feet before partaking in a meal. Most of these rituals and laws were directly connected with the sense of purity and sacredness. For example they could not eat strangled animals, meat was not eaten together with milk etc. (cf. Lev. 11:1-ff). This is a great invitation for us today to purify ourselves before partaking in one meal of the Lord. (Eucharist). Not washing with water, but purity of our intentions and our hearts.

With that kind of diversity in the practice of meals, it is difficult to say concretely what meal means. For example the act of breaking bread in this culture was referred to as sharing a meal.⁸ The Passover was a special meal for them and until today that meal takes precedence in the whole history of Jews. So, generally we can say that, in so many critical moments of a Jew's life, a meal played a big role and determined something either of his social status or his religious disposition. The

⁷ David, N.F., ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4, (K-N) p. 549.

⁸ David, N.F., ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4, (K-N) p. 650.

meal became the centre of community identity such that no one could simply absent himself without a serious reason (cf. 2 Sam 9:7).

As time went by, the Palestinian Jews of the Old Testament were influenced by and adopted the Hellenistic and Roman style of eating. This is where we get the concept of leaning on one elbow (reclining). This became a common practice in the formal meals, which not all could attend, only those who belonged to the same class and status were to recline at table. Significantly, this is where we see Jesus in opposition with the Pharisees, because for Jesus human being in the eyes of God are all the same and all need to satisfy their bodily needs e.g. Food.

The aspect of the breaking of bread became somehow unique in Jewish tradition, and it became a special rite that inaugurated the meal. The father of the family took charge of what today would call the 'cooking'. He took bread, broke it and gave to those present. On this point, *Jeremias* already begins to note that these elements found in the meals of Jesus were stable elements in Jewish meals; especially the part played by the head of the house. Jesus as the head breaks bread for us, a bread which is his own body. He assumes the role of the father and gives up himself for the children. This is a great value indeed for those in charge of a community or family to be able to offer even their very selves for the sake of others.

More and more in the new Jewish societies, meals already began consolidating on the sacred significance, because there were some symbols and rites performed.⁹ People sang and blessed the bread that was broken. And the point of forbidden foods and meats became prominent. For example, people had to become selective in the kind of animal to be offered for sacrifice. They had to be sure of the

⁹ David, N.F., ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4, (K-N) p. 4 650.

worthiness of the animal and how it was slaughtered. This included even the rabbinic approval of the animal for sacrifice. The sense of purity and sacredness of the people of God was shown in meals clearly. Another aspect is that of wine that was part of the meals. This was much in Jesus time and it may have intended to focus on the cup of his blood that was shared by all. When we think of the 'cup', which was drunk during meals, we are aware of the fact that, in Jewish customs, wine was not a common phenomenon. It was banned with exception of fermented beverages derived from fruit or grain. But the custom of drinking in one cup comes from the Hellenistic culture. Generally, anything handled by non-Jew was not to be taken. "This applied not only with wine or juice, but with food as well. This was even among the dietary laws, which were to be observed strictly."¹⁰

"During actual meals, as the people reclined at table, the host had to ensure that the guests sat according to their rank, beginning with the highest from his right side."¹¹ As part of the customs, the social position one held was indicated during meals. This meant a lot because whoever sits on the right hand of the host, was considered great and honoured. But we note the fact that this custom of reclining was not Jewish, but from the Eastern Mediterranean world and was known to the Jews at around 8th Century¹² (cf. Amos 6:4-7).

Something has to be said about the two parts of meal or banquet in Jewish traditions; the eating part (*deipnon*) and the drinking part (*symposion*). Though they were not commonly known in this way, the two aspects come out strongly in the Jewish meals. While in Greco-Roman world the "*symposio*" was used for

¹⁰ David, N.F., ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4, (K-N) p. 651.

¹¹ David, N.F., ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4, (K-N) p. 4655.

¹² David, N.F., ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4, (K-N) p. 651.

philosophical discussion, in the Jewish culture it was used for teaching and discussing the Torah. “In most cases *symposium* for the Greco-Roman would begin by offering of a libation to the gods followed by other religious ceremonies like singing.”¹³ For the Jews too, before beginning teaching the Torah they had to show a link with Yahweh by prayers or singing and the reading part of the Torah.

For the Jews, manners at table were to be observed strictly and not everyone could recline at table. For example “only men were to recline at meals –children, women and slaves were to sit at meals.”¹⁴ Sitting during meals was the lot of the ‘small’ people, while ‘big’ people reclined. This is what we will see in the New Testament time of Jesus when the women’s intrusion will bring havoc between Jesus and his contemporaries. This manner of eating (reclining) and the ranking, made some people refuse the banquet if they found their places taken by somebody else. Hence banquet became source of prestige, though in some instances they were educative.

Dennis E. Smith describes meals to be places of harmony, peace, communal, time of sharing food and companionship, that is why one’s behaviour meant to consider the welfare of others and the enjoyment of the group at large.”¹⁵ These are important aspects of meals in most of the societies.

We have said much about Jewish meals, their significance, and their transition from the original Jewish to a more mixed practices. Together with all the practices we have seen above, for the Jews, the aspects of purity and sanctity

¹³ John, M.L., *Dictionary of The Bible*, Milwaukee, 1965. p. 558.

¹⁴ Dennis, E.S., *Meals in Jewish Culture*, **In:** David, N.F., ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4, (K-N) New York 1992, p. 652.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

became predominant. We will see these aspects surfacing again and again when we come to reflect about meals in the New Testament.

1. 4 Meals in The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, strictly meals begin by the remembrance of the Passover, which has great meaning to the Hebrews as they commemorate their exodus from Egypt to the land of promise (cf. Lev. 23:5; Num.26: 16; Deut.16: 1-8). *John H. Hayes* describing this occasion says, “It is a seven day festival of unleavened bread.”¹⁶ And it is celebrated each year. This meal has some rituals and practices. But the point here is that it was a family or a communal meal. This meal was not like a banquet, because it was eaten in haste, ready for a move. This is what the Hebrew refers to as ‘*pesah*’, which is linked with the activity of God in his protection of his people. This meal has a direct bearing with the divine and the need for protection.

The Passover emphasized the aspect of togetherness. It is said that every one had to eat at least a portion of the Passover meal. Here too we notice the role of the father, who explains to the sons the special meaning of the meal (cf. Deut. 20:5-11) and the family aspect of meals. Also in other parts of Old Testament we see a reflection of several cultural, historical, religious aspects in meals. *Baruk A. Levine* says, “Sacred feasts and festivals marked a great part of Israel’s history and life.”¹⁷

But one of the remarkable things in Old Testament meals is that, they make a distinction between meals and banquets. Their symbolism, personal, socio-cultural and religious implications are profound. *Eugene La Vardiere* in his article on ‘*meals*

¹⁶ Gillian, F.H., *Meals*, **In:** Metzger, B. M., -- Coogan, M.D., eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, New York 1993, p, 572.

¹⁷ Baruk, A.L., *Feasts and Festivals*, **In:** David, N.F., ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4, (K-N) New York 1992, p. 602

in the Old Testament', looks at meals as profoundly "symbolic: they express aspects of hospitality, a source and sign of reconciliation, peace, unity, communion and solidarity."¹⁸ This is another significant development in the understanding of meals.

Banquets were considered to be somewhat of higher standard than simple meals. A meal could simply imply a daily family meal, while banquet meant something greater in its meaning and preparations. But the important thing is the sense both carry. For example that command of Yahweh in the book of Num 22:2-4 to the Israelites of not participating in the cultic meals of other people, it was not to make them anti-social, but to preserve their purity and sacredness as a people of Yahweh. From this point we see how God began preparing his own for the kingdom long ago in history. He makes them see their election and the covenant he makes with them as a preparation to that union with him at the end of time.

Exodus 12:14 give another dimension of meals in the Old Testament. Yahweh uses meals to show his mighty signs and wonders. The people of exodus use meals to celebrate their liberation and giving thanks to Yahweh for his mercy and concern. By extension, meals unite the human and the divine.

The hospitality of Abraham and Sarah to the unknown visitors stands out clearly as another value of meal (cf. Gen. 18:1-15). For the simple meal that Abraham and his wife Sarah prepared, abundant blessings were poured on them. They did not offer in order to receive, but their openness and generosity and hospitality was richly rewarded. Even in what looked ordinary, Yahweh manifested himself. We notice what Abraham did; he ran inside, called his wife, she prepared the meal and Abraham personally waited on them. This means he gave himself

¹⁸ Eugene, La Verdere, *Meals in The Old Testament*, In: Carroll, S., ed., *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Collegeville 1996, p. 597.

totally to the visitors. That kind of hospitality brings new life and creates an inseparable bond between humanity and God. When people are willing to show hospitality to others, God's blessing comes to them.

That meal which was shared on the eve of their liberation from slavery in Egypt shows the trusting relationship that existed between Yahweh and the people and between people themselves (Ex 12). It may seem normal that people shared a meal before being liberated. But the meaning that meal carried is intense. The familiarity and the unity it signified is what mattered. To refuse that meal would mean separating or cutting off from that family. It would be considered impossible for some one who shared a meal with you to turn against you. This was the case with Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abidu, together with seventy elders of Israel in the presence of God. (Ex. 24:9-11) "It was a great moment to ratify and celebrate the covenant."¹⁹ A meal consolidates the already existing bond of unity and establishes new ones.

Hence, in most of the Old Testament meals we note that people ate together and drank wine, having a good time with one another on the level of social bonds and even sacred treaties. Meals came to be understood as a bridge towards agreement and also as an expression of gratitude when everything was agreed upon. The Old Testament leaves us with set of rules and table manners for both hosts and guests (cf. prov 23:20; Sir 31:12-31; 32:1-13).

We can truly say "the bible is full of picturesque meal scenes which makes ancient and Old Testament seem neighbour to us."²⁰ In the *encyclopaedia of the*

¹⁹ Carroll, S., ed., *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 598.

²⁰ Madeline, S.M., – J. Lane, Millers., *Encyclopaedia of Bible Life*, New York 1944, p. 299.

²¹ Madeline, S.M., – J. Lane, Millers., *Encyclopaedia of Bible Life*, p. 300.

Bible we read, "Happiness then, as now in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Italy was synonymous with food abundance."²¹ This will be made clear in Christian understanding of the Kingdom banquet that begins here on earth by sharing with the Lord the meal he gives.

The book of *Nehemiah* in the Old Testament set an example of meals with his concern for the poor, when he held a meal for over 150 men and other poor people simply called in (Nehemiah 5:17-19). He did not think of a return of hospitality. It is indeed a foretaste of Christ's meal where he invites all sorts of people- the poor, the lame, and the crippled; Jesus expected no return from these people.

In some instances within the Old Testament, meals did not signal separation; even enemies were welcomed to a meal though they would be interrogated. Nobody should go hungry while there is food. For example, we learn of such sincere hospitality from the patriarchal narrative. E.g. on Syrian Desert, desert of Beersheba; People could say to their enemies "my house of hair, come home and eat with me."²² Slowly the sense of the true hospitality and concern for others in meals comes clear.

From Deuteronomy 16:1-8 we see how people made present the actual '*paskar*'. This meal brought the past and the eschatological future so vividly to mind. In this meal the communal aspect and the relationship between God and his people was highlighted. (Ex 12:6:43 ff). It was real binding such that nobody could just miss that meal, and there was a command for the next generation about it.

²² Madeline, S.M., - J. Lane, Millers., *Encyclopaedia of Bible Life*, p. 305.

So generally we get a good amount of reference of meals in the books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They enlighten us in our understanding of meals in the society from which these books were written or to whom they were addressed. In most of these meals love, charity to the poor goes without reserve to one in need. Also hospitality as a Christian value comes out clearly.

Again, another important message of meals in the Old Testament is the sacredness of the people of God. On most occasions certain people prayed over various foods and especially over the wine. (1Sam. 9: 13) But the prayers were not directed to gods of wine or fertility as it was with the Greco-Roman meals; but were directed to the one God of the Israelites, the chosen nation.

The Old Testament does not simply show the 'secular' aspects of hospitality and the aspect of togetherness but most of them enjoyed a sacred dimension. Sacred meals were part of the history of the people of the Old Testament. It is through these meals that God came to fellowship with humanity. God came down in meals and people could ask for favours and forgiveness during or through meals. These kinds of meals could not be tempered with any other business or activities other than searching for that union with the divine. "In 1Sam. 9:11-14; 25 though the people of God had known some cultic meals, yet they physically went to approved places to eat and offer sacrifices. These were the sacred meals"²³ These sacred meals set themselves apart from other cultic meals.

Therefore, we have to keep in mind the fact that the meals were part of the people's divine relationship with God; they present the '*ipsissimavox*' (the very

²³ Madeline, S.M., – J. Lane, Millers., *Encyclopaedia of Bible Life*, p. 430.

voice) of people's relation with Yahweh. This relation is shown clearly in the pacts made through meals.

1.5 Meals in The New Testament

This is another stage in our understanding of meals as elaborated in the bible. Here we want to give an over-view of meals as celebrated in the New Testament. Generally, all the Gospels and the Epistles have a mention of meals.

There is a very important shift from the Old Testament understanding of meals to the New Testament understanding. The shift is on the level of regulations, customs, laws and manners. But we cannot avoid acknowledging the fact that some aspects are carried forward from the Old Testament. It is undeniable that New Testament meals have all aspects of union between human and divine. For example with the Church opening to Gentiles, Paul had to wrestle with the issue of meals where Jews and Gentiles had to sit at table together. (Gal. 2:11-13) This has something to do with purity or impurity of the people as is carried forward from Old Testament. We should not understand that meals here separates them, but simply identifies each group; showing who they are and what they believe (Choice). Luke in particular seems to grapple with this problem that seemed to exist in the community. Luke tries to change the attitude of the people, making meals a moment of unity and togetherness.

The Lord's Supper (1Cor.11: 20) gives us a profound aspect of meal in New Testament. It acts like a hub of all the meals in New Testament. Paul refers to it as proper meal that the members of the Church gathered to commune. Far from other meals, Lord's Supper comes clearly with communion aspect (*koinonia*) and the thanks giving aspect (*eucharistoum*) features of meals. Acts 20:7 and 1Cor. 16:2

show clearly how they met in houses to express their love for one another and the love of God by sharing a meal or breaking of bread. The two aspects are of great importance in knowing the mission of Christ and what he calls people to do. This means that, the whole reality of meals is centred on communion and service to God and one another.

One of the difficult things with meals in the New Testament is that there was at times confusion between meals and sacrifice. They were intertwined and it brought some problems in asserting what was sacred and what was not. A good example is St. Paul writing to the Corinthians. (1cor. 10:21) 'You cannot drink the Lord's cup and the cup of demons. You cannot participate in the Lord's Table and the table of demons.' This will be something to note when we come to meals in African societies. This confusion may have affected the African Church to a great extent and the mission of the Church in Africa. It is undeniable that in Africa Among some believers, people participate in the table of the Lord in the morning and offer sacrifices to ancestors or other gods in the evening. These are things to be watched in the Church and it becomes a challenge in our evangelisation.

The Last Supper meal has some bearings with the Jewish meal. In both meals we see that the two parts of the meal i.e. the '*deipnon*' and the '*symposion*' (the eating and drinking part respectively), come out strongly. (Lk. 22:20; 1cor.11: 25). In these quotations we see that Jesus had a meal with his Apostles, and the cup was drunk at the end of the first part. This means that, as it was with the Greco-Roman meals and later, Jewish meals, Jesus might have to continue to teach his disciples after the first part of meal, as the Greco-Roman did during their meals where some philosophical discussions took place and the Torah was taught on the part of the

Jews. Jesus' *symposium* was a typical moment of teaching and feeding the Apostles with the word of God. A very significant moment when the person is parting from the group or somebody who will no longer share in the same way as he did while still on earth. Last words touches very much. This may have been the experience of the Apostles.

We acknowledge the fact that in New Testament the joyful tone during meals is mentioned very little. But in Acts 2: 26 for example, some joyful mood is shown and is connected with the eschatological theme as is in Luke 14:15 'Blessed is the one who will dine in the kingdom of God.' This is where the joy will be fulfilled. This is what Luke refers as the great marriage feast (Lk 14:7-11).

Like in the Old Testament, New Testament meals have special rituals or practices. For example the meal that the loving father prepared for his prodigal Son Lk. 15:22-32, expresses great joy and jubilation, celebrated with dancing and music. All the symbolism in that incident directs to a joyful atmosphere and re-union with the family. Though it looked like a family meal, a fattened calve had to be slaughtered for the home coming son. That meal aimed at bringing the family together, though we get a sense of the elder brother refusing. What we want to emphasise here is the aspect of togetherness during meals and how a meal acts like a bond of unity between parties.

The New Testament meals were greatly influenced by the Greco-Roman customs. People of the New Testament reclined on couches, on their left elbow, following their social status; the most important person being given a higher place and the lowest place for those who had no special rank within the society"²⁴ This is

²⁴ John, M.L., *The Dictionary of The Bible*, Milwaukee. 1995, p. 430

the impression we get in (Lk. 14:9-11) “The formal dinner meal of the first Century Greco-Roman world, Jesus reclined at meal and publicans and sinners sat down with him” v. 10.

Also, as was in the Old Testament and even in Greco-Roman world, the New Testament *symposium* has special table manners and courtesy. For example, Jesus refers to this when he talks about taking places of honour when invited for meals. But meals’ courtesies in the New Testament are realities pointing to something much higher, to man’s final destiny (Lk. 14:7-11). Although he is not speaking directly about meals, but a wedding feat, the end or aim is the same. In this passage the Lord wants to teach about personal relationship between the host and the guest. It ought to be a personal relationship and not on a superficial level.

1.6 Meals in The Gospel of Luke

Before we come to chapter two, where we expect to do some meal’s analysis in Luke’s Gospel, it is important to have a general overview of meal as elaborated by Luke. The question we ask ourselves is, how does Luke present meals that may be different from other gospels or other sources?

Luke writes to the Greek-speaking people. He cherishes meals as occasions for teaching. He begins by turning upside down the Greco-Roman mentality of meals. Though the New Testament has taken a lot from that culture, Jesus in the Gospel of Luke challenges that part of the custom. For example women and slaves prepared meals but they were not allowed to recline at table with men. This is what the gospel of Luke is trying to challenge. Jesus invites people from all works of life to join him for the meal- the lame, the crippled, the poor, women and prostitutes.

This is a great feature of meals in the Lukan tradition. The hungry for Luke has no social status or background. He is hungry and he/she needs food, period.

As we are talking about meals, Luke does not talk of meals in this way. His main focus is on breaking of bread, which in most instances is associated with the first day of the week or Sabbath day. All these remind us something higher than simply breaking of bread; namely resurrection. Jesus may have not intended to imply about his own resurrection, but a newness of the people who partake in the meal (cf. Lk. 24:33) and our participation in this newness. 'They got up at once and went back to Jerusalem.' This is a real resurrection that began from their hospitality. These men who were so afraid, by a simple act of breaking bread are strengthened to go back to Jerusalem and continue the mission.

Luke is so concrete in his meals: he uses these occasion to lead people to understand who he is and where is he leading them. Sick people are healed on these occasions. People move to the messianic banquet with full conviction because they have seen it happening here on earth through Jesus. Luke, using meals, removes all doubts about the future Messianic banquet.

No doubt that Luke does not want people to turn to meals for their physical satisfaction only. They are a call to '*metanoia*' i.e. a change of heart and attitude and they are an invitation to '*diakonia*' i.e. becoming people of service. He admonishes people to behave properly during meals, whether a host or a guest (cf. Lk.11: 37-54). "Much of Jesus' teaching done while Jesus is at a meal and usually bears on issues raised by the attitude and behaviour of those present."²⁵ In some instances, Luke portrays meals as occasion of betrayal and denial (Lk. 22:14-38) This should not

²⁵ Carroll, S., ed., *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 599

delude us and shift the focus of the unifying factor. He introduces this to challenge those who used meals to show their differences by origin or birth, and that those who have managed to partake in these earthly meals ought to have been transformed already. The elder brother refuses to welcome home a blood brother because a big banquet is prepared for him (Lk. 15:11-32). The father has no problem with his own sons, but the elder son refuses the home coming of a younger brother. The meals in Luke gives a chance even to those the society thinks unworthy. It is not for us to decide who is and who is not. It is the father.

J. Jeremias in his book *"The Eucharistic words of Jesus, London 1966;* states that Luke never uses the phrase 'share in a meal'." He distinguishes between breaking bread and taking food. This may be true, but should not narrow down all the meal occasions to simply imply Eucharist. Breaking bread for Luke is a designation for the celebration of Eucharist. This occasion of last supper sets up a sense of a banquet. It was held in the upper room, Lk 22:12, those present reclined at table, wine was used, Lk. 22:17ff. Words of farewell (teaching) Lk 22:16 and there was the Testament of Jesus with those present. (Lk 22:28ff).

Luke sets a tone of a father who is in charge of these meals. This is one of the stable elements of Jewish meals. In Jewish culture the father of the family took bread, broke it and gave it to those present. This is what Jesus does in most of his meals, either personally or through his disciples. Even where he is invited as a guest, he assumes a host's position (cf. Emmaus story).

Luke's meals do not have so much dietary law as was with the Jewish customs. This already gives a clue on how Luke uses his meals. There are some common elements between Jesus meals and the Jewish meals, but Luke's goes

beyond customs and traditions. Luke's theology of promise and fulfilment is well developed through meals. We note also his hospitality. There is a great contrast between the response to meals prepared by Pharisees and those by Jesus. Even when he assumes the hosts' role in a 'foreign home', the behaviour of Jesus is of a welcoming host. This is what opened room for many who were considered by the society unfit and useless. He breaks all the barriers of class and tribes and makes all seat at one table.

1.7 Conclusion

We have done an extensive survey of meals from a biblical point of view. According to Hellenistic culture, Jewish culture, Old Testament, New Testament and in the gospel of Luke itself. In all these we have seen a great deal of similarities and some minor differences from culture to culture or from a belief point of view. What has surfaced in this survey is the fact that cultures are not rigid and that they influence each other even on the point of meals. We have seen that much of we would call meal concept in the gospels came from the culture of the people from the surroundings. Jesus uses the same meal occasions to teach about something to do with the meal that the 'Lord of the banquet' has prepared for the whole humanity. The customary meals transcended the mere physical nourishment. The greatest difference is that, those who have been considered, as nothing in the eyes of the world will be the ones to be invited to take part in the banquet in the kingdom. Jesus emphasizes that it is not through the external observance of law that man will taste the Lord's banquet but by the Mercy of God, since it is a free gift from the Lord but which needs participation from our part.

In the next chapter we will try to highlight, by the way of analysis, how meals in Luke direct us to think of the heavenly banquet and what part we are to play in order to participate worthy in this banquet. This is where meals demand a response from us. It can be a cause of suffering or embarrassment when inviting the people of different colour, race tribe or religion. But that is what Jesus wants all people to turn to. This is the way he travelled, so he invites all to travel. We have seen in this chapter how the values associated with meals are shared by most of the cultures. The differences are not real intrinsic to meals, but to the practices and customs of a particular culture. They are real Christian values, which Jesus picks up and invite his contemporaries to respond to.

Chapter II

Analysis of Some Meal Occasions in The Gospel of Luke

2.1 Introduction

Luke's gospel can be named as the gospel of meals. He treats meals from different dimensions, but focused towards one end; namely partaking in the kingdom banquet.

"With his cleverly and an unusual formulation, by using the term 'event', he points out that his message contains a historical dimension, the dimension of deeds that unfolds in a definite space and time. However the past participle 'fulfilled' indicates that these events are not exclusively worldly."²⁶ This is how Luke presents his meals. He writes on earthly things to imply their heavenly dimension. A great journey that we are invited to travel with. The Scripture verse in Luke 14:15 'blessed is the one who will dine in the kingdom of God, is "breath holding"²⁷ as *Eugene La Verdiere*, says in preface of his book '*dining in the kingdom.*' In a normal meal, the concept of dining in the kingdom of God comes out clearly and this is what most

²⁶ Bovon, F., *Luke Portrait and Project*, **In**: William R. Farmer, ed., *The International Bible Commentary. A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-first Century*, Minnesota. 1998.

²⁷ Eugene, La Verdiere., *Dining in the Kingdom of God: The Origins of The Eucharist According to Luke*, Chicago 1994, preface V.

believers would like to do, but liking is not actually dining. Looking at the meals in Luke's Gospel, we realise that one has to begin responding to the meals by Jesus on earth, and then proceed to the one in the kingdom.

In this chapter we want to reflect on some passages of meals and discern their invitation to the dining in the Kingdom. As it may be clear that Luke's Gospel has several meals, at least some ten of them are well elaborated. The meal in the house of Levi (5:27-38), the dinner at the home of a Pharisee (7:36-50), the breaking of bread in Bethsaida (9:10-17), the hospitality offered at the home of Martha (10:38-42), a second dinner at the home of a Pharisee (11:37-54), a third such dinner, this one a Sabbath meal (14:1-35), the hospitality extended by Zacchaeus (19:1-10), the Last Supper and the Lords Supper (22:14-38), the meal at Emmaus (24:13-35), and the meal with the entire community in Jerusalem (24:30-49). These are some of the obvious meal episodes, which Luke uses for a purpose different from all other Gospels.²⁸

Luke in his artistic way presents the whole life of Jesus as a single story. This means that even his meals are part of this single story that unfolds slowly towards the great banquet in the kingdom. So the kingdom of God that is already in our midst (Luke 17:20), is made present in meals by Jesus. He 'acts' out the parable of love and hospitality of God in the kingdom banquet.

Eugene divides the ten meals into three categories following the journey theme of Luke. In the first three Jesus shares a meal as he begins his ministry and as he finds the community. The second set of four follows his journey to Jerusalem. The Last Supper and Lord's Supper acts like a 'hub', connecting the first two

²⁸ Eugene, La Verdere., *Dining in the Kingdom of God*, p. 13

categories and the last set, which is the meals after his death and resurrection. He celebrates all the values of meals in all these stages of his life with the focus on the community he has found. He invites the Church to accommodate all in her life. In my analysis of these meals, I will take one in each set with the Last Supper and Lord's Supper as a connector between the meal of the earthly Jesus and the glorified Lord celebrated with his disciples.

2.2 The Dinner at the home of a Pharisee. Luke 7:36-50

"A Pharisee invited him to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman...." This is one of the meals episodes that Luke has in common with Mk 14:3-8, Mt 26:6-13 and Jn 12:1-11. But for Luke the context of hospitality is predominant here, as soon will emerge Simon who does not perform any act of hospitality. This meal comes under the first set when he begins his public ministry and as he forms the community that shares meal and journeys with him. In this meal we see that Jesus opens the door to the Pharisee and the woman to come and dine with him. The two dimensions of invitation according to Luke are important to note here. Jesus literally invites everyone: the lame, the crippled, the poor, the prostitutes and the blind. His invitation extends also to those who consider themselves in a better position in the society. He invites them to lay aside their high social status and join those they thought unworthy joining a formal meal like this.

2.2.1 A moment of conversion

Dining in the kingdom is an invitation that calls all to shed off earthly glory and put on the simplicity of Christ. He invites us to be converted and look at the community of believers in a new perspective. The entry to the heavenly banquet is

an entry to new and positive relationship with God, with one another and with the whole created reality. For Jesus the social status or the dining condition, whether in an executive dining room or not, does not matter. The dining room in the kingdom calls for a new look into the whole relationship with others from within and not simply the externals.

Eugene La Verdere says, “the reality of dining in the kingdom is more than simply variety of food and drink or how one represents himself or herself, but rather it is the brethren gathered for a meal in common.”²⁹ This means that you can be in an executive dining room or eat the most expensive food in the world, but if there is no conversation of heart and a new look into the whole relationship with others, then sharing with Jesus in the Messianic banquet is impossible or remains a dream. As he invites the Pharisee to conversion he builds up a Church that will include all. As women were not regarded well in the society, Jesus builds a Church of equals; men and women alike, ‘bad’ and the self claimed ‘righteous.’ This is a wonderful banquet where all will be equal.

2.2.2 Invited to Change Ones Attitude

The participation in the kingdom banquet requires first to be forgiven and turn to forgive others. The woman was seen to be a sinner and her sinfulness marked her beyond forgiveness. This was the attitude of the Pharisee. “If this man knew who this woman is....” All was based on the attitude toward that sinner and prostitute woman. The invitation of Jesus to the meal in the kingdom calls for a solid union with God and with one another, and this is difficult unless one changes attitude and forgives. Particularly the attitude people have for others while sharing a meal

²⁹ Eugene, La. Verdere, *Dinning in the Kingdom of God*, preface, VII.

matters a lot. The 'blessedness' acclaimed (Luke 14:15), is not for a few, but for all. Jesus invites the two sides to share in common the blessedness of those invited to dine in the kingdom. Change of attitude is a call to love others in the state they are and help them to turn towards God.

The Christian meals cannot and should not be like any other meal (meals of the unbelievers). They are a community celebration; "every Christian meal reveal aspects of the kingdom; where guests are welcomed, people share with one another, broken covenants are renewed and all are reconciled."³⁰ This is possible when one changes the attitude towards the other. As we will see in the next chapter, our Eucharist is the highest model of the invitation to dine in the kingdom. It ought to be a community celebration, where all are in communion with one another and with Jesus who is offering that thanksgiving meal. "The Eucharist reveals all of these aspects of the kingdom of God as well as its universality. All including the poor, the crippled, the lame and the prostitutes, are invited to the table of the Lord."³¹ All are invited. It is up to each individual to respond to the invitation, and one of the ways is to shed off our earthly glory and put on the humility of Christ (conversion) and by changing the attitudes towards those who seem unrighteous or unimportant.

In a very artistic way with his journey theme, Luke takes up the *symposium* aspect of a meal and those that are purely for the expression of hospitality. He teaches and shows his concern for the neglected. It is really a call to *metanoia*, so as to be in union with Christ at the kingdom banquet. The banquet in the kingdom invites all to show charity, hospitality, and reconciliation with one another.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

The meals in Luke are not merely solving a temporal problem. For example in the feeding of the five thousands men (Luke 12:17), the action of feeding leads to a confession of Peter that Jesus is the Messiah. Even the Greek verb used in this episode *chartazo*, that means they were hungry but now they are filled, gives a higher dimension of meals. The satisfaction is not an earthly thing; “The expected time of fulfilment will be a time of abundance that can be pictured as a joyful banquet. The abundance of food for the five thousands not only anticipates the Church’s meal but also the eschatological meal”³² The point here is still that meals of Jesus really call for something more than simply eating and drinking.

2.2.3 *A Moment of Fellowship*

The idea of fellowship is so significant in this particular meal. Jesus realises that there is a gap between the woman and the host who is a Pharisee. *Eugene La verdiere* doubts whether they were real Pharisees, because they could not have joined a meal where there are tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:30). The reason of Eugene may hold water. He speculates that these may have been Christians who did not expect those who were considered unworthy to partake in a formal meal like this.³³ Luke’s meal in the Pharisee’s house aims at narrowing the gap that existed within the Christian Community. The sharing in the kingdom Banquet is not an individual affair: communion with one another is essential. This is a great teaching for today’s Church on how is it possible to share the Eucharist while we are not in communion with the Community of believers. The two go together as a ‘condition.’

³² Tannehill, R.C., *Luke*, In: Furnish, V., ed., *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, Nashville 1996. p. 156

³³ Eugene La. Verdiere, *Dining in The Kingdom of God*, p. 47

Jesus came and said that he had come to call sinners to repentance and not the righteous. It was difficult to convince the Pharisees that sinners were mournfully repenting. They saw them feasting. They see them at a banquet. It is almost impossible for the Pharisees to see Jesus celebrating with sinners as a sign of repentance. But Jesus in all the meals expresses a sense of joy, of home coming of the lost Son (Luke 15:11ff). He does not convince them to repent by celebrating with them, but he celebrates their willingness to join the community of believers. In this context the woman's many sins are forgiven and she is welcomed to join the family of God: "repentance does not consist of mourning and fasting, rather one's life is turned around through the joyful discovery of a new opportunity."³⁴ The new opportunity here is the joy of being in a stable communion with God and with one another. This is the real kingdom banquet. We see for example the joy of the father for the homecoming of the prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-33). This is a typical impression of how the father will prepare a banquet in the kingdom. Even the unusual things are done with joy. E.g. slaughtering a cow for a simple homecoming, a father, (king) waiting for the homecoming Son. These were unusual things to happen but special moments to celebrate.

Jesus does not force people to come to fellowship. See what he does with the Pharisee. The intrusion of a woman to where she did not belong sets up a moment for Simon to reflect and come to a self-knowledge and open up to others: "Jesus asks Simon to make a judgement about the two debtors in the parable."³⁵ (v. 43)

³⁴ Tannehill, R.C., *Luke*, In: Furnish, V., ed., *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, p. 108

³⁵ Tannehill, R.C., *Luke In: Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, p. 136

Arturo Paoli in his book *'Meditation on Saint Luke'* (1977) describes the dining room of the Pharisee to be 'a cold inhospitable place' until when the woman emerged with many gesture of love.³⁶ In a dramatic way the woman as part of the Church, begins a mission by inviting the Pharisee to conversion. "Christ turns the situation upside down, making the victim into a saviour"³⁷ This is real sharing at a deeper level, which permeates the spiritual realm of those gathered to share a meal.

We see in this meal that Jesus creates so many changes for people to come to an awareness of who they are. He does not condemn Simon, but he teaches both the Pharisee and Scribes to remain open to those labelled sinners."³⁸ The Church at large is given a challenge to open up to the outcasts regardless of the social norms and situation.

Jesus in this meal creates a new Christian family. "The sign of the new Christian family was its meal, an event challenging every vestige of division and failure of hospitality."³⁹ The customs of the time required that women were to be separated on most occasions. More seriously she is a sinful woman according to Simon; 'if this man were a prophet he could have known what sort of a woman she is' (v. 39) But Jesus creates something new by including women and sinners in the banquet.

It is an invitation to *metanoia*, acknowledging that we are all sinners and always in need of the mercy of God. The Church is not a Church of holy people, but of sinners who stand always in need of God's forgiveness. 'Two people were in debt

³⁶ Paoli, A., *Meditation On Saint Luke*, Trans. By, Bernard F. McWilliams, New York 1977, p. 168.

³⁷ Paoli, A., *Meditation On Saint Luke* p.170

³⁸ Tannehill, R.C., *Luke, In:* Furnish, V., ed., *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, p. 138

³⁹ Eugene La. Verdiere, *Dining in The Kingdom of God*, p. 48

saying go and do likewise. It is an invitation to be reconciled with God and with one another so as to be in full union with God in his banquet in heaven.

The second set of meals for Luke focuses on his journey to Jerusalem where he will face his death, resurrection and ascension. This is a journey of a Christian towards the kingdom of God. From the Church point of view, the whole journey focuses on the destiny of the Church in Jesus to God. The meals lead us to reflect on where we are heading too.

2.3 The Hospitality Meal in The house of Martha. Luke 10:38-42

This is one of the meals that Jesus attended on the way to Jerusalem. Prior to this we had said that the whole Gospel of Luke is a journey that leads to the kingdom of God. This Bethany incident rounds up the first set of meals that leads to Jerusalem, though Luke does not mention Jerusalem. This is because for Luke there is only one journey to Jerusalem leading him to his crucifixion and death. The meal at Bethany doesn't seem to be a mere meal, but a complete lodging in this house. This is the situation that Martha finds herself in. The hospitality finds a true expression in this incident. As Martha is concerned about the physical needs the Lord is concerned with her spiritual well being. 'Martha, Martha.' This is a language of affection and concern.

V. 42 show how to succeed. "There is a need of only one thing." The one thing is not only what Mary did, but also ones commitment to the call to holiness. As Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to him, we are all invited to be aware of what keeps us focused on our journey towards the celebration with Christ when God brings all things to what He intended. 'Mary who was seated at the Lord's feet listening to his words, had chosen a better part.' "The tension rises between ministry

and discipleship.”⁴⁰ This means that our preoccupation with many other things of this world may divert our attention and our focus away from the kingdom of God. It could become a serious obstacle to the sharing in the banquet.

The journey of Jesus with his ‘first Church’ (disciples) to Jerusalem is important. Our movement depends on our disposition to Jesus. In this journey the role of women and the universality of the Church cannot be overlooked. The hospitality of the woman to the head of the Church is remarkable.

We have seen again that sitting at the feet of the Lord is something to do with discipleship. We saw in Luke 7:38, a woman came in when Jesus was reclining at a meal in the home of a Pharisee. Martha and her complaint shed light to the fact that, in life it is easy to be distracted with many things and miss the necessary. Jesus invites the Church to harmonise the ministry and the discipleship (attending to the word). Note that, being at the Lord’s feet does not mean that Mary was not working. It does mean that she was not distracted by the ministry or worried and excited about many things. This is a call to be free from all attachments. Where is our attention fixed? If we listen to the Lord and we are focused towards one end, then we will surely partake in the meal of the kingdom. The ‘one thing’ is what gives meaning to life. And in a way the Church cannot move out to the apostolate if she has not listened to what the Lord wants her to do. The need to wait and listen before acting is clear in this regard. This is an invitation for the Church in her journey and service. But the busyness of Martha should not be ignored. The Church is called to service. The reciprocal of hospitality is noticeable. If the disciples depended on the hospitality of the people they went to, it is their obligation to serve them by

⁴⁰ Eugene La. Verdiere, *Dining in The Kingdom of God*, p. 75

The reciprocal of hospitality is noticeable. If the disciples depended on the hospitality of the people they went to, it is their obligation to serve them by preaching to them. Jesus as a prophet continues to challenge those who have decided to follow him.

So much can be said about Jesus as he is in the house of Martha with a band of men. We can speak about Mary or Martha or the reaction of Jesus to Martha. But for me the hospitality of Martha to the Lord is remarkable. It may have been routine for Martha and her sister to receive guests, but a band of thirteen men was a great hospitality to the Church. It was a true sacrifice for Martha that is worth considering for the Christians today. Our union and service to others leads us to the total harmony with God, neighbour and nature. A call not to strive for our own sanctification only, we have a responsibility for others as well. No one can claim to love God and strive for his kingdom while sending away a hungry person. Telling a person who is hungry 'go in peace and God bless you' without helping him or her is not a pious act worthy sharing in the joy in the kingdom.

We note that Martha, despite breaking the barrier of the society towards women, takes a role of a disciple and also is affirmed in her decision to neglect other domestic duties in order to grow as a disciple."⁴¹ In a way Martha represents the Church that is on her way to the kingdom. Martha's hospitality can be a fore-taste of the hospitality offered by God himself to all those who are ready to share in the banquet.

The two in this episode go together. One has to listen to the Lord, and as a disciple of Christ, has to put into practice. To enter into the kingdom, both are

⁴¹ Tannehill, R.C., *Luke, Jn.*: Furnish, V., ed., *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, pp. 186-187

necessary. Jesus feeds by his word and strengthens the Church he formed to embark into service "...Receiving the messenger seemed equivalent to receiving the message."⁴² It is a call to a well-balanced way of life.

The love of ones neighbour does not involve only seating down with him or her, but taking trouble to do something for him/her. Most important is Mary's choice. The life no longer depends on the food, but on everything that comes from Jesus. The good portion Mary had chosen will be the food that lasts for ever which is Jesus' gift to his disciples. That coming to union with God when everything will be all in all means giving oneself. I believe that one in isolation is lacking, but together they complement one another and as disciples fulfil the greatest command of loving God and loving one's neighbour. These are earthly expression of the journey towards the union with God and neighbour.

We see Martha taking up the tone of compassion and strong feeling of Jesus towards the hungry and those who suffer in different ways. Martha puts into practice what today we would call an evangelical attitude i.e. an attitude of true love that springs from the life and message of Christ.

We consider a meal that takes place while Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem with his disciples as that journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. Jesus is going to Jerusalem to make a new covenant through word, death and resurrection.

From the beginning of Jesus ministry, the devil during temptation tried to be an obstacle on the way that leads to the union with God. The turning of stones into bread (Luke 4:3-4) is an obvious sign that it was not a preparation for the kingdom.

⁴² Tannehill, R.C., *Luke, Jn: Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, p. 187

Obstacles will always be there on the way, temptations, suffering and even rejection, but for those who persevere the enjoyment to the kingdom is granted.

The hospitality at the house of Martha and Mary is a clear example of the Church on her move towards the kingdom. The Church of 'Luke' is on the move. Journey theme is closely linked with all the missions of Jesus. In itself it is a teaching to the Church he had formed, as she moves towards the kingdom of God, she, need to listen to Jesus and save one another. The listening Church is successful in her mission. The two women stand as 'sign'. Those received by the Lord will be instructed and those instructed will be sent to serve the Church.

The hospitality of Martha and Mary also stands as an accomplishment of what Jesus did before his ministry. "...On the third day they found him in the Temple, sitting with the Jewish teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). He listened to them and found their standpoint about the kingdom of God, and then we went out to preach. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." (Luke 4:8)

Dining in the kingdom is not a speculation, but is something already here in Jesus Christ and 'is not yet' waiting for its fulfilment at the end of time. The invitation is to participate in the 'already meals so as to journey with Christ to the kingdom. For example the meal offered by Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus was transformed by the openness of Christ and changed his whole life. His hospitality changed Zacchaeus' attitude. Unlike the hospitality of the 'old', which expected a reward in return, Zacchaeus' hospitality opens to the poor "...I will give half my belongings to the poor."

The openness of Zacchaeus like any other hospitality in Luke leads to a promise of salvation. "...Salvation has come to this house today." (Luke 19:9), "...Mary has chosen the right thing...." (Luke 10:42)

Meals for Luke are great moments of teaching. Borrowed from Hellenistic *symposium*, Luke shows how Jesus uses the meal's moments for teaching. The Hellenists used meals, especially the second part of the meal (*symposium*) for some Philosophical and political debates. Jesus in Luke's gospel uses meal as occasions of teaching about the kingdom. Different from Hellenistic meals, Luke's meals invite everybody to what can be called '*divine symposium*'. We have seen for example how he teaches about the priorities in life during the meal prepared by Martha. (Luke 10:38-42), without condemnation he teaches Zacchaeus what it means to be a rich person. Richness for Jesus is that spirit and willingness to open for others who are in need. Being available to those in need is like opening ones gate to enter the banquet in the kingdom of God.

2:4 Last Supper and Lord's Supper. Luke 22:14-38

This is the Hub, a hub of all the meals that came before and those that will take place after his death and resurrection. Its preparation is so dramatic. Jesus takes the initiative with regard to the making and the preparation for the Passover meal. "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Lk 22:15). This reinforces the sense that when he takes his place at table he is to offer them hospitality of God and institute Eucharist that will keep them focused. Clearly it connects the meals of Jesus before his death and resurrection and those after. Luke persists with meal even after Jesus' resurrection. He makes use of the Hellenistic tradition and the simple hospitality together to lead us forward to the dining in the

kingdom. The two aspects of meals are well reflected in the last supper; meaning it was a moment of intense teaching and showing a special hospitality.

Last supper and Lord's Supper may sound the same, but for Luke they are different. Last supper (Luke 22:7-18) is the first before he eats and drinks in the Kingdom. "...For I tell you I will never eat it until it is given a full meaning in the Kingdom of God" v. 16. "The Last Supper episode is bound up with the events of the Passion-resurrection, where Jesus the Prophet is manifested as the Christ."⁴³ The taking of the cup first symbolises the aspect of *symposium*. Jesus begins by teaching first, as a way of inviting them to join him in that meal with full meaning of the kingdom of God. It is a foretaste of the paschal meal of the New Covenant that is different from the Jewish paschal meal. So, we see that the Last Supper account in Luke, as in other gospel accounts, is rooted in the culture and the daily life of the Jews. It is also situated within the whole theology, which Luke wants to impart to his readers. Luke refers to the Last Supper account as a Passover meal 22:15, even though there are some discrepancies in the text itself.⁴⁴

2.4.1 Last Supper

The Last Supper for Luke was a celebration of the Passover. "Go and get the Passover meal ready for us to eat" (v 8). "Among all the other meal episodes in the whole Gospel, no other meal was given such elaborate preparation."⁴⁵ Luke maintains the journey theme at Last Supper. It is a Passover of the Lord from this life to death and resurrection and a Passover for the Church to new life that calls for

⁴³ Eugene, La. Verdier., *Dining in The Kingdom of God*, p. 122

⁴⁴ *Compared to the Last Supper accounts of Mark and Mathew, Luke's version stands out. He has two cups of wine, which are shared at table, while the other Synoptic have only one cup. The Passover meal, on the other hand, has four cups of wine, each of which has its proper place in the meal.*

⁴⁵ Eugene, La. Verdier., *Dining In The Kingdom of God*, p. 123

a change in the way of living the message of Christ. Luke wants the Church to think of the early meals as a foretaste of the meal in the kingdom when it is given full meaning. We note the longing of the Lord to eat this Passover. "I have longed to eat Passover meal with you before I suffer" (v 15). Luke considers this meal as a very significant break through and it shows an end of the Jewish paschal meal and the fulfilment that has to take place in this new covenantal meal. For Luke, Last Supper involves so many issues. Note for example the witnesses, Peter and John. The leaders of the Church are sent to prepare. This is a call to service for the leaders of the Church (Acts 3:1; 3,4,11)."⁴⁶ To the Greco-Romans and the Pharisees of Jesus time this would be a scandal. Meals for them were signs of honour for the host and those reclining at table with him. Think of Peter and John serving. Jesus says, yes! Stand up and serve. The Greco-Romans and the Pharisees concept of meal ended on being served and making up a name, but for the Christians, the eschatological banquet aspect keeps us on our feet and changes our attitude towards the poor and all those invited. This is where we are invited to turn our attention. No more do the slaves and women prepare meals. In the Church, leaders do all the preparation and later welcome the servant to dine with them. "...It is the same with you; when you have done all you have been told to do, say we are ordinary servants; we have done only our duty" (Luke 17:10). This is how Jesus prepares the leaders of the Church for service. Jesus himself does what he teaches at the Last Supper and Lord's Supper. He invites us not to partake in his meal and sit back, but move to serve others. This is the invitation we get when we celebrate the Eucharist as an *anamnesis*; not only of his passion death and resurrection, but the whole of his life

⁴⁶ Tannehill, R.C., *Luke, In: Furnish, V., ed., Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, p. 311

as shown by Luke and which has the Last Supper and Lord's Supper as part of the whole history.

2.4.2 fare- well meal

It is so dramatic and full of emotions. "He took his place at table" literally means he reclined (v 38). This shows that it is a formal banquet of Jesus with the twelve. They are no longer to hear him talking about love, hospitality, but they are now to see him doing it. The aspect of parting company touches them more. But with consolation, "you will eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and you will seat on throne to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30). "The final words of a person are considered to be particularly significant as a seal and symbol of life."⁴⁷ *Timothy Johnson* adds and says, "Last Supper also emphasizes the special relationship between Jesus and his followers"⁴⁸

The bread and the cup they took were not for themselves, but it represents the whole community that they will serve and guide. As it was with the Passover of the exodus people, the fare- well meal is meant to be a strength giving to the people to reach the kingdom. Also it is a moment of giving thanks for the gift of Christ. "It is meant to be a solemn act of remembrance, an *anamnesis* of God's liberation of the oppressed people, leading to thanksgiving in the present (*barakah* or the Eucharist) and hope for the future (*eschaton*)."⁴⁹ Mark 14:22 and Mathew 26:66 have this kind of meal, but their emphasis is on *eulogia* (blessing) while Luke has this meal with the emphasis on giving thanks.

⁴⁷ Johnson, L.T., *The Gospel of Luke*, SacP 3, Colledgeville 1991, p. 348.

⁴⁸ Johnson, L.T., *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 349.

⁴⁹ Tannehill, R.C., *Luke*, *In: Furnish, V., ed., Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, p. 312

2.4.3 Drinking in one cup

This may not have been a usual thing to do in the culture of the time. But with Jesus everything is brought to newness. It emphasises the fellowship with Christ's moment of suffering, death and resurrection. His blood was not poured but collected in one cup and shared by all. Also it is a sign of fellowship with one another. This fellowship has to be noted as we daily celebrate the meal with Christ. Included here are the four actions of bread, which should not go unnoticed. "He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and handed over to them". Only in one verse, but it is packed with important information for the community/Church. The leaders and where the Church is leading too, namely, the fulfilment of the reign of God, which in our term here is called 'dining in the kingdom.'

So we see that the Last Supper and Lord's Supper stands as the 'hub' of the whole history of Christ and particularly his meals. His self-emptying and service for his Church is remarkable as is shown by the great moment of the Last Supper and Lord's Supper.

2.5 The Meal at Emmaus Luke 24:13-35

It is another meal after his resurrection. We can say it is a meal closer to the 'dining in the kingdom'. As he opened the eyes of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus through Scriptures, Jesus opens the eyes of the believing community and they really share his self-offering at the Last Supper and the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:14-38). As he opened something new and established a new covenant at the Last Supper, and Lord's Supper climaxed everything, the Lord re-enacts the Last Supper to the faint hearted disciples (v 18). "...You must be the only person in Jerusalem..." Jesus turns this to be an affirmation to them of who he is. They become the only people who did not know what it meant when he was still with

them. Note that this happens just before ascension. So significant that when he when he ascends he goes to prepare the banquet where all are invited to participate.

2.5.1 A Time to Reciprocated Love

The hospitality of the two towards Jesus opens their eyes to see the reality. “They begged him to stay with them since it was getting dark” (v 29) Jesus does not refuse this invitation and reciprocates their hospitality with something divine. “He took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them, suddenly their eyes were opened.” He shows them the highest hospitality of self-giving that will be accomplished when God brings all to their intended end.

Jesus in his glory still breaks bread for us today as we celebrate the Eucharist. For Luke, whoever partakes in the meal is invited to go and invite others to join the celebration. “They left within the hour and went back to Jerusalem...” (V.33).

2.5.2 A Call to Mission

The whole mission of the Church begins by the assembled community during a meal (Luke 24:36-49). He celebrates a meal with them all, just before ascension. Note the fact that the first meal Jesus begins in Galilee in the house of Levi. He invites Levi to join the journey. The Last meal that is the first meal for the Church before the mission is in Jerusalem, the holy city, and the “heaven on earth”. Jesus began his mission with meals and he invites the Church to begin her mission after the meal. Today we speak of Eucharist as the beginning of the mission. The ‘go in peace the mass is ended’ is not an invitation to go and have a nice weekend, but is an invitation to go and preach what we have heard and experienced in that sharing at the table of the Lord. This in one way is a ‘ticket’ towards the kingdom of God.

When one engages in the sharing the word of God with others, he/she is making own way to the banquet of God. Jesus gives all authority to go and take the message to all the people beginning from Jerusalem. Also he gives them power over people's sins for all who turn to him.

The mission begins by listening to his words first and sharing his body and blood. So for our Sunday celebration of the breaking of bread, the 'go in peace of Christ' is an invitation to go and invite others to the great heavenly kingdom.

2.6 Conclusion

Though briefly, we have seen how meals in Luke's gospel play an important role in inviting all to dine in the kingdom. The condition is that "only those who take seriously the lesson of our Lord's feast and carry it out in practice throughout life, can, with security expect their own elevation at the marriage feast on the Sabbath in God's everlasting Kingdom."⁵⁰

What we have seen in most of his meals is that, he wants/invites everyone to the Kingdom banquet. He wants all, without segregation to recline with him at table in the Kingdom of God. Sitting at table means sharing the glory the father had created before the foundation of the world. To some people he asks a simple act of love, change of attitude, hospitality etc. But some refuse and prefer selfishness at the expense of the heavenly banquet.

What Jesus does in the meals is a common message through out the gospel. But the choice of meals speaks louder to our human reality. Jesus wants us to feel the hunger of that moment in heaven and willingly turn to it and go for it.

⁵⁰ Joseph, D., *The Gospel of Saint Luke*, Maryland 1958, p. 371.

As the invitation to dine in the kingdom has been so open to all humanity, in the following chapter we want to see how does the Church in Africa respond to the this invitation, with Eucharist at the centre and as a pick of that earthly banquet and the highest form of hospitality to those on the journey.

Chapter III

Pastoral Approach: Response of The Church in Africa to The Invitation to Dine in The Kingdom

3.1 Introduction

The invitation of the Lord to dine in the kingdom has no limitations of culture or background. It is a universal call inviting each individual to journey with Jesus towards that destination where God intends to share His glory, which was there since the foundation of the world, through Jesus Christ. The response to this invitation depends on our own cultural background and situations. An African will respond to the same invitation in a slightly different way from other people. This is what we want to illustrate.

This part of the essay is not so much a research, but much of it is my personal response and reflection. I believe that the pastoral challenges I have encountered so far and the comments people have made in an informal way give a foundation for my reflection. As an African evangelist soon to go out to the mission I feel challenged with certain issues. Supported by some commentaries and literatures I want to look at the Church in Africa and see what could be done to improve our Christian celebrations. This does not mean that nothing has been done,

but I believe there are traditional values that could safeguard us from the corrosive effects of modernity and materialism.

The African Church by nature is a celebrating Church. This is one of the important features of the Church in Africa. It is a reality that needs to be taken up as a value. This has come from the culture and traditions of the people who celebrate most of the events of their lives in a positive and enriching way. The events, such as a party banquet, are occasions of great festivity and rejoicing; among most of the African societies they are celebrated as community or family events. These are gifts to the Church because they can be a source of inspiration in the way Christians celebrate the meal of the Lord.

“African traditional culture is centred on the family. Africa cannot flourish unless its families survive present social upheavals. The African family must find new strength, reaffirm the positive values contained in tradition, and assimilate a more personal dimension of understanding, commitment and love”⁵¹

The Pope in this affirms the fact that Africans have plenty of resources for their own growth and the growth of the universal Church. We have to put our energy into revealing these values and making use of them for our personal growth and union with our creator.

The meals express the love, hospitality and care of the Father for the whole humanity. These are common values in African society. We see this when we look at the meaning and significance Africans give to meals. For example, the value of a visitor in an African home is expressed by the hospitality and the sense of urgency the host has in preparing food for the traveller. The host remain restless until the visitor has something to eat. Only then can he/she sit down and talk. I think this is a great value Christians in Africa need to utilise much more to express the love and

⁵¹ John Paul II, *Speaking to the Catholic Laity in Harare, Zimbabwe, on September 11, 1988*, In: Africa Faith and Justice Network, *The African Synod: Document, Reflections, Perspectives*, 1996. p. 46

concern for one another amidst the changing and hostile world. The Church in Africa needs more witness through our way of life than mere doctrinal truths. Doctrines need to be supported by witness.

3.2 African Values Associated With Meals

Africa in its diversity of culture as well as values has some common aspects. It is through some of these the Church in Africa is called to be a tangible Sacrament of Christ with its values in union with the Gospel values. The African people are rich in values connected with sharing a meal or celebration. The question is, how are these values taken up and expressed in a Christian way, especially in our Eucharistic celebration?

3.2.1 hospitality

One of the most appealing characteristics of an African home or family is its hospitality. People differ in the manner of welcoming, but the willingness to open up for the visitor is typical of an African. This moves me to think about some of these values that are dying and probably not well actualised in our Christian way of life. What a beauty there is when an African embraces the value, for example, of hospitality and Christ's message of love. Hospitality is a traditional value to be cherished for a Christian way of living.

For most of the African people meals are an external expression of their deep down love and concern for the people around them, for those who come in their homes. This hospitality is itself a witness-bearing for the other people who look forward to the kingdom of God. Christ said 'you will know them by their fruit' (Mt 7:20). I think that if any African who is normally renowned for his/her hospitality does not make full use of that given gift, then the message of Christ has not taken

root. One's interiority inevitably stands forth and is made manifest in one's actions or omissions. Hospitality, as central in an African meal, is itself an act of spreading the Good News to other people. It is a missionary activity. If only people are aware of their positive values they can go out and share what they have. This value is closely connected with something divine. People easily find God in the hospitality they offer to others and receive from them.

3.2.2 Community Aspect

There is a common saying among the Benna people of the southern part of Tanzania that; "*whoever eats alone is a witch.*" In the gospel of Luke meals are a community affair (Cf. Luke 22:7-13, 14-38; 5:27-39; 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24). The Holy Father Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter "*Novo Millennio Inuente*" no 45⁵² emphasises the importance of communion at all levels of Church life. I think this communion is manifested at the celebration of the Eucharist. This shows that community is at the centre of the meals and they are used to express the hospitality of our Lord as he commands us to do the same. Be it in an African meal or in the Eucharist, people benefit from the community gathered for a meal. For example, in African meals the whole family naturally dines from the same plate at the same table. This should be strengthened when people come to share at one table of the Lord. This strengthens the sense of togetherness within the family and one feels at home and part of it.

When we contemplate about the Church as a family, the communal aspect in celebrating Eucharist is of paramount importance. Eucharist has a deep-seated communion with God and with one another. One cannot claim to be in communion

⁵² John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter, Novo Millennio Inuente*, Rome, English Trans. *At the Beginning of the New Millennium*, Nairobi 2001, p. 37

with God and fail to appreciate the rest of the people of God. This is one of the 'conditions' to dine in the kingdom of God. One has to change one's attitude about other members of the body of Christ and see each and every person as equal. This hospitality and love need to be reciprocated in day-to-day life. This is the initial mission of the Church after sharing that love and hospitality of the Father through Christ.

Probably today we are caught in a drama that began years ago when evangelisation was done without much consideration of the culture of the people. This is how we may have missed many African values. The Eucharist is not like an African meal, but the values and significance can easily be drawn from our common practices during meals. For example, dancing is a celebration value, which is in most of the African meals, but lacking in most of our Christian 'celebrations.' Probably the 'solemn' attitude that is part of our Christian worship denies or rather blocks the joyous moment, which in Africa is expressed through dancing. It is not necessary to change the way we have been doing to an African way but the values we have just mentioned can be incorporated and brought to a new understanding when we participate and offer this thanksgiving Eucharist. As the Mother Church invites the Church in Africa to inculturation, there is a need to see the value and importance of some of these aspects.

For the Africans, the search for God and their way of expressing this is deeply seated in their wisdom and feelings. These are human faculties which the people of Africa have not exploited fully as they come to celebrate the sacrifice of the Lord. When you see an African celebrating in a traditional way, the whole of the person is involved. This is the case when they exercise their hospitality.

The African faith and justice Network in its book *"African Synod: documents, reflections perspectives (1996)"* describes a great need for a new vision in the African Church. I believe that this new vision includes a real involvement of the whole person in Christian worship with his or her feelings, emotions. Probably today we have more techniques in celebration than faith and creativity. Something has been done in inculturation, but more can be done in the inculturation of some of the positive African values. Looking at an African, with his values and practices, Christianity can be enriched by some of the basic principles of the African worldview. E.g. we have seen how an African has a sense of sacredness in nearly all aspects of life; there is a strong emphasis on community in Christian living. These are some of the things that will help the people of Africa to answer positively to the invitation to the kingdom of God.

Meals in Africa are a strong symbol of reconciliation. People come to these reconciliation services for a celebration that involves eating. Marriage celebrations, burial, birth, are all centred on celebration and feasting. All these touch one the physical part of the person, but that is not the experience when we move to a deeper level of the human person. For example, something is missing in the whole Sacrament of reconciliation in the Church practice. Possibly it has been 'privatised' very much and the aspect of a joyful father welcoming his lost Son and the community homecoming of one-member remains a nightmare. For an African who has experienced the feasts or celebration involved in traditional reconciliation finds little meaning in the way it is celebrated in the Church. This is the same human person who on one hand enjoys the values, and on the Church level experiences none of these. Will it be a sin or against the Church to acculturate some of these

values and utilize them in the Church? I believe that the Church as a community is not rigid. Vatican II made it clear that the good values should be used for our worship. Jesus used the Hellenistic cultural value of reclining during meals for example. Why not some of the African values to be used?

3.2.3 A sense of belonging

Meals in most African society express an attitude. It is an attitude that shows a moment of being accepted, and when that meal is shared one feels at home with oneself as well as with others. For example, when a meal is prepared for somebody who has been away from the family, or somebody who, due to wrongdoing cut off from the community that one gets the sense of belonging. It is a real return to others and to oneself. For example the story of the prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), the younger Son was not even considered a fellow human being, when they refused to give him even the food of the pigs in that distant land. But the action of the father of slaughtering a fattened calf and the whole banquet gave the son a great sense of belonging. The action of the father signalled an aspect of sonship. Meals brings us a sense of who we are and that we belong to a family. This is what is expected in our sharing at one table in the Eucharist. The Church is our family of belonging. But even in the Church and as we partake at one table we have some 'elder brothers' who are not happy when others join at the table of the Lord due to negative attitudes or somebody not belonging to the some background. We have seen this in the genocide of Rwanda, where some were denied their right of worship because they were of a different tribe. This shows that something is missing in the understanding of the meal the Lord prepares for us all.

Therefore, the Church in Africa in her pilgrimage towards the eschatological banquet is invited to be dynamic in her approach. The Africans are also invited to change their attitude about other people who are not of the same tribe or background. If this is done there will be a great response to the divine celebration with an increased sense of belonging to the Church.

As Vatican II invites us to heed 'the sign of the times', no doubt it calls the Church in Africa to listen carefully to the culture of the people and dialogue with it.

3.3 Eucharist at the centre

All the values, all the importance we give to meals need to be centred on the understanding and the living of the Eucharist. This is a well-known Sacrament and its place within the Church is well known, but probably little lived. "... The Eucharist occupies a unique place as a Sacrament of Sacraments."⁵³ This is true, in a way that all the other Sacraments are ordered to it.

This Eucharistic celebration is a challenge today to all Christians, particularly to the Church in Africa. The Church in Africa in her pilgrimage meets with so many obstacles like wars, mushrooming of so many Christian denominations, tribalism, and political instability. These are, in one-way or another a stumbling block to people in their search for God. I strongly believe that some of these are caused by the lack of understanding of one another, lack of appreciation of other people who are not from the same background, and the individualistic tendencies that has lead to wars and tribal clashes. The conversion and the change of attitude to which Jesus invited the people of his time, is the same message that the people of Africa have to give heed. But I think if people come to the table of the

⁵³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nairobi 1992, n. 1211

Lord with clear understanding of all that Jesus does in that *anamnesis*, then most of these blocks may be lessened or removed. So much happens at that table of the Lord and which we take for granted. *Paul Bernier* calls individualism a modern heresy because it runs contrary to the nature of the Eucharist, which is communion.⁵⁴ Just as the Last Supper brought Jesus and his disciples together, the Eucharist should also be a sign of unity among believers. The only hope and external sign for our unity as members of the body of Christ is our transformation when we partake in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is also a “bond of Charity.” This is not our own charity, but a charity of the one who gives oneself for us and gives thanks to God for that gift. This has to be made clear as we celebrate Eucharistic meal. The world today threatens the centre of all that exist (Christ), for nothing came into being without him. As mentioned above, individualism, self-sufficiency, wars etc. distorts the whole plan of God. As Christians we have to learn to say ‘no’ to these cultures and embrace the culture of love, concern for one another (Christian values). These may look far away for us, but they are real challenges for the Church in Africa and the whole universal Church. Sharing a meal at table is the simplest and most fundamental indication of our becoming one. “...Because the need for food and drink is the one need we all share and are continually being made aware of.”⁵⁵ This surely is a value within our reach, with a higher meaning when we partake in the meal of the Lord.

⁵⁴ Paul, B., *Bread Broken and Shared: Broadening our Vision of Eucharist*, 1981, p. 89

⁵⁵ Lucas, J.R., “*The Philosophical Background To Eucharistic Theology: Thinking about the Eucharist* (1972) <<http://users. Ox. Ac.uk/~jrlucas /eucharis.htm/>>, 12/29/2001, 3

“Jesus did choose meals as a vehicle of his self-gift.”⁵⁶ Through meal we get exemplified the fact of going beyond oneself and sharing with others. This is something Christians are called to when they share the meal at the table of the Lord.

3.4 Conclusion

I strongly believe that Africa has so much to offer to the universal Church. We may not be aware of how important our values are to the Church, but when we try and make them part of our worship and our overall way of Christian living they will assume a greater reality and benefit the universal Church with a living hospitality that springs from our traditional way of living. The context of meals in Luke, as we have seen so far, has to do with attitude of those invited and those who invite. The Pharisees and Scribes murmured at Jesus’ table-fellowship with sinners and tax collectors. Their main complaints were: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” But this was not a one-way traffic; as Jesus was making his way to the sinners and tax collectors, they too were making their way to him. Meals became the meeting point. The Church in Africa is no exception. She is called to move towards God as He has made his invitation possible to all, and the invitation is to meet at the table of the Lord. But sometimes the attitudes in some of the African society today, the civil wars, tribalism and tribal crushes etc. can act as a stumbling block to the invitation. They hinder people from responding freely to God who calls them to the joy of eternal life. These are some of the issues to be re-addressed in Africa so as to allow people to have the freedom to dine in the kingdom. When today we think of the many people in Africa who are indirectly refused freedom of worship, we realise how the mission of the Church is still fresh and demands a lot of

⁵⁶ Paul, B., *Bread Broken and Shared*, p. 60

commitment. For the Church in Africa this is the new evangelisation, which Pope John Paul II invites us all as we enter the new millennium. "As the Church prepares to enter the Third Christian Millennium, the Evangelisation of culture is a crucial part of what I have called 'the new evangelisation.'" ⁵⁷ I think for all the people involved in evangelisation or mission work and for me in particular as a Rosminian, this challenges me to think of the African values, which are neglected. Even our Founder Antonio Rosmini in 1829 wrote a letter addressed to his three members who were sent on mission from Italy to England

" I recommend all three of you to make yourselves little by little as English as possible in anything which is not sinful, since in this way you will be acting like St. Paul: 'I have made myself all things to all men'.... Each nation has its own customs, which are good in its own eyes. So you ought to see through English eyes and in your charity prove what you see."⁵⁸

This is a challenge for all of us today as we study and prepare ourselves for the new evangelisation, especially evangelisation of people who are not from our own background. This is where we are invited to change our attitude and be converted by all that is good from the culture of the people.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Called to Evangelise Culture: The Response of the Rosminian Family to the Hopes of the Church of the Third Millennium*: Address to the Rosminian Family when he received the members at the end of the General Congregation of the Institute of Charity, 26 September 1998.

⁵⁸ Antonio Rosmini, Founder of The Institute of Charity, Letter to G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola: Rome 23rd May 1829. (Letters, I, P. 114 ss.)

GENERAL CONCLUSION

It has been a moment to think and talk about meals. By telling the stories of meals, Jesus made humankind aware that meals are not simply moments of enjoyment and moments of seeking honours. Jesus invites us to accomplish a miracle in our day-to-day life when we share a meal at the table of the Lord. The greatest miracle is conversion and change of attitude. It doesn't matter whether we are the hosts or guests.

It was tempting to think that Jesus was out of 'fashion.' During his time the fashion was to invite those who would invite you back and out do you in hospitality. Literally people competed on this issue of invitation to meal. I wonder whether this is not still the attitude of the so-called modern society, modern religious houses, modern world. People still look for honours and show off. For example, look at the meals we prepare for our feast days, our birthdays or patron Saints, our founders. Think of the people we invited to those occasions.

Imagine Jesus is saying 'no' to that. He invites the poor, the lame, the cripple, and the prostitutes. Who on earth among these people would ever invite you to a banquet reciprocating your invitation? Surely none of them, but Jesus says, this is the way towards God, towards everlasting celebration in the Kingdom. This is the real and true invitation to 'dine in the Kingdom.'

Luke shows a special sensitivity for table fellowship not just for its own sake, but also because it is a sign of a deeper kind of hospitality that entertains the strange and alien elements in life and looks for good everywhere. This large and generous spirit of Jesus is acknowledged as deriving from his faith- understanding of

the profound goodness hidden in the mystery of God. This is what people through all the ages search for and wish to come be part of.

It is only by coming to the knowledge of this profound goodness hidden in God that they come to appreciate each other and show a concern for each other. Luke shows how Jesus comes and turns the 'Pharisaic' 'table fellowship' upside down and invites people to think of something higher.

God in his banquet does not see a lame, a poor or a prostitute, but a Son and daughter who has been invited to share in his Kingdom celebration. God does not exclude anybody from the banquet; it is human beings who choose to go away.

What a challenge even today in our own dealing with others. We may have 'starved many to death' without our awareness by choosing people who are to dine with us. 'Dining in the Kingdom' is not 'everybody's cup of tea' in our human reckoning, but Jesus invites us to this great moment of spiritual experience, a mystical communion, a counter system and a future hope.

Hunger kills. That is why we pray everyday 'give us this day our daily Bread.' But understandably it is not only bodily food but also food of eternal life that we will eat in the fellowship of the kingdom of God. We are all invited to share his hospitality with all humanity.

In this essay we have tried to journey with Luke and see how Jesus uses these earthly meals to invite us to the heavenly banquet. We are invited to do something with our attitude towards other people and towards ourselves. We are invited to know who we are and what is our destiny as human being. He has invited us all; what excuse do we give today?

Abbreviations

Cf.	Confer; compare
Lev	Leviticus
Sam	Samuel
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Gen	Genesis
Ex	Exodus
Prov	Proverbs
Sir	Sirach
Gal	Galatians
Cor	Corinthians
Mk	Mark
Mt	Matthew
Jn	John
Lk	Luke

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