

# Reclaiming The Eucharistic Celebration In The Context Of Social Justice In The Democratic Republic Of The Congo

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## **Abstract**

*Eucharist and baptism are central sacramental acts or rites in the life of Protestant Christians churches. These acts are believed to be vital components of sacramental theology. The Eucharist is considered the most important sacrament for the Christian's experience because, during the primitive church era, it was regarded as the meaningful expression of the church service (Culman,1948:13).*

*The elements used in the Eucharist are apparently very minimal, but the meaning and perspectives portrayed postulate real challenges for people. There is great dimension, faith and mystery when participating in the Eucharistic service.*

*During the ceremony, the members churches show respect and dignity through radical pietism, viewing the Eucharist as a type of magic that washes sins and heals sicknesses (Moyo, 2015:101). In fact, the Eucharistic celebration becomes a form of local folklore and a simple liturgy of hypocrisy.*

*As a social meal and an act of solidarity, the Eucharist brings a novel understanding of the society. This study is motivated by my pastoral experience of the Eucharistic celebration, by the lack of knowledge of the meaning of the Eucharist and by the lack of motivation of some Christians to be involved in public life. My understanding of the sacramental acts and social injustice rests in the DR Congo — a country with a wealth of potential but characterised by multiform crises such as warfare, poverty, injustice, conflict and corruption. This inconsistency creates the gap in this study, which looks at how Congolese Christians view the Eucharist in the midst of multiform crises. This insight has prompted me to embark on this academic journey to better comprehend the Eucharist's significance in the backdrop of humanitarian crises and severe social injustice in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The study calls for a comprehensive investigation of the challenges produced by the Eucharistic celebration and their implications for the public lives of Congolese Christians. Therefore, the scope of this study hopes to explore the social justice implications in the Eucharistic celebration and to respond to the current needs of the Congolese people who are suffering the social injustice.*

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## **I. The meaning of the Eucharist**

The understanding of the word 'Eucharist' as a sacrament in the social injustice context offers a new understanding in sacramentary theology. This new understanding should produce a great awareness and appreciation of its historical foundations, theological grounding and social code (Smith 2003: 287). Torvend (2019) argues that the Eucharist should lead Christians to global outreach. He claims that the Eucharist has an earthly trajectory, in which communion in the life of the risen Christ is meant to lead every worshipper into the world (Torvend, 2019:15). In this section, the intent is to define three key concepts: sacrament, Eucharist and social justice.

### **Sacrament**

The term 'sacrament' is derived from the Latin word *sacramentum*, and translated into Greek as *mysterion*. In the most general sense of the term, a sacrament is a sign that possesses a hidden sanctification or bears some relationship to it (Nutt 2017: 61). Sacraments are a language of faith of the church which Christian believers experience. During worship, members express and testify their commitment to the church by gesture of the sacraments. According to Kisitu (2018:125), a sacrament is understood as a communal event, communicated through words, symbols and actions that emphasise the unity of the community and the responsibility of each member to each other.

Sacraments are often described as a visible sign of inward and spiritual divine grace, and they take the form of rites and rituals. Sacraments are thought to be special or specific means of grace (Thorsen, 2020:158). Sacraments are the elements that Jesus Christ incorporated into the Christian faith as they served to strengthen

Christian faith (Feenstra 1984:141-142). The sacraments were considered more to be a sign of divine grace. People's faith should be emphasised, rather than the rites and rituals performed. Protestant churches recognise two sacraments, namely Holy Baptism and the Eucharist, while Catholics identify seven sacraments (Thorsen, 2020:158).

Sacraments were understood and celebrated by early Christians as communal events or rituals that theologically defined who they were: Christians united in the life of Christ. The early Church's sacramental activity was founded on the core sacramental principle: "a belief that we can experience God through liturgical events and symbols, and that the Church is a sacramental community that commemorates Jesus Christ's presence in tangible and symbolic ways" (Kisitu,2018:124).Furthermore, the particular view that Christians have of the sacraments serve as important ways of remembering how God has provided salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and how God continues to work in assuring, encouraging and strengthening Christians. The sacraments represent a vital way through which the Holy Spirit work. The goal of sacraments is invariably to point towards God's grace (Thorsen, 2020:158).

When Jesus said: 'Do this in remembrance' (Luke 22, 19), he conveyed that the Eucharist was a public expression of faith in Jesus Christ for the community of believers. By this ritual, the church members realise their commitment and the unity with other members in the world.

In the Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry document (1982:13), the World Council Church receives the Eucharist as a sacrament from the Lord, in which Jesus Christ provides communion with himself. The Eucharist is fundamentally a whole act that will be examined under the following headings: thankfulness to the Father, memory of Jesus Christ, invocation of the Holy Spirit, faithful communion, and Kingdom meal. The sacrament is viewed as a symbol of God's mercy.

### **Eucharist**

The term 'Eucharist' — also known as the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, and Mass and Divine Liturgy — is derived from the Greek verb *eucharistein*, and the noun *eucharistia*, which means 'to give thanks' and 'thanksgiving', respectively. It was adopted in the Christian vocabulary as a translation of the Hebrew verb *barak*, and the noun *berakah*, which are also translated into Greek as *eulogein* (to bless) and *eulogia* (blessing). For Jews and Judaic Christians, *berakah* (blessing-thanksgiving), is an act of praise directed towards God and a basic expression in all prayers (Downey 1993:137). The Eucharist is a religious service in which bread and wine are used as a focal point for religious instruction, public petitions, personal devotion, and congregational praise. Its prevailing characteristic and the meaning of the Greek word from which it is derived is thankful praise (Cully *et al* 1990: 228).

In the Bible, especially the Old Testament, all sacrifices and offerings of the patriarch and Israel — and even those offered by pagan cults — were figures of the Eucharist. Feingold (2018:72) positions the Eucharist in the prefiguration in the Old Covenant as being in the presence of God, manifested at certain times by a visible glory overshadowing the Holy Place. However, the immolation of the paschal lamb during the feast of the Passover most perfectly prefigures the Eucharist in three ways: first, the Eucharist was performed by eating unleavened bread. According to Exodus 12:8: "They are to eat flesh...as well as unleavened bread. Second, on the 14th day of the moon, it was immolated by the whole multitude of the children of Israel, and this was the symbol of the Christ's Passion. Third, the blood of the paschal lamb saved the children of Israel from the Angel of Death and liberated them from Egyptian captivity" (Thomas, 2016). The background of this rite includes the Jewish practice of using meals to celebrate events with significant religious meaning.

In the New Testament, Zizioulas (2011:2) attests that the Eucharistic meal is positioned in the context of the history of the people of Israel. There is no doubt that the Passover took place in the context of the Easter celebration. The New Testament gives four accounts of the institution of the last supper: Matthew, Mark, Luke and St. Paul in 1 Corinthians. These books record that Jesus Christ shared a meal with the disciples on the night before his crucifixion and also shared a meal with those who believed in him after his resurrection. The institution of the Eucharist was celebrated in the context of a Passover supper, with Jesus Christ's sacrifice giving meaning to the Jewish Passover.

For Smith and Taussig (1990:21), the fact that early Christians regularly ate meals whenever they gathered was a common characteristic with other social groups, Furthermore, when these various groups held their meals, they followed similar patterns and rules. This indicates that the ancient meal, or more particularly the banquet, was a social institution that was shared across cultures, regardless of social or ethnic distinctions among people.

In that case, the Eucharist was already instituted in a social frame as a common meal, common meeting and common tradition. It should be noted that the same basic patterns were followed whether the meal was to be designated 'secular' or 'sacred' (Smith & Taussig, 1990:22). This is the social setting in which the form and purpose of early Christian eating practices evolved. Social boundaries, social connection, moral duty, classism, and social equality are the forms of social relations that comprise up ancient banquet ideology (Smith

2003). Jesus Christ's sacrifice gave significance to the festive meal of Jews commemorating their liberation from slavery in Egypt.

In writing about the new meaning of the festive meal of the Jews' commemoration in the Eucharistic institutional context, Tissa Balusiriya (1977:7) argues that Jesus instituted the Eucharist on the night of the Jewish Easter. It was the national feast and a celebration of their independence as well as their liberation from slavery. Jesus Christ's sacrifice gave a new, deeper, and more universal meaning to this event.

Regarding the Eucharist being instituted, the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, cited by Feingold (2018:37), notes:

He [Jesus Christ] did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

This text highlights the principal reasons for which Jesus instituted the Eucharist. As the greatest gift of all, the Eucharist contributes to the church's vitality, nourishes the people of God in this state of exile and helps the church to perpetuate the redemptive gift of Christ in the world. According to Feingold (2018:54-55), the Eucharist is by far the supreme sacrament in dignity; it is the queen of the sacraments. The church becomes a way for the life of humanity through the Eucharist.

Feingold (2018:170) attests that the church Fathers have given united testimonies about the Eucharist, though expressed in different ways. They emphasise, above all, the reality of Christ's body and blood, Christ's sacrifice for humankind, and a sacrament which brings about unity in the Mystical Body of Christ, and which thus must be celebrated in the presence of the bishop. Many church Fathers used the Eucharistic faith of the church to combat Gnosticism or other Christological heresies and asserted the real presence of Jesus Christ in terms of the transubstantiation.

Many scholars continue to discuss the sense of Jesus Christ's presence in the Eucharist in an endeavor to fully comprehend the significance of the Eucharist. This is one of the points of contention regarding the significance of the sacrament in terms of form. For the first theory, promoted by St. Thomas Aquinas and others, and cited by Feingold (2018:32), the technical term 'transubstantiation' describes the extraordinary conversion of the bread and the wine into Jesus Christ. The priest proclaims the mystery being celebrated and expresses his or her surprise before the substantial conversion of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, a reality that beyond all human understanding, with these words, delivered immediately after the words of consecration. The Eucharist is a "faith puzzle" (Pope Benedict XVI 2007:46). The transubstantiation involves the instantaneous conversion of the bread and the wine. In other words, during the Eucharist, Jesus is present with his humanity and divinity in form of the bread and wine. The bread and the wine are not the symbols but the real presence of Jesus.

John Wycliffe, Huldrych Zwingli and others saw the Eucharist as 'a mere commemorative symbol' (Feingold 2018:345). For these scholars, the bread and the wine remain natural elements even after their consecration. The bread and wine represent a visible mark of the invisible reality, the presence (or spiritual presence) of Jesus Christ and God's invisible grace.

Additionally, there are some scholars, such as Luther and Calvin, who take more intermediate positions. They reject the radical theories of transubstantiation or consubstantiation in favour of the 'real presence' or 'spiritual power' of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. The presence of Jesus Christ in the church in many forms, such as the Lord's Supper, is most important in this subject. The church celebrates the mystical sacrament of Jesus Christ's presence through the adoration of God. This reality confers a new impulsion of dignity in the Eucharistic celebration. , as Fay (2001:1) beautifully explains, Our Savior instituted the Eucharist during his last dinner with his followers to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the years and to entrust to the church, his spouse, a remembrance of his death and resurrection. Msg. Fay concurs with *DominicaeCenae* (Pope John Paul II 1980) that the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is an endless mystery that the church will never be able to fully comprehend; the threefold God is the creator of everything and has the ability to accomplish far more than we can conceive (2001:3). The Lord is adored as the blessed sacrament in the rite of Eucharistic exposition and benediction, and in Eucharistic procession, or is kept in the tabernacle. The Christian faith is strengthened with devotions that are rooted in Jesus Christ's presence in the appearance of bread, and the Eucharist nourishes the dying (*viaticum*) and the sick (*DominicaeCenae* 1980).

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that Jesus Christ keeps his promise to be with his followers always, until the end of time (Mt 28:20). This is realised in the Eucharist. 'Christ has not left us without his corporeal presence in this voyage, but he links us to himself in this sacrament in the reality of his body and blood,' said St Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* III 75 a. 1). The author adds that Christ gives us eternal life through the celebration of the Eucharist under the appearance of bread and wine and we are thankful to God for this blessing (Knight 2017).

## **Social justice**

This paper has found it worthy to reflect on social issues in the DR Congo such as corruption among political leaders, mass killings, poor infrastructural development and gender inequality. The application of social justice as a response to the troubles in the DR Congo offers an interdisciplinary framework where those in the religious, political, law enforcement, traditional leadership and academic sectors (among others) can support a common struggle. The study of social justice offers the opportunity to gain insight into a variety of issues and teaches people how they can use this knowledge to be an agent of change for social issues. The term 'social justice' is a wide notion that has different implications for different people, both positive and bad. While caring about each individual is important, social justice is the quest of equity in the community and society as a whole, seeking to change laws or other constraints that cause people to become engrained in the challenges they face (Bailey, 2018).

Multiple causes — both foreign and internal — define Africa's social, economic, and political setting in terms of African viewpoints on social justice. Poverty and inequality on the continent have a large depth and incidence, as evidenced by social and economic indices. In other words, the social and economic circumstances underline the causal relationship between economic growth and poverty and inequality reduction (Stiftung, 2013: 15). Despite excellent economic growth trends and expectations, poverty and inequality remain a worry for millions of people in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The reality is that many people live in horrible conditions. The interaction of social, economic, and political settings has an impact on the possibility of achieving social justice.

Social justice, according to Rawls, has moral, theological, philosophical, and political roots. Some theorists and philosophers say that it is abstractionist as a notion since it concentrates on an idealized state of what a society should be (Rawls 1999:39). Others argue that social justice is relativist in nature, taking into account human diversity and differences, and that it underpins justice ideals. Equality, distribution, and redistribution, solidarity, subsidiary, inclusion, fairness, equity, equality, and nation-building are all principles of social justice (Taylor 2013:17). Social justice is a broad concept that encompasses universal human rights values as well.

The term 'social' can have various meanings in various contexts. Notwithstanding, the term generally refers to a society or a community of people. When the distribution of goods and advantages in society is allocated fairly, justice is achieved. Everyone has equal access to goods such as money, basic liberties, freedom of movement, office power, and profession choice (Taylor, 2013: 20).

*Social justice* is understood as a justice exercised within a society (Stronks and al, 2016:5). It includes many topics of the current debate in order to promote equality and well-being in a society. People and organisations approach this topic in diverse ways. World Day of Social Justice is celebrated on 20 February each year. It promotes gender equality, indigenous peoples' and migrants' rights. In 2020, the theme for World Day of Social Justice was *Closing the Inequalities Gap to Achieve Social Justice*. This day focused on fulfilling the goal of full employment and social integration. An additional focus was the United Nations' global mission to promote development and human dignity.

Social injustice is a notable obstacle for the peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. Social justice essentially breaks all barriers that people face in relation to their gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, disability and so forth. It is therefore necessary to uphold the principles of social justice. Social justice is based on the equality of the rights of all people and the possibility for all human beings to advance themselves socially and economically, without discrimination. It is crucial to understand that social justice is a fundamental condition of peaceful coexistence and of human prosperity within a country.

Nelson and Creagh, cited by Rambaritch (2018:47), make reference to the ancient Greek and Roman eras when the notions of justice and equality were used to organise political and social life. As one of the classical authors of the theory of justice, Rawls (1999:3) considers justice as the first virtue of social institutions. For Rawls, the idea of justice is fairness through the principles of liberty and equality. Challenging the idea of liberty and equality proposed by Rawls, Young, cited by Rambaritch (2018:48), suggests that the broader scope of justice cannot be restricted by liberty and equality, because justice includes all aspects of public life — that is, political and economic institutions and civil society.

The concept of social justice is vast and the term cuts across several disciplines. When we think about social justice, we usually think of income, wealth, employment, and educational chances. Social justice is viewed as a component of distributive justice in the writings of today's political philosophers, and the two words are frequently used interchangeably (Miller 1999:2). As a result, those who grasp the effectiveness of social life, political practice, socio-economic implications, distributive and retributive principles, and all aspects of welfare are frequently referred to as "social justice" (Miller, 1999; Field, 2015). Miller (1999:17) defines social justice as "the ability of a society's basic structure to provide both advantages and disadvantages to its citizens". Discovering the basic concepts that people examine when judging whether components of their society are equitable or unjust is the first step in developing a social justice worldview. There is the concept of 'distribution

among the members of a society' and the 'fundamental structure of a society' in Miller's definition. The basic structure of society, or more precisely, how the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the allocation of benefits from social cooperation, is the primary subject of justice (Rawls, 1999:6). The political constitution, as well as the major economic and social systems, are referred to as key institutions by Rawls. This is the ideal principle that a number of nation-states attempted to implement.

Because its impacts are significant and present from the start, the basic structure of society is the core subject of justice. As a result, the concept of social justice can be viewed as a benchmark against which the distributive components of society's fundamental structure can be measured. This norm, on the other hand, should not be confused with the principles that define other virtues, because the underlying social structure might be efficient or inefficient, liberal or illiberal, and just or unjust (Rawls 1999:7-9). Rawls views justice as a social ideal, with social cooperation as the social notion. In other words, the concept of justice makes sense if it is predicated on societal value agreement.

According to Van den Bos (2011:2795), social justice is defined as the fair and equitable distribution of power, resources, and obligations in society to all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, age, gender, ability status, sexual orientation, or religious or spiritual background. Inclusion, collaboration, cooperation, equal access, and equal opportunity are all values emphasized in this concept.

The Stiftung believes that universal human rights values underpin social justice (2013: 17). The ideals of equality, equity, distribution, and redistribution, as well as solidarity, subsidiarity, inclusion, recognition, fairness, and nation-building, are all automatically included in the concept. Concretely, social justice refers to the justice exercised within a society and the equal opportunities to achieve social action. It is not just about what is good for the individual, but also what is good for society as a whole (Stiftung 2013: 17). Social justice, according to Capeheart and Milovanovic (2007:2), requires an awareness of human connections. This is a difficult and broad endeavor, but it is also fascinating and worthwhile.

Social justice concerns large or small groups, such as families, churches and workplaces. Nation-states have a special standard in this dissertation because the state is considered the executor of the principles of social justice. The state's involvement in fostering a just society is widely recognized as critical in influencing the social justice agenda, not just through domestic policies that mobilize people, but also through mediating with external influences (Stiftung 2013:6).

Millions of people in the Democratic Republic of Congo are facing horrific circumstances, highlighting the urgent need to revisit and engage with themes of what constitutes the public good. This is done through discourses of social justice to create a more equitable, respectful and just society. This section served as an attempt to explore the definitions of the key themes of this topic and the contextual meaning for the current research. The next section considers important aspects of the Eucharist in the celebration thereof.

## **II. Some aspects of the Eucharist**

The Eucharist is the 'sum and the summary of faith' (Pope Benedict XVI 2007: 23). It is one of the sacraments which is multifaceted and has social implications — some of which are discussed below.

### **Liturgy and the Eucharist**

The connection between the Eucharist and liturgy is the most vital theological point of the current study. Jesus Christ's words, 'This is my body which is broken for you... Do this in remembrance of me' (1 Cor 11:23-25), are the liturgy of the Church's understanding of the Eucharistic celebration. According to Moyo (2015:104), liturgy manifests in the socio-economic and political context of the church by exhibiting the power dynamics of society in the church.

Various meanings have been applied to the understanding of the term 'liturgy.' In the present study, the aim is to rely on the meaning of liturgy in the Eucharistic context. According to Gathogo (2018:2), the liturgy concept is derived from the Greek, '*leitourgia*', meaning a 'public work done on behalf of the people.' It is seen as the order of the service of the church.

Adrian Fortescue, cited by Moyo (2015:96), defined liturgy from the original Greek word '*leitourgia*', meaning a public duty — a service to the state undertaken by a citizen. The meaning of the word liturgy is then extended to cover any general service of a public nature. For Carvalhaes (2015:3), the term liturgy was first related to how people used it to organise their lives within the city, including festivals related to civic duties.

Today, liturgy refers to the manner in which public religious worship is done. Various faiths utilize liturgies to organize their worship and ceremonies to honor God, gods, and/or divinity, according to Carvalhaes (2015:3). Liturgical worship, according to Gennrich and Rakoczy (2018:31), reflects faith in the community's theology — that is, the community's knowledge of God, God's people, and their call to his word — as expressed in the language, metaphors, and rituals used. The liturgy defines the fundamental nature of a Christian church (Pope Benedict XVI 2008:26). For J. Gordon Melton, cited by Mpofo (2018:109), Prayers, readings, and liturgical acts such as the administration of the Eucharist are all part of the liturgy of a church.

The liturgical power in the worship service is distinguished by the dominant role that liturgy plays in the community. Liturgy becomes one of the sociological elements of understanding people. The Eucharist is given as worship, according to Moyo (2015:101), and it is a lesson to be brought into the community following the service. "This is my body, which is broken for you.... Do this in commemoration of me," (1 Cor 11:23-25) Jesus Christ says, addressing socioeconomic and political difficulties. In Moyo's view, the words 'in remembrance of me' are highlighted in post-colonial liturgy. Exploring these words in a feminist context, Siwila (2015:91) sees the role that Jesus Christ played from a liberating perspective:

If Jesus, who calls all humanity to the table, is the same Jesus who heals the woman with the flow of blood, how can we differentiate today the blood that flows from these women who are excluded from the Lord's Table and that of the woman in Mt 5:24-34? How can we help these marginalized groups to reach out and touch the cloak of Jesus? We need to radically transform and heal the damaging, misogynist aspects of the Christian tradition that deal with the body.

The relationship between liturgy and the Eucharistic celebration calls for transformative and liberating perspectives. Carvalhaes (2015:5) explains this when he highlights the effort of the World Council of Churches in the Baptism Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document, as well as Lima Liturgy, that helped foster the renewal of the church. In these documents, Carvalhaes claims that languages and practices produced new ways of thinking as well as trends within Christian churches. The liturgical Reform was a sort of *aggiornamento*, or updating the church to reflect current events in the world. So far, the Eucharistic liturgy has urged participants to be responsible citizens who care for others and has reminded each person of the sacred nature of their participation. It's a ritual, an act, an affirmation, and a formal public declaration all rolled into one.

The Eucharistic sacrament is an all-inclusive act and cuts across social differences and class boundaries. Liturgically, Siwila (2015:83) says that Christians are considered as God's church, a congregation of all believers, and all body of Jesus Christ that is accessible to all. As a result, the Lord's Table is seen as a sacred location intended to bring humanity together. Concretely, the liturgy of the Eucharist or the Eucharistic celebration in the liberative and the transformative perspective was one of the aims during the liturgical reform. According to Moyo (2015:102), The Eucharistic ritual reminds the church that Jesus Christ is the one who overcomes, deliberates, releases, people from poverty difficulties and social injustice. The liturgy of the Eucharist is an expression of the communion, hospitality and solidarity of the church members and of the grace of God in the restoration of humanity.

According to the liturgy of the Eucharist, the Eucharistic celebration affects and addresses all dimensions of people's lives. As a response to the Eucharist liturgy, the participants demonstrate the presence of God in their social lives. God's justice, according to Wolterstorff, as cited by Moyo (2015:103-104) is an expression of His holiness: "...our justice is a reflection of God's holiness...holiness unites liturgy and justice".

### **The Eucharist as a sacrament of remembrance**

The Eucharist is not only a sacrament in and of itself, but a sacrament of 'remembrance' or 'memory.' In terms of the Eucharist as a commemoration, Uzuku, quoted by Siwila (2015:84), sees it as a reenactment of the Christian story's event. It is one of the first forms of worship, commemorating Jesus Christ's death. Menno understands the Eucharist foremost as an act of remembrance of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, and second as an exhortation to love one another (cited by Strizzi 2015:143).

The remembrance concept leads to the understanding of the Eucharist in three ways: first, the remembrance of Jesus Christ refers to all of salvation. It testifies to the love, humility, solidarity and compassion of Jesus Christ for all humans. The remembrance also re-enacts the role of liberation and challenges most of life's boundaries in our particular context. Indeed, the Eucharist is meaningless when worshippers celebrate the remembrance sacrament of Jesus Christ and disregard those who suffer injustice in their own communities. The remembrance must influence community members' daily relationships and habits. The Holy Eucharist, according to Pope Benedict (2009:5), is a gift made by Jesus Christ of himself, revealing to us God's immeasurable love for all people. The 'higher' love that motivated him to 'laid down his life for his friends' is manifested in this wondrous sacrament (Jn 15:13).

Second, remembrance signifies revitalising the memory of Jesus Christ. The word 'memorial' is central to the profound meaning of the Eucharist. The memory, according to Thurian (1985:91), is a ritual action that actualizes the event of Jesus Christ's sacrifice rather than a simple subjective recollection. As an act of thankfulness and supplication, the church offers this one-of-a-kind sacrifice to the Father. "Do this as a tribute to me' actually means 'do this so that my sacrifice may be remembered among you and by my Father on your behalf'". The memorial concept actualised God's deliverance of the people and the renewal of the Jewish paschal. When applying this concept, the Eucharist as Christ's sacrifice becomes a 'Christianisation' of the Jewish paschal. The Eucharist, according to Downey (1993:137), is a liturgical and holy supper in which the church commemorates, honors, and proclaims Jesus' sacrificial life, death, and resurrection. It is a liturgical rite

in which a group of people gather in the name of the Holy Spirit and act through, with, and in the name of God's son, Jesus Christ. The members give God, the Almighty Father, all glory and honor.

To rephrase, the Eucharist is a memorial of Jesus Christ's entire life, but particularly for the culmination of his life in his passion-resurrection. It is a celebration and a solemn act of praise and thanksgiving for the signs and wonders that God has exhibited for people throughout the ages. Above all, the Eucharist symbolises the mission of his son, Jesus Christ. It is a proclamation of the Lord's self-offering and death on humankind's behalf, until he comes in the fullness of time (Feingold 2018:340).

Third, the Eucharist is a memorial because it recalls the past and functions as a renewal of the last ceremonial of Jesus Christ. This memorial is not a discontinuous past but is one of realignment; that is, it concerns the past, present and future. The Eucharist is an act of actualisation. So far, the commemorative 'in memory of me' recalls the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and influences the future of the participants. It is not an exhumation of the past but is a re-actualisation of reality (Jean-Marc Ela, 1980: 9). Jounel (1983 :323) emphasises that the above means that during the Jewish meal, each family brings up not only the remote past but a glorious future from the prophets. In this regard, the Eucharist refers to the past, renews commitment to justice in the present and builds the future. Finally, by these words: 'Do this in memory of me', Jesus Christ reminds his followers of the work of salvation and liberation, to do as he did, to save humanity and to promote this calling in memory of him each time that they participate therein. In the context of the liberating perspective, as a memorial, the Eucharist is a sacrament of human liberation and the transformation of the world and a sacrament of solidarity.

### **The Eucharist as a sacrifice of alliance**

Smith (2003:67) emphasizes that sacrifice is the major religious rite of all people in the Greco-Roman civilization in his analysis of the banquet in the early Christian world. This places the sacrificial supper at the center of the ancients' religious lives. In view of Smith and other authors, the sacrificial ritual is one of the fundamental religious acts in ancient times. The implication is that festive joy is a social experience deriving from, as well as contributing to, the 'friendship' that is also fundamental to the banquet. As a result, 'festive delight' is to be regarded as a communal experience based on the form and purpose of the banquet of which it is an integral part, rather than as an individual experience (Smith 2003:81).

The Eucharist portrays a great sacrificial dimension. In the words, 'This is my blood of the New Testament', the Greek text stresses the expression 'sacrifice of alliance.' This highlights the sacrificial character of the death of Christ on the cross. In view of the ritual's blood of animals in the Book of Exodus with Moses (Ex. 24:8) in the Old Testament, the 'new sacrifice' for the New Testament overrides the old because of the death of the son of God. The death of Jesus as a supreme sacrifice renews the 'alliance' between humanity and God. Feingold (2018:43-44) sees in the Eucharist the mystical dimension of the expiatory sacrifice of our redemption in these terms:

Christ became man in order to be able to offer an expiatory sacrifice to satisfy all human sins in perfect justice. This was necessary because of the gravity of sin and the impossibility for man to offer fitting reparation... It is mystically because Christ Himself is the immolated Victim who becomes present on the Altar through the ministry of His priest who acts in His Person and His Blood is sacramentally poured out for the living and the dead (Feingold,2018:43-44).

In this Christology perspective, Jesus Christ is the primordial sacrament because he "is the reality to which the sacrament refers, namely the presence of the divinity itself, the divine grace of reconciliation and eternal life" (Osborne cited by Kisitu 2018:128). The Eucharist sacrifice implores the application of salvation to all humankind, the sanctification of the faithful until Jesus Christ returns and the gift of liberation to those who do not yet know him (Thurian 1982:101). Although Jesus Christ has done everything for the salvation of all humankind, and although objective redemption and reconciliation have been accomplished on the cross, it remains for the Church — that is, the Body of Christ — to be an instrument for the application of each and all the graces of salvation (Thurian 1982: 101).

### **The Eucharist and social life (social justice)**

Social life is central in human society in view of its importance and the global meaning in the context of social life. The Eucharist's unity with Jesus Christ gives our social relationships a fresh start (Pope Benedict XVI 2008:49).The goal of this study is to better understand social life and the concept of social justice in the context of Eucharistic celebrations. Social justice is often used in a plural-disciplinary context; the term refers to equality, equity, solidarity, justice and distributive justice. The antithesis of social justice is injustice, inequality and inequity. In other words, social justice promotes freedom, human rights and hope.

When exploring the Eucharist in relation to the African concept of Ubuntu, Kisitu (2018:124) considers that in celebrating the sacraments we encounter not only God but also our lived experiences. These experiences include loving and being loved, caring and being cared for, and forgiving and being forgiven. These values

manifest themselves in human societies as a sacramental celebration. Kisitu argues that the life of the early church bears testimony to these experiences, for instance, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles:

Now all believers were one in heart and soul, and nobody called any of his possessions his own. Instead, they shared everything they owned...none of them needed anything, because everyone who had land or houses would sell them and bring the money received for the things sold and lay it at the apostles' feet. Then it was distributed to anyone who needed it (Acts 4:32-35 NIV).

In view of Kisitu's thinking, the Eucharistic celebration challenges the social lives of people, the quality of being human and the quality of a society. Through this experience, we find the foundational meaning of the Eucharist as a gift of God's encounter with human persons through Jesus Christ. During the Eucharistic celebration, the followers of Jesus Christ share a meal. This is not only a joyful moment but also an opportunity to listen to and learn from one another. For Kisitu, (2018:133), as a sacrament of the believers, the Eucharist is an opportunity to encounter God and one another in the true spirit of humanity.

In relation to the social meaning of the Eucharist, According to Moyo (2015:102), the Eucharistic celebration necessitates reconciliation and fellowship among all individuals seen as brothers and sisters – in God's family — who are seeking suitable social, economic, and political ties. Injustice, oppression, exploitation, and manipulation are all challenged by the Eucharist's very character.

In the *Sacramentum Caritas* document, The Eucharist, according to Pope Benedict (2008:50), is a ritual of communion between brothers and sisters who have allowed themselves to be redeemed through Christ and who have united Jews and pagans as one people, bringing down the wall of hatred that separated them (Eph 2:14). Only by constantly striving for reconciliation are we able to partake of Christ's Body and Blood in a worthy manner (Mt 5:23-24). True peace requires, without a doubt, the restoration of justice, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

In light of Pope Benedict XVI's call to reform unjust systems and restore dignity and respect to all men and women — all created in God's image and likeness - sharing the Eucharist recognises the need to change unjust structures and reinstate dignity and respect to all men and women. The Eucharist becomes an opportunity for church members to participate in social life activities.

From this consideration, the Eucharist is also a community act. The obvious social conditions for first-century Christian meals place a strong focus on the contemporary Christian Eucharist as a communal rite. Some individualist cultures have contributed in major ways to the exploitation of the poor, significant damage to the environment and to our inability to coexist in families and communities (Smith and Taussig, 1990:81). The significance of the Lord's Supper challenges individualistic piety and suggests a more collective model. As an expression sacramental to the group life, the Eucharist helps us to live harmoniously.

The social justice approach to the Eucharist identifies four crucial themes: challenging injustice, applying the concept of Ubuntu, reconciliation, and acts of community. Throughout human history, the story of salvation has spanned all of humanity. Wood (2014: 360) believes that the Messianic people do not represent the entire human race because all humanity is predestined for eschatological renewal and all humans will share in the final liberation of the glory of God's sons and daughters (Rm 8:21). These themes constitute the focus for the next chapter in this research.

### **The Eucharistic celebration in the Protestant church of Congo**

The Protestant church of Congo regards the Eucharist as a victory over evil, a spiritual union with Jesus Christ, and a foreshadowing or typology of the celestial banquet promised by Jesus Christ. The Eucharistic celebration is an opportune moment to remind participants of political, economic and ethical perspectives that can challenge the society (Mushila, 2001:77-87). The minister of the Eucharist is an ambassador who represents the divine initiative and expresses the connection between local communities in the universal church (WCC, 1982:15). In local churches, wine or juice represents the blood, and the bread or biscuit represents the body of Jesus Christ. The Protestant church recognises the Eucharistic hospitality, also known as intercommunion, with all Christians baptised by immersion as the unity of Jesus Christ's body. The WCC (1982:11) details this in these terms:

- The Eucharist ushers in a novel reality that changes Christians into the image of Christ and thus makes them efficient witnesses for him.
- The Eucharist is valuable food for missionaries, just as bread and wine are valuable to pilgrims on their apostolic journey.
- As Jesus is the one who gives his life for the salvation of the world, the Eucharistic community is fed and developed by acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ in speech and action.
- Eucharist gathers and unites people and allows them to share the unique Lord's meal,
- Eucharistic assembly must also gather those who are present beyond its visible limits because Christ invited to his feast all for whom he died.



Regarding the Protestant church in Congo, Eucharistic hospitality has its foundations in the Christian creed and leans on traditions according to the Bantu table (Mushila, 2001:88).

### **Summary**

The first and the second points covered the understanding of the Eucharistic celebration as a meaningful part of the promotion of social justice in the DR Congo. It also retraced the Eucharist celebration in the Protestant church of Congo. Thus, the Eucharist celebration can challenge social injustice crises.

The next point chose some aspects and analysed them in view of the social experience derived from the Eucharist celebration. It explained that the Eucharist was foundational to Christian faith and was a ritual in which the followers of Jesus Christ re-enacted human injustice and violence. This was manifest in the cruel death of Jesus Christ on the cross. In his incarnation, life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ challenged the violence and the social injustice of his time (Kaunda 2018:90). The Eucharistic celebration can challenge social injustice crises.

When exploring the link between liturgy and Eucharist, the Eucharist manifests from the liberation and transformative perspective. As a worship service, the Eucharist liturgy involves any general service to public life. The 'remembrance' expresses the recalling of the event of the Christian story, re-enacts the role of liberation and challenges most of life's boundaries and social injustice. There is a great interpellation for the continuous exploring of the meaning of the Eucharist because, according to Radcliffe (2005:169), the church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the church.

### **III. Eucharist celebration in a social justice context: A liberation perspective**

The attempt is to analyse the liberation theology perspective in the Eucharist, in line with the objectives of the study. Theology of liberation is located in the 'contextual theology. The main themes addressed are liberation theology according to the contextual theology; Eucharist in the liberation theology; social justice compared to the liberation theology; and implications of the Eucharist and social justice.

Within the Eucharistic sacrament, the redemptive or redemption plan is fulfilled and revealed. As a result, according to Gutierrez, the sacrament is an effective revelation of the call to communion with God and the unity of all humanity. This is a historical encounter, not because God comes from history, but because God arrives from history (Gutierrez, 1988: 146). This mystery, according to Gutierrez, is the "love of the Father, who loved the world so much that he sent his only Son" (Jn 3:16), as well as a summons to all human beings in the Spirit of connection with God. Human beings are called together as a community to participate in the Trinitarian community's life and to enter the circuit of love that connects the Trinity's people. This is the kind of love that "builds up human society throughout history" (Gutierrez, 1988 :67)

The mystery of the Eucharist celebration holds the great mission of the church in the redemptive perspective. When Jesus says, 'in memory of me', the calling is to renew the event of salvation and to actualise this event within our lives. Contrastingly, 'communion with God and others presupposes the abolition of all injustice and exploitation.' Ela argues that 'the Eucharist is an appeal or call to great solidarity with the world and its history by the sharing of bread with the poor and the hungry....' For Ela, the Eucharist is a commitment involving the powers of life (Ela, quoted by Kouadio, 2016:16). In the Eucharistic celebration, the church cannot ignore or forget the oppressed. Ela recommends celebrating the Eucharistic sacrament to reconstitute its theological and social dimension or apprehension with its critical power and liberation (Ela, quoted by Kouadio, 2016:).

The Eucharistic celebration is not a simple ritual. It announces a new anthropological model. It engages the participants in a liberation process in the context of oppression, social injustice, conflict and poverty, and the celebration becomes a calling to liberation. Ela (quoted by Kouadio, 2016:22) confirms that 'in celebrating "in memory of" is not to present a new structure of salvation but to present the original structure with renewed acts of liberation which have historically occurred in our lives.'

Considering Ela's viewpoint, we can highlight that in the Eucharistic celebration, Jesus Christ's calling is not only to *tell* but to *do*. In the 'do this in memory of me', Jesus Christ invites all celebrants to participate in their process of liberation. So, the Eucharist stands to invite all participants to say 'yes' to solidarity. The Eucharist is a commitment and a struggle to love others, most of whom are hungry and weak. This is why, when celebrating the Eucharist in the African context, the church should be mindful of a large number of people who are seeking liberty, justice and peace and also to forgive itself.

Another author who explores the relationship between the Eucharist and society from the redemptive perspective is Wood. From the theology of Henri de Lubac, Wood explores the social dimension of the Eucharist and the church's role in the world as being the sacrament of unity in these terms:

The Eucharist is not only the visible sign of communion in and with Christ, but is also constitutive of ecclesial communion, for in partaking of one bread we become one body (Wood, 2014: 365) (1 Cor. 10, 16-17).

In analysing Wood's thinking, we can conclude that the Eucharistic celebration as a sacrament of unity transcends all boundaries of cultures, races, languages, nations, ethnicities and political parties. In the

celebration, the Kingdom of God becomes a visible reality. The church members become brothers and sisters to one another in the same body of Jesus Christ. 'This is the true relationship between Eucharist and society' (Wood, 2014: 365).

Social justice in a context of faith recalls the role of the church (or another faith community) in helping disadvantaged people in their local communities — for example, running a food bank, setting up the church hall to be a community space (often the only remaining community space in deprived areas), running welcome programmes, providing services for vulnerable people (those with mental health issues or addiction) and offering advice and support in areas like debt management or education (Lewis 2017:6). These social projects aim to promote the transformation of the liberation of people in the inclusive and social justice perspective.

Social justice in the context of liberation theology also promotes equality, independence, freedom in the fraternity and the fight against all forms of violence. The social injustice context of people becomes a calling for the church to be a 'liberation- shaped' church and suggests some practical steps that can be taken to achieve a greater semblance of social justice (Lewis 2017:7).

Considering the Eucharist as a basis of social justice, Igboanusi (1994:2) notes that the Eucharist is the symbolic eating of the bread and drinking wine (fruits of human labour) and is a tacit declaration of our honest intention to share other fruits of fair human labour and collaboration instead of monopolising them. In other words, the elements of the Eucharist constitute the solid fruits of the human labour in the production process. Moreover, these elements explain the socio-economic dimension of the Eucharist. Thus, in the Eucharistic celebration, Christian social justice can be a motivation and an inspiration for the participants.

Igboanusi demonstrates the thinking of Paul and Eucharistic social justice where participation in the Eucharist influences the sharing of material goods and possessions. Paul, unlike Luke, expresses great anxiety over the Eucharistic life of the church (Acts 2,42-47; 1 Cor. 10,31). The division in the Corinthian church was not a dogmatic, spiritual or mystical division, but rather a social division. This is because the Eucharistic celebration challenges the divisions and confirms the unity of the body of Jesus Christ when the bread is broken and distributed to all. Here, the basis of Christian identity is proclaimed, and mutual care and social justice become a Christian inspiration (Igboanusi, 1994:5). In the same way, the dream of a just society must motivate all participants. The transformation of the society becomes a motif of the church. The issues of hunger, conflict, war, misery and underdevelopment in the world inspire the church's mission to work towards social justice. Christians have a duty to work for this.

Reflecting on the Eucharistic celebration in a social context as a redemptive tool, the Eucharist has to lead the Christian communities to analyse the issues which confront persons in the present. The people are called to unmask injustice and to build groups for liberation (Balasuriya, 1977:80).

When teaching Eucharistic celebration, we can find the richest themes of love, justice, solidarity and/or unity and communion. These terms have different definitions, but their meanings tend to converge in the same Eucharistic discourse. The theological concept of justice indicates the broader spectrum of solidarity because Christian love, solidarity and justice cannot be separated, since love implies an absolute demand of justice (Igboanusi, 1994:15). Further, we cannot love our fellow humans without justice. As the Eucharistic celebration proclaims the love of God for humanity and love for one other, there is a great dimension of social justice in this celebration. The Eucharistic community has become a true agent for justice in the world. The church task exceeds all frontiers because the entire mission of the church boots the justice of society. The Eucharistic celebration is a proclamation of social justice as a source of the liberation of people.

The connection between Eucharistic celebration and social justice is the power of inclusion, and not division or exclusion. One of the key elements that characterises social justice is living in a community where one can be loved and receive and share material, as well as spiritual goods. There is respect and dignity for all human beings and nature (WCC, 2011:332). In one bread and one cup, 'the Eucharist moves Christians to a commitment to work for greater unity and justice in today's world.' The Eucharist must not point to areas of separation or division, but the sacrament has the transformative power to shape society and bring about justice despite physical separation (Driscoll, 2014:2). The Eucharistic celebration responds to the social injustice challenges of current times. Where the world is faced with grave problems of hunger, war and violence, the Eucharist expresses love, solidarity, fraternity, participation, equality and equity. Driscoll (2014: 3) notes the following when he quotes the bishops of the world:

In a culture of death, the Eucharist is the culture of life. In an atmosphere of individual and societal selfishness, the Eucharist reaffirms total self-giving. Where there is hate and terrorism, the Eucharist places love. In response to scientific positivism, the Eucharist proclaims mystery. In desperate times, the Eucharist teaches a sure hope of a blessed eternity.

In the context of the DR Congo, where people suffer grave social injustices and abuse, there is a great need for churches, especially the CEAC, to revitalise the Eucharistic celebration to attract the participants not only in the festive celebration but in the educative celebration. The significative gift presented by the Eucharistic

celebration leads to the fellowship of the table, the communion of the church and the commitment to the underprivileged.

#### **Four dimensions of the Eucharist in the redemptive perspective:**

When the people participate in the Eucharistic celebration, Jesus Christ communicates a form or a way of life that can include or embrace every aspect of human existence. The Eucharist is not only the innermost sanctuary of faith of the church but also the key to discovering the original truth or logos of creation in all of its distinct dimensions. It embraces life holistically (Healy, 2012, 587-588). The Eucharistic celebration can help the church and Christians spread the message on the streets while avoiding entanglement with coercive powers. There are, in the Eucharistic celebration, some ways or optional approaches which the members of the body of Christ can use when inviting others to participate. The attempt is not a human effort to build a society on the model that Christ has left, but to conform publicly to the body of Jesus Christ and to participate in the action by which Christ is reconciling the world. The Eucharist is the ongoing action of Christ in the Spirit to go out and reconcile the world to the Father (Cavanaugh, 2014:391-392). In terms of the redemptive perspective, four dimensions can allow the Eucharistic celebration to reach this objective. These are: social, political, economic and ecological.

#### **Social dimension**

One of the speakers of the social dimension in the Eucharist is Henri de Lubac. He worked within the context of a larger recovery of the social dimensions of the Eucharist advanced by the liturgical movement. For Lubac, the social unity of the Church as a mystical body of Jesus Christ is founded in the Eucharist. In liturgical celebrations, there is an important social implication (quoted by Cavanaugh, 2014:392-393). In this sense, we find a great deal of ferment about the social dimension of the Eucharistic celebration in the church as a mystical body of Jesus Christ. However, the spiritual dimension of a mystical body of Christ is viewed by the visible body. The dynamic of the social church is translated by the Eucharistic community. When church members participate in the Eucharistic celebration, the 'true ecclesial communion' and the testimony of the church in the public space are proclaimed. For Mitralaxis (2017:12), this provides a basis for a social justice that is genuine and not merely idealistic; it liberates work from slavery to need, transforming it into a personal relationship, and it highlights each human being's creative distinctiveness.

One of the functions of the Eucharistic celebration is to fortify relationships; social communion is not only between people and their Lord but also between members. For Balasuriya (1977:81), when the community becomes more committed to each other and society, the Eucharistic celebration will become more meaningful. The Eucharistic celebration creates a form of social community with a social implication of living in harmony and promoting human dignity and identity. The fraternal communion which Eucharistic celebration postulates calls all participants to consider each other and bring good will to each other. Balasuriya (1977:81) argues that the Eucharist is actually challenging the lifestyles of the more affluent.

In the African context, eating and drinking together is an important and significant symbol of community. This action highlights the social role and reinforces vital community cohesion. The meal generates cohesion and harmony among members of the community.

Just as the African experience of sharing a meal gathers people, it fosters the sharing, and partaking of communion. The Eucharistic celebration, in the context of social justice, becomes an intimate fraternal experience. The Eucharistic celebration is not an occasion of boundaries, division oppression or repression. In the same sense, Jesus said with consternation, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me' (Jn 13,18).

One of the values of the Eucharist is solidarity or fraternal communion. The celebration confirms the unity of the body of Christ and the unity of humanity. Kubi notes that:

It is very important to celebrate the Eucharist within family gatherings, but it makes no sense when families, brothers, and sisters within the community are divided, and are not kind-hearted towards the poor and oppressed. Due to the Eucharist, we shall once again find the fraternal and communion power (Kubi quoted by Kouadio, 2016:19).

#### **Political dimension**

In the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus highlights the redemptive project: the salvation of humankind. The Eucharistic celebration takes the form of a potentially revolutionary meeting. Liturgically, the political action which engages participants creates a motivation to transform society. Participants realise the values of justice, truth, freedom, love, equality, equity and peace within human societies. There is, therefore, a need to build a just world order and a transformed society. There is also a Christian inspiration to work in the service of our neighbour throughout the world (Tissa Balasuriya, 1977:83). This inspiration must motivate our *respublica* management. There is a need to work diligently to encourage and stimulate people to strive for their self-liberation from poverty, bondage, injustice and oppression.

The political dimension requires all political leaders to engage in serving people, to lead with a conscious awareness and to manage society and organisations with full regard for human rights.

Archbishop Romero, quoted by Carvalhaes, considers the Eucharistic celebration to be a way of fighting against governmental repression and corruption and engaging communities in the struggle against oppression. At the table, a new world is called upon, rehearsed and organised. At the altar, God's holy ground and just and communal food was to be spread around the country to transform structures of injustice, unchain the ties of misery and turn lives and land into a holy, just and communal ground (Carvalhaes, 2013:5). The Eucharistic celebration becomes a motivational centre of liberation, a place for meditation and a call to go out as a potential revolutionary to build freedom, hospitality, solidarity, justice, dignity and a fair life for all. The Christian Passover takes on and reveals the full meaning of the Jewish Passover; liberation from sin is at the very root of political liberation (Gutierrez, 1988:148).

### **Economic dimension**

How can we justify the contrast between the Eucharistic celebration and the hunger (famine) that the Congolese face, despite the wealth of their country? In the context of the hunger, poverty and oppression that the Congolese face, with the gap between the rich and the poor increasing, what is the economic dimension of the Eucharistic celebration? The Eucharistic celebration calls humankind to have a charismatic and prophetic attitude when confronted with dramatic circumstances that provoke or induce hunger and misery. We must know what God tells us when we celebrate faithfully (and with fervour) the Eucharist in the context of hunger, poverty, oppression and misery. The Eucharistic celebration highlights the values of sharing, solidarity, communion and fraternity. According to Kouadio, the Eucharistic celebration 'can lead African Christians to a total liberation in Jesus Christ' (Kouadio, 2016:4).

According to Wressinski:

The Eucharist is not the synonym of suffering. It is a way to reject the suffering imposed upon people by people. It is important to reject all alienation and misery within the world consciously. If there is anytime where the rejection of absolute misery is proclaimed, it should be when the body and the blood of Jesus Christ is offered to us during the Eucharistic celebration (quoted by Kouadio, 2016: 17).

To rephrase, the Eucharistic celebration is a sacred moment for the church to challenge all injustice and to fight against all forms of oppression that deny humankind and affect the liberation of Jesus Christ's teachings. It opens the way of human life. 'Any division or separation between the poor and the rich during the Eucharistic celebration is not acceptable and it means that the church of God is scorned' (Bialo, 1999:85).

### **Ecological dimension**

Climate change remains an alarming concern for the world, despite significant international efforts. According to the former President of the USA, Barack Obama, (quoted by Kumalo 2019), 'We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it.' The WCC Assembly in Busan in November 2013 identified eco-theology and climate justices as two key priorities for the period 2014 to 2021 (Wener&Jeglitzka, 2016:19). The environmental crisis plaguing the world makes our response imperative and urgent. Our lifestyles impact adversely on the environment and affect people, societal institutions and cities around the world. According to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the world's wealthiest countries have emitted more than their fair share of greenhouse gases. Resultant floods, droughts and consequences due to the climate change continue to fall disproportionately on the world's poorest people and countries, many of whom are in Africa. There is a need to recognise the strength and creativity of African people in times of distress (quoted by Conradie, 2010: 135). Since climate change and ecological destruction are becoming more and more menacing to humanity, climate issues present a global challenge that should be reflected on in theological education and formation worldwide (Wener&Jeglitzka, 2016:20).

Conservation of nature is an urgent issue for our time. Through the Eucharistic celebration, there also is the challenge of responding adequately to the problems related to the current global economic and ecologic crises. These crises include job losses, state austerity and exhaustion of aid from the Global North (WCC, 2011: 332). Currently, the silence of the church and the inactivity of its members in public spaces after the Eucharistic celebration — despite the cruel infliction of injustice by those in power — may be seen as complicity in the unjust system. The commitment to environmental justice through the Eucharistic celebration is one of the most important dimensions we can find in this sacrament. For Mushila, the Eucharistic celebration is a significant moment of ecological and missionary awareness (Mushila, 2001:87). The Eucharist calls for the church and participants to adopt a new world view towards social injustice in ecology. The Eucharist reminds us that the world is a creation of God and that we have a responsibility towards it as we are a part of this creation. In the light of the dramatic ecological destruction in Kinshasa town, the protestant church or Congo can consolidate churches' power and capacities in lobby and advocacy work.

The protestant church needs to re-read the signs of current times — that is, the *kairos* and the *kronos* moments — to re-discover the gospel's message for today's world of ecological degradation. According to Wolf (2010:1):

The Christian religion is not just about preaching the gospel; it also about what Luther called the law. It teaches the law. The law is part of the Christian religion, but it is not specific to Christianity. It is in terms of the law that the Christian religion has to do with the problem of climate change.

According to statistics of church members, the protestant church is one of the two principle churches in the DR Congo, just behind the Catholic Church, so it has the capacity to fight against the negative impact of climate change. The theological justification of the church's involvement in this new form of struggle is that religion can play a key role in this task. Christianity recognises this link and understands the environment from God's perspective. Bread and wine are natural products; they are the fruits of human labour. As participants in the Eucharistic celebration, Christians have to respond positively to the calling of the cultural mandate to take care of the environment. They need to respond adequately to the current challenges of ecological destruction.

The bread and the wine are symbols of fellowship which, at the same time, suggests the gift of creation. The materials used in the Eucharist also retrace that fellowship is rooted in God's will to bestow the Earth with the provision for all people to build a more humane world. Thus, the Eucharist appears to be inseparably linked to the creation and the fostering of a real human fellowship (Gutierrez, 1988: 148).

#### IV. Conclusion

The last point postulates the redemptive perspectives of the Eucharistic celebration in a social justice context. Four dimensions were discussed, based on the writings of various theologians. According to these perspectives, the Protestant church can adopt and adapt these teachings to promote social justice in the DR Congo. In the context of this study, the Eucharistic celebration is viewed as an important moment for the church to challenge social injustice in the minds of participants and to promote fraternal communion in society.

Considering the war, conflict, poverty and injustice that plagues the DR Congo — and the significant number of church members (Christian)— there is no sense in proclaiming the unity of the body of Jesus Christ in the Eucharistic celebration when there are divisions transpiring within the church and society. Ordinary people and political leaders participate in the service of communion on most occasions. However, in the public space, the reality of life does not reflect the reality of the Eucharistic teachings.

The Eucharistic celebration is not simply eating bread and drinking wine with a solemn devotion to the remembrance of Jesus Christ, and it is not only participating in the Divine Liturgy or a simple ritualisation; rather, it represents a way of life that can include every aspect of human existence. This is how the Eucharist forms the basis of social justice. Thus, the members of Christ's body are called to be servants within society. The church is a leader for people to promote social justice.

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