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A Chronological Treatise of Ecumenism in Zimbabwe: The Place and Prospects of Eucharistic Intercommunion therein

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Abstract:

This article presents a chronological treatise of ecumenism in Zimbabwe and critically examines the role and place of Eucharistic intercommunion therein. As its point of departure, the article briefly traces the objectives of key ecumenical bodies in Zimbabwe and examines the various ecumenical predicaments and challenges associated with the same. Fundamentally, the article argues that whilst the ecumenical journey in Zimbabwe has achieved several significant and monumental strides on the religious, social and political landscapes, by design or default, Eucharistic intercommunion, has, however, remained one critical new frontier of ecumenical contact that relentlessly calls for pastoral attention. Ever since the establishment of Christianity in Zimbabwe over a century ago, it has been observed that common sharing of the Eucharist among Zimbabwe's various Christian denominations has not been fully implemented. Consequently, this has impacted negatively on the Eucharist which has traditionally been regarded as a symbol and sacrament of Christian unity, fellowship and re-conciliation. The article concludes by acknowledging and affirming the various theological and pastoral challenges that continue to pose as obstacles to Eucharistic intercommunion as an emerging area of ecumenical contact, not just in Zimbabwe but globally.

Keywords: Ecumenism, Eucharistic intercommunion, ecumenical bodies, ecumenical predicaments, Christianity in Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

After more than two thousand years of Christianity in Africa, the dynamics and dialectics of African Christianity today exhibit a Christianity that is visibly active, vigorous and healthy. As underlined by Baur (2009), on the African Christian landscape, large numbers enthusiastically come together for liturgy. Men and women devoutly serve in a number of denominational and interdenominational ministries that build up both church and community. However, inculturation of the Eucharistic celebration in Africa today has been constantly and repeatedly criticized for failing to reflect the true African value of commensality, with its notion of inclusivity (Tinarwo 2018). For over a century of Christianity in Zimbabwe, some drivers of key Christian denominations and ecumenical movements seem to have comfortably settled on Eucharistic discrimination and selectivity whilst ecumenical debates and discussions have also skirted on the urgency of Eucharistic inclusivity and compatibility within the Christian family. Following the same trajectory, Amadi (2008:46) thus observed and concluded that one of the challenges to the local church [Christian Church] is to organise the celebration of the Eucharist to take place in the form of an African family, where the meal is central and where each person's presence is needed and felt.

As if to confirm Amadi's observation and conclusion, in 2017, the author was privileged to attend the funeral of a high profile Catholic cleric together with his two Anglican long-time friends. The Requiem Mass was well attended by scores of Christians from other denominations throughout Zimbabwe's ten provinces. The priest who shared the word of God spoke so highly about the deceased as a man of unconditional love, a man of peace who always crossed denominational boundaries in search of Christian unity and the common good. As the liturgy of the Mass unfolded, there was consecration of the gifts (bread and wine) and the Lord's Prayer (Our Father) in which the ecumenically composed congregation confidently addressed God as their One and Only FATHER. The prayer of the Our Father was then followed by the rite/sign of peace that in the author's view fundamentally underlined the need for congregants to reconcile, forgive and be forgiven before they could approach the blessed Altar. Ironically, when most of the congregants, particularly from some mainstream denominations expected to join their fellow Catholics and ecumenically share the Eucharist on that memorable occasion that was tailored to the deceased's unique personality, an announcement was, however, made that Holy Communion was to be received only by those in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. The announcement was not well received by the ecumenically composed congregation as it dented and damaged the message of Christian unity that had just been preached. Over and above, the announcement almost dried up the sap of the visibly prevailing ecumenical spirit. On that particular occasion, the author did receive Holy Communion but his two long-time Anglican friends did not. Subsequently, the occasion did not just trigger debate and discussion about the meaning of Christian unity but also motivated the writing of this particular article. However, in order to fully understand the operational frame work

and back ground of the ensuing discussion (the place of the Eucharist in the Ecumenical movement), it is perhaps prudent and academically meritorious to begin by defining the two terms, Eucharist and Eucharistic intercommunion before tracing the history of missionary presence and ecumenism in Zimbabwe.

2. Eucharist and Intercommunion

In the Christian religion, the Eucharist is the main ceremony in which believers eat bread and drink wine as a way of remembering Jesus Christ's last meal and supper with his disciples before he died, according to the Bible (Rundell 2007). In some Christian denominations in Zimbabwe, Africa and the world over, the ceremony is called Communion or Holy Communion with reference to the unleavened bread and wine that are used in the ceremony. It is so called and expressed in many other names that evoke fundamental aspects of it. The term Eucharist is popular among Eastern Orthodox Christians, Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Lutherans. Other Protestant and Churches of evangelical persuasion prefer to use terms such as Communion, the Lord's Supper, Memorial, Remembrance or Breaking of Bread, among many others. Shorter (1985:49) referred to the Eucharist as the fundamental Sacrament and symbol of Christian healing and reconciliation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994:336) articulates that the ceremony is called the Eucharist because it is an action of thanksgiving to God. Breaking of bread as a way of giving thanks to God has always been the custom of the early Christians where the breaking of bread was the heart of the liturgy (Porter 2001:207). For that reason, the significance of the ceremony in the history of Christianity has always been undisputable and imperative. A comprehensive examination of Christian history and thought exhibits that Christians in all places and various rites have celebrated the Eucharist for over twenty centuries as a practice that engaged their entire faith. However, for over two millennia, although Christians celebrated the Eucharist with enthusiasm and heightened messianic expectations, the same ritual and religious symbol has historically proved to be an emblem of both unity and division as exhibited during the course of Christian history, particularly the most historic religious epoch, the Protestant Reformation. In spite of its purported unifying elements, ironically, as from the 16th century, the Eucharist has been a source of some of the deepest and most bitter controversies and divisions in Christian history. Yet the credibility of the Gospel message, of Christ and of the Eucharist itself is inseparably linked to Christian unity (John Paul II 1995).

Thus, as the name suggests, Eucharistic intercommunion (common sharing of the Eucharist) is perceived and understood as an agreement between Christian denominations whereby each particular denomination may participate in the other's Eucharistic celebrations or may hold joint Eucharistic celebrations with no limitations, exclusivity or reservations (Kearney 2015). As per agreement, devotees or participants (regardless of denominational affiliation) may fully partake of the Eucharist of the other without reservations or limitations as a demonstration of full, not partial communion. Ever since the time of the Reformation, the body of Christ was divided severely to an extent that common sharing of the most fundamental ritual and meal became impossible. Such a position has since been maintained by several denominations (particularly Catholic) for centuries as denominations inherited and celebrated irreconcilable theological disputes of their historical past and founding Fathers. Apparently, Missionaries who came to evangelise Zimbabwe were also not an exception.

3. Missionary presence in Zimbabwe

In view of the fact the International Missionary Council of 1921 had ensured that all churches involved in evangelisation should move away from a competitive missionary drive in order to work together for the sake of the world (McCabe 2002:27), save for Eucharistic inclusivity, the 19th century European missionaries who first came to evangelise Zimbabwe showed visible elements of the spirit of the International Missionary Council as they strove to witness in common. Without minimising the first recorded two attempts to evangelise Zimbabwe by Fr. Gonzalo da Silveira (1560) and the Dominican Friars (1607), Methodists Missionaries who came under the London Missionary Society (LMS) were the first to make attempts to evangelise the Ndebele dominated region of Matabeleland in 1859 (Manyonganise 2015). Thereafter, several other denominations followed the bandwagon.¹

Over the years, Christianity has taken new forms and continues to be re-generated and re-vitalised. As underscored by Manyonganise (2015:80), within the first 20 years of colonialism, 20 different missionary groups had established themselves in Zimbabwe. Zvobgo (1991:2-4), for example, reveals that the London Missionary Society was followed by Catholics in 1879. Roman Catholics were followed by Anglicans in 1888. Anglicans were followed by missionaries of the Dutch-Reformed Church of South Africa in 1891. Also describing the movement of denominations to ecumenically witness in Africa and Asia, Brockman and Pescantini (1991:192) had this to say:

With the spread of world missions, the divisions of western Christianity arrived in Asia and Africa. Denominationalism flooded the world [and Zimbabwe] with the spectacle of separated Christians. Many evangelicals regard as unsaved those who have not received the Holy Spirit by being 'born again' in a transforming personal experience of salvation. Consequently, they began actively to evangelise among baptised Catholics and main-line Protestants. Added to this confusion, was the proliferation of indigenous Christian and crypto-Christian sects in Africa [Zimbabwe] and Asia.

As missionary efforts intensified, several denominations expanded. Like their missionary counterparts, the Catholic Church also established Dioceses and Mission Stations. Education, health and care for the poor and needy were also among their top priorities. By so doing, they were bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity. Through the influence of

¹ Manyonganise underlines that Methodism came in Zimbabwe in two forms, namely, the Wesleyan Methodists from Europe and the United Methodists from North America. While Wesleyan Methodism was dominant in Mashonaland, the United Methodists were dominant in Manicaland.

evangelisation, they transformed the local people from within and set them apart and ready for the ecumenical journey in Zimbabwe. Even though early missionaries were often accused of many things such as failing to address the existential needs of the African people or 'cosmological underestimation', preaching a superficial and impoverished Gospel that reflected the division of Western Christianity (Daneel 1987:68-88), the fact that the missionaries from various denominational backgrounds managed to co-exist and cooperate in their day to day missionary endeavors was itself a demonstration of their desire for common witnessing. As they cooperated and collaborated amongst themselves and engaged both the Church and government on various levels, they also demonstrated their collaborative efforts in ecumenism and willingness to commune. However, before the article makes a critical examination of the place and prospects of Eucharistic inclusivity in Zimbabwe, the next segment briefly gives a mapping of key ecumenical bodies in Zimbabwe.

4. An Overview of Key Ecumenical Bodies in Zimbabwe

Ecumenism or ecumenical council is described by Franzen (1969:408) as a fraternal association of churches who in accordance with sacred scripture confess to the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour and who endeavor jointly to perform their common calling to the honour of the one God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Technically, in its modern usage, ecumenism is an interdenominational initiative and movement whose aim, objective and vision is to foster unity, greater cooperation and common witness to the world by Christian Churches in line with the demands and expectations of Sacred Scripture. Whilst Zimbabwe has a variety of ecumenical bodies that try to foster Christian unity in order to achieve the common good, this article looks at three main ones, namely, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and the Evangelical fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ).²

4.1. The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference³

The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference is an association of local ordinaries other than the vicar generals, coadjutors, auxiliaries, and other titular bishops who perform a special work entrusted to them by the Apostolic See or the Conference itself (Randolph, 1978:12). The ZCBC was established by the Vatican (Rome) on the 1st of October 1969, some eleven years before Zimbabwe gained its political independence in 1980.

ZCBC is a member of the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA). It is also a member of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). Among its objectives, ZCBC promotes solidarity among Bishops of Zimbabwe and self-sufficiency among each of the Dioceses. Like their counterparts in other countries, in union and subordination to the Roman Pontiff, as individual bishops, they serve Catholic members of their own Dioceses. As vicars and legates of Christ, Bishops govern the particular Churches assigned to them by their counsels and sacred power which they exercise exclusively for the spiritual development of their flock (Flannery 1975:348). Over and above, in collegiate manner, they are concerned about the general welfare of the entire Catholic Church.

There are several commissions that fall under the ZCBC as noted and documented by Ruzivo et al. These include: Catechetics, Liturgy, Laity, Seminary, Marriage, Clergy, Social Communications, Education, Social Services, and Development. Justice and peace, Theology and Ecumenism are also among such commissions. Each commission is chaired by a Bishop (Ruzivo 2008:8). To date, the Roman Catholic Church has a total of eight Dioceses, namely, Archdioceses of Harare and Bulawayo, Dioceses of Gweru, Mutare, Chinhoyi, Hwange, Masvingo⁴ and Gokwe. Like any other Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference anywhere in the world, the ZCBC is bound by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), particularly with regard to ecumenism. Save for common sharing of the Eucharist with non-Catholics, from the time it was convened, the Second Vatican Council has marked a major change and turn-around in Catholic thinking about ecumenism. In fact, the council demonstrated the Catholic Church's willingness to engage and commune with other ecclesial communities as 'equal partners' on the ecumenical journey. Before the Second Vatican Council, the ecumenical attitude of the Catholic Church was regarded as hardly positive. In fact, the hierarchy of the same was largely perceived as a 'tenured decelerator' (Akerboom 2002:5).

Apparently, ever since the inception of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe, the Catholic Bishops have written individually and as a corporate body many pastoral letters to their flocks and to the government of Zimbabwe on various burning issues of national concern (Nyatsanza, 2002:2). However, whilst the ZCBC has demonstrated its willingness to participate in ecumenism, as already underlined, for the past 500 years (after the Reformation) the Catholic Church has not yet entered into any agreement with any denomination on the issue of common sharing of the Eucharist. Catholic approach to Eucharistic intercommunion has always been that of fixity and exclusiveness, thereby making her compatibility with other Christian denominations highly questionable in that regard.

4.2. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches

Another Church ecumenical organ that has acted as a mouth-piece for its member churches is the Zimbabwe Council of Churches. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) is a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC). It was founded in 1964, some five years before the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference. Like its Mother body (WCC), the main objective is to be a fraternal association of churches to foster greater unity and visible cooperation. As understood

²The narrative section on key ecumenical bodies owes part of its theoretical thrust to Ruzivo's pioneering chapter, 'A mapping of the Church groups in Zimbabwe' in the book, *The Role of the Church in the struggle for Democratic Change in Zimbabwe*.

³ Before 1969, the same College of Catholic Bishops had operated under the name Rhodesia Catholic Bishops' Conference (RCBC).

⁴ Of the eight Catholic Dioceses, Masvingo is the youngest, carved and created from Gweru Diocese in 1999. Michael Bhasera was the first Bishop of Masvingo Diocese.

and underlined by Hallencreutz (1988:189), the main objective of the ZCC is to increase mutual understanding and develop more effective ecumenical witness and action on local, national and international level. Over and above, it is its mandate to coordinate ecumenical initiatives in Zimbabwe and facilitate the re-union of denominations.

Verstraelen, cited by Ruzivo (2008:5) underscores that the ZCC is an umbrella body representing more than 25 Christian Churches, 10 para-Christian organisations and a number of others with observer status. It comprises mainly Protestant denominations, Pentecostals and a hand full of some African Initiated Churches. The Roman Catholic Church continues to occupy the observer's seat in the ZCC. Ever since its inception, the ZCC has been vocal and fearless in engaging the government of Zimbabwe on political, social and economic issues.

Like the ZCBC, ZCC has a number of departments that are designed and tailor-made to provide efficiency for an ecumenical organisation of such magnitude and trajectory. These are: justice, peace and reconciliation, church development, leadership development and ecumenical chaplaincy. In addition, the ZCC is also directly linked to the Ecumenical Documentation and Information Centre for Eastern Africa (EDICESA) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) (Ruzivo 2008:5). The ZCC celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 2014.

Whilst the ZCC has well defined objectives and departments that also include ecumenical chaplaincy, the issue of Eucharistic intercommunion, however, seems to occupy a peripheral, informal and uncelebrated status. It is perhaps not regarded as one of the movement's key concerns and objectives. However, Akerboom (2002:18) suggests that ecumenical strides and initiatives that do not include Eucharistic intercommunion are viewed as rather simple and seemingly contrary to the Gospel teaching of unity, love and forgiveness.

4.3. *The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe*

One other Church organisation to reckon with in the history of ecumenism in Zimbabwe is the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ). The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe is a fellowship of churches, church related organisations and individuals who share a desire to express unity, fellowship and combined action among churches and organisations of mainly evangelical persuasion (Ruzivo 2008:10).

The EFZ was established in 1962, some two years before the ZCC. As a member of the world body, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), its vision is to mobilise, network and empower members of the evangelical churches for the accomplishment of the 'Great Commission' [Matthew 28: 19-20] in Zimbabwe by providing humanitarian, relief, advocacy and counsel. Among its numerous objectives, it also focuses on a number of areas. These include: peace building and development services to, and on behalf of the marginalised, the victimised, the disadvantaged and the abused. The fact that the EFZ targeted churches and organisations of mainly evangelical persuasion is reflective and indicative of the fact that the movement was initially anti-ecumenical and incompatible with denominations of non-evangelical persuasion. As reflected in its objectives, EFZ was also not interested in politics either (Ruzivo 2008:10).

However, at the dawn of the 21st century, the EFZ made a surprise paradigm shift and turn around as the body suddenly opened up and engaged other organisations such as the ZCBC and the ZCC in the democratisation of the country. A Call to Conscience, Zimbabwe Silver Jubilee 1980-2005 (2005) and The Zimbabwe We Want: Towards a National Vision for Zimbabwe (2006) by Heads of Christian Denominations are typical examples of the EFZ's involvement and participation in the country's politics. The two joint documents, among many other ecumenical strides, are a product of the Church in Zimbabwe's prophetic and collective voice. However, like is the case in the ZCC and ZCBC, the issue of Eucharistic inclusivity is generally not regarded as topical and urgent in the EFZ.

5. A Critical Appraisal of Ecumenism in Zimbabwe

Whilst ecumenism in Zimbabwe has to date achieved monumental and celebrated strides, there are numerous other issues of faith that relentlessly call for pastoral attention, in spite of the fact that Christianity is over a century old in Zimbabwe. Top on the list of future ecumenical tasks is Eucharistic intercommunion, also referred to as common sharing of the Eucharist or simply, open Eucharist. Whilst Abrahams (2002:38) makes an analysis of the Roman Catholic participation in the Ecumenical movement, this article draws valuable insight and theoretical framework and thrust from Akerboom's (2002) understanding of the place and significance of the Eucharist in the Ecumenical Movement, global and local. Akerboom strongly feels that for decades, Christian denominations in general and ecumenical movements in particular, have ignored or relegated the Eucharist to the periphery and shores of ecumenism, yet the sacrament and symbol has been historically regarded as centre and summit of Christian worship. In fact, it was regarded as the heart and hub of Christian worship.

Akerboom posits that, ever since the establishment of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948 to try and foster genuine cooperation, re-engagement and rapprochement amongst the deeply divided Christian Communities, great global strides have since been made in areas such as common witnessing, inter-religious dialogue, common prayers, mixed marriages (*matrimoniamixta*), common faculties of Theology and Bible Translation, among many other areas. Apparently, similar strides are also evident on the local ecumenical landscape, being championed mainly by the already underlined ecumenical bodies such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, among others. Whilst significant strides such as these have been made in the said areas, as already underlined, one key element of ecumenism, namely, Eucharistic intercommunion has remained a far distant prospect for decades, yet traditional Christian theology views the Eucharist not just as the Sacrament of new life but also as a symbol of Christian Unity, Source and Summit of Christian Life (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994:336). Thus, as underscored by one interviewee, common sharing of the Eucharist is just but one of the many faith related issues that urgently and relentlessly calls for pastoral attention and ecumenical contact (Mavima 2018).

Unity that is symbolized by common sharing of the Eucharist signifies a common source of being in the one God and therefore, membership of the one Family of God(Sarpong 1985:5). Following the same logic and trajectory, speaking with reference to global ecumenism, whose elements and traits are also discernible and applicable to ecumenism in Zimbabwe, Akerboom thus suggests that, among other critical areas, today and tomorrow, ecumenical organisations should be more concerned with central issues of faith such as Eucharistic intercommunion and the mandate of ministry in the service of divine salvation(Akerboom 2002:11). For him, Eucharistic intercommunion is an integral element of ecumenism not just an extension element, an appendix or addendum that is added to the ecumenical movement. Thus, he concludes by accusing the ecumenical movements (global and local) of addressing some seemingly simple areas of ecumenism for the past 50 years and neglecting or deliberately avoiding essential issues of faith such as Eucharistic intercommunion that promote fellowship, unity and re-engagement. Akerboom(2002:11) also mentions Scripture and tradition, ecclesial ministry, the magisterium, and the papacy as other critical areas and subjects for future discussion.

Even though critics have varied contested interpretations of Catholic policy on Eucharistic intercommunion, several critics have been visibly vocal in criticizing particularly the Catholic and Mother Church for being exclusive and discriminatory in her ecumenical approach. As underlined by Sarpong (1985:5),from an African perspective, to eat from the same pot is vital and symbolic. Commensality is reflective and indicative of friendship of an extraordinary nature or the closest type of blood relationship. For him, the Eucharist as a symbol of unity has such a communitarian significance of unprecedented imagination and value. He further argues that Eucharistic celebration is an assembly of believers, of brothers and sisters who partake of the same food and are nourished by the same source. In the book of Acts (2:43-47), common life, prayer and the Eucharist were the hallmark and recruitment techniques of the infant Church. For that reason, interdenominational fellowship on the level of common sharing of the Eucharist may not be viewed as threatening the unity of the Church but rather creating, sustaining and strengthening Christian unity(Manunure 2018).

In addition, the African Synod of 1994, for example, made the Church as God's family its guiding model for the evangelization of Africa. The Synod underlines that for people in Africa, this image expresses very well what the African Church really should be in future. The image of family emphasises, among many other values, care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, inclusivity, acceptance, dialogue and trust(Amecea Pastoral Department 1995:21). Over and above these values, it logically follows that a family that prays together also eats together. Without eating together, the African family would, therefore, lose one of its fundamentals and hallmarks. In fact, it ceases to be a family. From a celebrated African contextual landscape, eating together or commensality may appear just like an ordinary physical symbol, yet in actual fact it represents something metaphysical and transcendental. Thus, if ordinary food is regarded as sacramental and symbolic from an African perspective, the Eucharist, which is viewed as spiritual food by most Christians should, therefore, be even more symbolic and sacramental, especially when it is ecumenically shared(Manunure 2018).

6. Challenges Related to Common Sharing of the Eucharist.

A cursory examination of Christian history and thought reveals that the Eucharist has been one of the many concepts that has caused severe intra-religious conflicts. For centuries, it has been one area (among others) of vibrant and virulent controversy that has stood in the way of fuller and greater communion amongst various Christian denominations, globally and locally. From our earlier discussion, it has been underlined that challenges related to common sharing of the Eucharist may exclusively be better understood in the light of the 16th century Protestant Reformation and the subsequent formation of the ecumenical movements in the early 20th century and beyond.

Apparently, as underlined by Franzen (1969), the 16th century Protestant Reformation divided religious thinking into denominational thought and almost destroyed the unity, common foundation and the essence of the Christian faith. The divisions in the western Church broke the common participation on the Eucharistic table that had for centuries acted as a unifying element. Consequently, reformers began to call their converts to different shrines for worship and Eucharistic celebrations. Regrettably, the body of Christ was not simply divided but rather splintered into countless fragments. Denominational isolation, disagreement, opposition and religious wars thus became the order of the day.

When the Catholic Church, through the Council of Trent (1545-1563) defended and clung resolutely to the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist, reformers such as Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564) and Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), among others had their own interpretations of the Eucharist, with each individual reformer paying close attention to the danger of encroaching into another reformer, particularly on the doctrine of the Eucharist. Luther, for example, rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which taught that bread and wine in the Eucharist become the ACTUAL Body and Blood of Christ. For him, the Body of Christ only exists at the sacramental ceremony, that is, at the reception of communion(Algermissen 1945:928). With regards to the same, Calvin taught a spiritual pneumatic presence of Christ at the moment of reception(Franzen 1969:303).Luther's doctrine Calvin rejected as being idolatrous as the Catholic doctrine. Zwingli's doctrine of the significative symbolical presence he considered inadequate as well. Thereafter, whilst most Protestant reformers for the most part could, however, be more generous and accommodating amongst themselves regarding Eucharistic intercommunion, the Catholic Church has adopted a more traditional and rigid stance. From as early as the period of the Reformation (1517), the establishment of the World Council of Churches (1948), the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) up to the new millennium, she has maintained some cautious contacts of collaboration with other ecclesial communities without changing or diluting her position with regards to the Eucharist, thereby making the prospects of common sharing of the Eucharist a far distant and inaccessible ecumenical dream.For her, the Eucharist is properly the Sacrament of those who are in FULL communion with the [Catholic] Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994:352).Over and above her position, she also forbids her members from receiving Holy Communion

from non-Catholic ministers. This has again raised serious questions about her willingness to commune with other denominations as equal partners on the ecumenical journey.

For that reason, ever since the 16th century Reformation, the Catholic Church in particular has not entered into full, formal or documented agreement with any Christian denomination regarding the Eucharist. Fundamentally, she allows no joint Eucharistic celebrations for the reason that she sees herself as in partial, not full communion with other Christian groups, particularly those that separated from Rome during the Reformation (Kearney 2015). For her, such common worship would have to be excluded because the necessary unity of faith does not exist between the Catholic and other Christians (with the exception of Orthodoxy). For Catholics, when joint Eucharistic celebrations are performed, it would give the illusion of a unity which does not yet exist (Abrahams 2002:43). According to the Catholic Church, those who separated themselves from the Mother Church during the time of the Reformation have not preserved the proper reality of the Eucharistic mystery (what it is, what it signifies and what it effects) in its fullness, especially because of the absence of the Sacrament of Holy Orders or ordination in those separated denominations. The Catholic Church repeatedly underscores that such ecclesial communities should, therefore, be left to celebrate their sacraments their own way. Thus, one can safely confirm that theological differences have for centuries posed and continue to pose as the greatest obstacle to visible Christian unity that is expressed in Eucharistic inclusivity.

Whilst on the one hand some conservative Christians have hailed Eucharistic exclusivity, on the other hand, a handful of liberal Christians from various Christian denominations (Catholics and Protestants) who are lobbying for common sharing of the Eucharist have described Eucharistic discrimination and exclusivity between denominations as more of a display of power than a theological issue (Makoni 2018). For the liberals, the implementation of open Eucharist seen as long overdue, considering the fact that Christianity is expected to adapt and/or adopt some solid African cultural pillars and noble values (such as commensality) that glue people together. When implemented in Zimbabwe, the practice of common sharing of the Eucharist would thus produce a unique and perfect opportunity to observe how African Christianity handles Christian theology and the Gospel outside the immediate spheres of the Western-oriented historical churches, particularly the Vatican.⁵ Writing about inculturation and the evangelisation of cultures, Shorter (1998:11) echoes the same sentiments when he confirms that Euro-American culture was entrenched in the language and forms of universal communion, leading to a feeling of alienation among many Christians, particularly Catholics. Consequently, for generations, Africans (among others), worshipped with a liturgy that was not theirs. Over and above, they were ruled by an alien Canon Law, and for decades they have reflected on their faith using theological systems that had been developed elsewhere. With regards to inculturation of Eucharistic celebrations in Africa today, the interaction between Christianity and the African culture has thus remained far from being receptive and reciprocal.

Apparently, from the time of its institution, the significance and communitarian value of the Eucharist cannot be overstated. Refining and further polishing Pauline theology of the Eucharist, Augustine (354-430) did not just reinforce the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist but also regarded the same as the sacrament of Christian unity. He thus related the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist to his understanding of the 'horizontal' communion, the unity of Christians with one another in the body of Christ (Augustine, Sermon 272). On this concept, he depended heavily on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians 10:17 and 12:27. 1 Corinthians 10:17 emphasises that the fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf.

For that reason, Augustine became popular with the theme, 'Many Grains, One Loaf' whereby he links and connects each individual baptised Christian to the grain of wheat that are thrashed to form one loaf, the body of Christ. In the visible object of bread, many grains are gathered into one, just as the faithful (as scripture says) 'form a single heart and mind' (Acts 4:32). The Eucharist is for that reason, the sign of unity and the bond of every Christian, particularly when it is ecumenically shared. Eucharistic intercommunion is an integral element of ecumenism not just an extension element, an appendix or addendum that is added to the ecumenical movement. As underscored by Akerboom (2002:19), if the missionary witness is to regain credibility, perhaps a new Reformation is needed in the third millennium. In spite of challenges associated with the practice, common sharing of the Eucharist is one way of making the Eucharist more meaningful, a true reflection of the common origin of Christians and therefore, their membership in the one universal family of Christians.

7. Conclusion

Symbolism is fundamental in any religion of this world. Applying this theological fact to Christianity, one is almost tempted to assert that the Eucharist is the greatest symbolism and ritual by which the unity of Christians is both signified and brought about' (Paul VI 1964). Whilst Christians claim to have originated from the same founder (Jesus), and share the same history for the first fifteen centuries (1st to 15th), ironically, globally and locally, a handful of mainstream denominations (particularly Catholic) to date are still visibly discriminatory and exclusive on the Eucharistic table. Consequently, this has impacted negatively on the Eucharist which has traditionally been regarded as a symbol and Sacrament of Christian unity, fellowship and re-conciliation. This article, therefore, challenges leaders of various Christian denominations in general and drivers of key ecumenical bodies in particular, not just to appreciate the centrality of the Eucharist in their denominations and movements but also to re-visit and re-examine their 'sacrosanct' theology of the Eucharist in the light of the communitarian significance of the same. Just as in the traditional African culture and religion considerable emphasis is placed on ritual ceremonies that are often repeated and symbolically meaningful, the

⁵ In his encyclical, *Ut Unum sint* (That they may be one), Pope John Paul acknowledges that the papacy is a stumbling block on the road to visible unity and therefore asked Christian leaders to reflect deeply with him on the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love and unity within Christianity and be recognised by all Christians (Abrahams 2002:3)

communitarian significance of the Eucharist in the Christian religion should not be over emphasized. Taking full cognisance of the fact that Ecumenism is viewed as a process, a journey and an evolution, the communitarian significance of the Eucharist should, therefore, find its place in ecumenical dialogue in this new millennium. Thus, in conclusion, to echo Amadi's (2008) sentiments, whilst the 1994 Africa Synod did well to model the Church in Africa as an extended family of God, this model is, however, far from being implemented for as long as there is visible Eucharistic exclusivity and discrimination among members of the one Body of Christ.

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