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Reading Luke 22:14–23 in an Ethiopian Context: A Tri-polar Contextual Approach

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Abstract

A contextual reading of biblical texts is crucial because it makes the theological message of the Bible relevant to its readers/hearers. This article is written on the basis that an Ethiopian meal context illuminates a better understanding of the Lucan Lord's Supper text. The meaning of the fellowship that Jesus maintains in instituting the Lord's Supper becomes better understood when seen in the context of dining together. It was in the context of the Passover Festival and his impending crucifixion that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. The unity of the Twelve with each other and with Triune God (i.e., both a horizontal and vertical fellowship) is established by sharing from the same bread and cup. Jesus gave his body and blood, represented by the bread and cup, and enacted a close affinity. The article employs a tri-polar theory to discuss this text in an Ethiopian meal context.

NOTE: Because it is an uncommon tradition to use family names in Ethiopia, all names of the Ethiopians referred in this article are stated by their first names, followed by their middle or fathers' names.

Introduction

Reading and/or interpreting biblical texts in an Ethiopian context is not a recent enterprise for the Ethiopian church, particularly the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (see, for example, Cowley 1989; Ethiopian Orthodox Theological College 2015; Yimenu 2022). Unlike the sub-Saharan countries, an indigenised approach to reading the Bible was introduced in Ethiopia from the

time that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church was introduced in the 4th century.¹ Ethiopian contextual interpreters give special focus and consideration to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church's interpretive traditions that are heavily rooted in the teaching from the 14th century national epic *Kēbra Nagast*.² Thus, a contextual reading of the text based on the interpretive traditions of this church does not embrace some helpful socio-cultural traditions of the people with their unique cultural symbolic nature which constitute the identity of Ethiopian society. For instance, *gurāša* (eating a meal by giving a mouthful to each other) is one of the important cultures that all ethnic groups of people in Ethiopia experience.³

As a departure point from usual Ethiopian contextual interpretations that frame reading biblical texts in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church's interpretive traditions, this article pays attention to the traditional meal culture of Ethiopians (eating a meal together with others at one table) to read the Last Supper text in Luke 22:14–23.⁴ The aim of the article is to demonstrate

¹ The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church is the oldest church of the country, introduced in the 4th century AD. See Smithsonian Magazine 2019; or Archaeology Magazine 2022. See also Fekadu 2009:26–28.

² The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church's interpretive traditions are heavily rooted in the teachings of the *Kēbra Nagast*. It

is a storehouse of legends and traditions, some historical and some of a purely folk-lore character, derived from the Old Testament and the later Rabbinic writings, and from Egyptian (both pagan and Christian), Arabian, and Ethiopian sources. (Budge 2000:iii).

Kēbra Nagast is assumed to have been written in Coptic, and believed to have undergone transformations and revisions in the course of translating it into Arabic and Ethiopic languages.

³ አድር ('*adər* – a traditional way of helping each other during difficult times, like in loss of close relatives) and ሸምግልና (*šəmǝǝlana* – a traditional dispute-solving mechanism) also are among such important cultures that all nations and ethnic groups of people in Ethiopia experience.

⁴ Although the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church has traditions that are related to eating a meal together, the way these are performed is different from common, traditional meal-dining practices of the society. The reason for its difference is that most food/meal traditions of this church are inherited from the Old Testament teachings and hold a specific religious flavour that is mixed with elements of the local traditions. For example, *sänəbāte* is one of the meal traditions of the church. *Sänəbāte*

how an Ethiopian traditional dining culture helps readers understand the text in question, especially the communal aspect of the Lord's Supper. Maintaining a sustainable relationship among Ethiopians is expressed in dining on a meal, which is performed involving *guraša*: giving a mouthful to each other. This parallels the communion aspect described in the Lord's Supper text.⁵ I chose a meal-dining tradition to read the text in consideration because the parallelism between the text and the culture discloses the similarity and dissimilarity between the two contexts. I assert that eating a meal in an Ethiopian culture helps to understand the communion aspect of the Lord's Supper, because it is performed in a unique and distinctive way of *guraša* and offering a morsel of food to the Supreme Being, which are described below.

Engaging a tri-polar approach applied through the hermeneutical lens of inculturation and a narrative criticism methodology, I use the meal in the dining culture of Ethiopia to read the text in question. Inculturation hermeneutics is used to mediate an interaction between the cultural and textual contexts. Thus, I discuss the communal aspect of the Lord's Supper by letting an Ethiopian dining tradition and the Lucan Last Supper text interact with and interpret each other. With the help of inculturation hermeneutics as a mediating element, I consider a reciprocal way of interpretation: allowing a culture to interpret a text and vice versa. Knut Holter (2008) makes a distinction between the two categories of 'Letting the Old Testament interpret Africa' and 'Letting Africa interpret the Old Testament'. In the first category, 'Letting the Old Testament interpret Africa', Africa is the object of investigation. Therefore, the Bible is an interpretive tool. Holter (2008:18) writes:

What underlies this approach is the assumption that the existence of certain religio- and socio-cultural parallels between ancient Israel and traditional or even modern Africa

are different types of food that are brought by members of this church on every Sunday and eaten together with the poor at ጊጂ ሰላም (i.e., a hall inside the church compound). Thus, such meal traditions of the church do not represent the dining practices of the Ethiopians.

⁵ Of course, there are other theological themes in the text, like the abandonment and suffering of Jesus, which are not included in this article, simply for the reason of limiting the theme that relates to issues in the chosen local context.

may enable African biblical scholars to let their scholarship contribute to the interpretation of society, culture, and religion in contemporary Africa.

This approach asks: how can the Bible help me better understand this people group? Thus, in this first category of research, the object of study is an African people group or practice with the Bible as the tool for better understanding. Holter's second category, 'Letting Africa interpret the Old Testament', asks: how can African perspectives and practices help us to better understand the text? Here the object of study is the Hebrew Bible. In this approach, African comparative material is used to illuminate meanings within the biblical text (Holter 2008:38). Such reading requires placing the given text in its appropriate position in order to discern and discuss its main theme(s) in the text's literary context. This is attained here by employing a narrative critical method. Based on the discussion of the context of the culture and the text, the chosen theme is analysed through the hermeneutical lens of inculturation.

After describing the hermeneutical lens of the third pole and the methodology applied, I identify the structure of the text and discuss the theme of fellowship in the Lucan Last Supper, based on the chosen method of narrative criticism. Following this, I will deal with a critical analysis of the chosen cultural context, which is used to read the text under consideration. In this way, the theological meaning of the chosen theme will be discerned and discussed. Thus, this article is arranged: (1) introduction, (2) definition of tri-polar approach, (3) description of narrative criticism that is used to structure and discuss the Lucan Lord's Supper text, (4) contextual analysis of the text that consists of two issues: discussions of literary context and the main theme of the text, (5) analysis of the meal sharing tradition of Ethiopians, and (6) implementation of the theological significance derived from the discussion, which is followed by (7) my conclusion.

A Tri-polar Theoretical Approach Defined

A tri-polar approach is used to interpret biblical texts in a context of a people's culture. It contains three elements or poles: a cultural context that parallels the context of the chosen or given text, the biblical text itself, and a mediating pole between the text and the culture. The cultural practice and the given text

are analysed to identify similarities and/or dissimilarities between the two. Similarities and dissimilarities between the two contexts are mediated by the third pole to appropriate the meaning of the text in a manner that escapes syncretism. Thus, the third pole is an intersecting or negotiating element between the cultural and textual contexts. It is explained in different ways. The explanation offered by Grenholm and Patte (2000:1–15) is different from the way it is described by West (2018:240–273) or Draper (2015:3–22). An important thing to notice here is not the way it is described, but its role. Scholars use it as a pole that mediates between the context of the text and culture. In this article, I follow the explanation offered by West. West (2018:247–248) expresses the third pole as ‘implicit’. He writes,

Implicit in bi-polar-like formulations are aspects of a third pole mediating between the African context and the biblical text: namely, the pole of appropriation.

He continues:

What connects or entangles text and context, then, is a form of dialogical appropriation that has a theological and praxiological dimension. [...] The ideo-theological third pole can take various forms, resulting in at least six intersecting yet different emphases in African biblical interpretation: inculturation, liberation, feminist, psychological, post-colonial, and queer biblical hermeneutics.

I find it appropriate here to use inculturation as the hermeneutic lens of the mediating third pole between the culture and the text. The term *inculturation* involves complex descriptions. It has been used in different contexts with various nuances of meanings.⁶ However, I use it as a theory that sees the culture and the text in a balanced and reciprocal way. The two may inform and reform each other, guiding to a proper application of the text’s meaning. An emphatic aspect here is reading a text with the eyes of culture and vice versa, letting the contexts of biblical text and culture converse with each other and learn from each other. Utilising it in this sense enables me to make a

⁶ For its use in various contexts with nuances of meanings and its development in history, see Bass 2020:92-108.

communicational bridge between the culture and the text. Its meaning in this term is offered by Ukpong. He (1995:5) writes:

[Inculturation hermeneutics] designates an approach to biblical interpretation which seeks to make the African, and for that matter any socio-cultural context, the subject of interpretation. This is different from making another context the subject of interpretation and then applying the result in the African context. It is also different from reading the context into the biblical text.

Thus, using inculturation as a third pole for a hermeneutic lens helps me to carefully deal with the text and culture in a balanced way, avoiding careless compromise of Lord's Supper theology and yet not ignoring a particular value of the culture that helps understand the text. In this way, an appropriation of the theological meaning of the text is materialised.

Narrative Criticism Defined

Narrative criticism is part of literary criticism. The literary critic assumes that the author worked with sources, but also that the author composed a new account from these sources – an account that has literary integrity (cf. Luke 1:1–4). As opposed to historical criticism that deals with the origins and original historical backgrounds of the text, narrative criticism is used to examine the final form of the biblical text, the text as it is before the reader. It focuses on the literary shape of the text. The narrative critic examines the text to discern its aspect, genre, structure (including plot, theme, irony, foreshadowing, etc.), characterisation, and narrative perspective (Rhoads 1982:412–434; Resseguie 2005:15–19). In order to structure the Lucan Lord's Supper text and to discuss the theme of fellowship that is the main objective of Jesus in instituting the Last Supper, I use the method of narrative criticism, particularly the aspects foregrounded by Wenham and Walton (2011), which are: setting, plot, point of view, and characterisation which are common elements of narrative criticism.

The setting of the story is provided in the narratives. Settings could be the geographical, religious, physical, temporal, and socio-cultural environment in

which the story is narrated (Resseguie 2005:87). Because setting provides the background of the story, it helps to analyse the story in its own right context.

A plot orbits around characters, functioning for the development of the story. It is a device that develops the progress of the story from one position to the next leading to a conclusion (Mburu 2019:109). It involves: (1) the beginning, the end, and the climax of the text, climax being identified by clues found in the text; (2) any suggestive gaps in the story – questions that come to the reader’s mind, that the author does not resolve; and (3) any ambiguous expression, or irregularity, or peculiarity (e.g., digression/interruption, thematic inconsistency, apparent repetition) in the text. Characterisation focuses on how the narrator portrays characters found in the story, the way in which characters behave as the story unfolds (Resseguie 2005:197–198). Point of view is about the perspective from which the implied narrator wants readers to see the narrative.⁷ Identification of these elements of the narrative is very important because they offer helpful data concerning the content, context, and nature of the text.

The Literary Context of Luke 22:14–23

Before dealing with the text in its narrative context, it is necessary to see if the textual unit of the text could be extended rather than ending at verse 23. For two basic reasons, Luke 22:14–23 cannot be read in isolation from the succeeding verses, verses 24–38. First, Luke emphasises the aspect of communion in the Last Supper much more strongly than the Markan and Matthean accounts by including a discourse that Jesus had with the Twelve. In Luke, the author brings forth the aspect of communion not only in the narrative of the Last Supper, but also in the extended discourse. Some of the discourse in Luke’s report is uniquely Lucan while some of it has synoptic parallels in Mark and Matthew, but it is located outside the Last Supper scene in Mark and Matthew. The pericopes of the Last Supper – from the arrival of Jesus and the Twelve (Mark 14:17; Matt. 26:20; Luke 22:14) until they leave the room and go to the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:26; Matt. 26:30; Luke 22:39)

⁷ Scholars provided a detailed discussion on the setting, plot, point of view, and characterisation. (See, for instance, Wenham and Walton 2011:95–96 and Resseguie 2005:87).

– are rather shorter in Mark (ten verses) and Matthew (eleven verses) than they are in Luke (twenty-six verses).

Second, the key words in the given passage (i.e., Luke 22:14–23) are repeated in the succeeding section (vv. 24–38). Particularly, the eating and drinking theme, the key word ‘table’ (vv. 14–15, 17–18, 21 vs vv. 27, 30), the idea of the weakness of Jesus’ disciples, and Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denial (vv. 21–22 vs v. 34) are repeated in the extended section. Notably, in the Lucan version, Jesus relates the Last Supper setting to the disciples’ dispute over which one of them would be the greatest. Jesus uses their dispute as an opportunity to explain who is the greatest in the kingdom of God. As opposed to the kings of the Gentiles (v. 25), Jesus, though being their Lord, still served them at the table (v. 27). Verse 27 looks back to the institution of the Lord’s Supper (vv. 17–20). Thus, being the greatest is rooted in serving at the table – not being served (vv. 27, 30). The failure of Peter to give his life for the sake of Jesus (i.e., that he would go to prison and death with Jesus [vv. 33–34]) conversely points to Jesus’ giving of his life for Peter and others (vv. 19–20).

Outline and Discussion of the Context of the Text

1 The Last Supper and the betrayal (vv. 14-23),

2 Disputes among the disciples over the issue of being the greatest (vv. 24-30),

3 Foretold impending denial with additional teaching and advice (vv. 31-38).

The narrative of the Lucan Last Supper begins with the clause: ‘When the hour came, he took his place at the table’ (v. 14), which functions as a connecting clause, connecting the pericope with the previous verses (vv. 1–13) by repeating the same idea in verses 1 and 7 where the nearness of Passover Festival and the arrival of the actual ‘Day of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover’ are mentioned, respectively. Moreover, the Last Supper pericope and the rest of the verses of the chapter are interrelated with each other in different ways. This is especially seen in the relationship of the passage to preceding and succeeding sections that disclosed the theme of the Passover Festival with elements related to the Passover and key words related to eating

and drinking (see vv. 1, 7–9, 11, 14–15, 17–21, 27, 30). Therefore, the Passover meal becomes the main context of the passage.

The plot of the narrative and portrayals of the characters are expressed in the framework of the eating and drinking at the table. Jesus is the protagonist who gives his body and blood represented in the bread and cup to be shared (eaten and drunk) by his disciples. He also predicts what Judas is thinking by putting it in the context of dipping a hand in the food. Furthermore, Jesus controls the forum by leading and responding to disciples' questions in the dialogue as well as giving them teachings and advice. The focus of his answers is on fellowship: he desires to share a fellowship meal with them before his suffering. Thus, he gives the bread and cup that represent his body and blood to maintain their fellowship, and he responds to the disciples' dispute over greatness, relating it to table service – serving others just like a servant at a table. His answer to their dispute annuls their divisiveness by focusing on the theme of fellowship. Furthermore, he wants them to understand fellowship in its transcendent nature rather than in terms of simple table service: Jesus' suffering, foreshadowed in the Lord's Supper, must be fulfilled. Thus, his suffering also becomes the context for understanding the fellowship aspect of the Lord's Supper (see vv. 15–16, 18, 21–22, 30, 32–33, 37).

The Theme of Fellowship Discussed

One of the significant moments in Jesus' earthly life and ministry was the fellowship he had with his disciples on different occasions. More than any other occasion, the theme of fellowship is especially seen when it is disclosed at the celebration of the Passover Festival, in which he instituted the Last Supper. There is no other true fellowship that is expressed in any other way than Jesus' giving of his body and blood for others (vv. 19–20). As it has been already demonstrated in the introduction, there are other aspects in this text, such as abandonment and suffering. However, here I limit myself to the aspect of communion within the Lord's Supper because the theme of fellowship not only prevails in the text, but also it correlates with an Ethiopian cultural context.

In Luke 22:14-23, two interwoven themes conspicuously appear in front of readers: abandonment and fellowship. Looking at the narrative as it unfolds in

these verses, it seems that the theme of abandonment dominates, and the theme of fellowship is less obvious in the story. However, beneath the theme of Jesus' being abandoned by one of his intimates, the story presents the fellowship aspect of the Lord's Supper. It speaks of the reality of community. The intimate fellowship between Jesus and his disciples is discerned when one closely reads the text. By saying 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer' (v. 15), Jesus expresses that this is the last occasion for him to be in fellowship with them here on earth.

Luke's emphasis on the fellowship theme also is unfolded in the way he presents a traitor (Judas, called Iscariot [vv. 3–6; 'who is the son of James' [Luke 6:16]) amongst the Twelve. Mark and Matthew present the account of the disclosure of a traitor by Jesus prior to the distribution of the bread and wine, whereas Luke keeps the account until the distribution of the bread and wine is over. The reason for Luke's bracketing this and bringing the account of the distribution of the bread and wine first is to give emphasis to the fellowship theme. Explaining how Luke restructured the text by revising its corresponding Markan story, Nash (1992:398) writes:

Luke revises the Markan order of the event by presenting the ritual meal prior to the announcement of the presence of a traitor in the circle of the disciples. This restructures the narrative to place more emphasis on the fellowship of the Supper and to heighten the sense of abandonment and betrayal which occurs at the end of the meal.

The fellowship theme is also clearly demonstrated in verse 17. After taking the cup and blessing it, Jesus says, 'Take this and divide it among yourself'. This conspicuously shows the unity at the table, all sharing from one cup. The theme is also expressed in different ways from different angles in the narrative. It is observed and identified from the unity shown in the group that dined together at the Last Supper: the Twelve and Jesus. Jesus, with his close team, ate and made a dialogue that exhibited their relationship. The composition of the group and the extended discourse between Jesus and the disciples exhibits that the Supper was eaten in the spirit of fellowship.

Nevertheless, the team was not perfect as can be understood from Jesus' words that one of them would betray him. Judas Iscariot committed his heart to money and to Jesus' opponents. However, although the character of Judas – with his bad inner thought – stands in contrast to the group's unity, the theme of communion unfolds in the narrative, with raising of the question of who would betray their Lord. Their unity is still maintained. When the disciples heard Jesus saying that his betrayer was one of them, they asked each other, 'Which one of them it could be who would do this' (Luke 22:23). It surprised them because it was unthinkable to them that one of them would do such an evil thing, violating the intimate relationship they all had together.

In addition to these, the fellowship aspect of the Last Supper in Luke is seen in Peter's words about Jesus' prediction. Following Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper in which he gives himself to others, Peter assumed that he could also give his life for Jesus' sake. Peter's statement emerged not without context, but from his commitment to Jesus and the fellowship he experienced as part of the team. However, Peter's fallen nature undermined his promise to Jesus.

An Ethiopian Meal-Dining Culture

Food plays an important cultural role in every community in the world, operating as a way for people to connect within their community and to celebrate important events. This idea is expressed in various ways in the materials written on topics related to food and culture. For instance, Eleni Michopoulou and Pijus Jauniškis (2020:9) state of the communal aspect of food: 'Acquiring food in various ways was evidently reported to help connect with the community, society and one's cultural identity' (see also Pufall et al. 2011:242). 'In fact, the simple act of eating together is a universal symbol of hospitality and acceptance which transcends cultures' (Nash 1992:397). This general expression, of course, is true in many aspects of Ethiopian food traditions. However, an Ethiopian culture of dining employs a deeper meaning of fellowship than the aforementioned general statements. In the Ethiopian context, eating together signifies the idea of relationships in a stronger way than the dining traditions in many other countries in the world. This is because dining is carried out in a distinctive and unique way in Ethiopian culture. This distinctive nature of eating a meal is related to the manner of eating a meal

that is expressed in the Amharic word *guraša* and to the belief of diners about divine intervention in their life.

In many parts of Ethiopia, meals are eaten communally, with diners using their hands to scoop up እንጂራ (*ʾənəǧera*) (a fermented flatbread made of ቤፍ [*t'ef*] flour) and other dishes. Such dining together takes place not only when food is served in homes, but also when friends eat at hotels or in restaurants. Like in most countries of the world, Ethiopians dine in restaurants if it is impossible for them to be at home or if they are away from home for special reasons or occasions. A special feature of the connectedness of diners in Ethiopian eating culture is attached to food eaten in a restaurant. When friends, colleagues, or family members or a group of people go to eat in a restaurant, each orders what she/he wants to eat. However, the interesting thing is that after a choice is made by each, the waiter will bring all orders on one plate. For example, they make a food order to the waiter saying: ‘ሦሥት በአንድ’ (i.e., three in one, if three different kinds of food are chosen) or ‘አራት በአንድ’ (i.e., four in one, if four different kinds of food are chosen) etc. The choice of the number of food types depends on the number of individuals in the group. After the food types are put on one *mäsob* (plate), it is brought from the kitchen, and all eat from the composition without paying attention to the food type each chose. It is offensive if one eats all the type of food that she/he chose, because doing so destroys the communal connection that one has with the others. Thus, dining together from the compilation of food types is a conventional practice that symbolically bonds the diners.

Another special nature in Ethiopian communal dining that strongly plays its role in connecting people in a dining tradition is called *guraša*, meaning ‘giving a mouthful’. *Guraša* is carried out in a distinctive and unique way when eating a meal together. The Amharic term *guraša* refers to giving a mouthful to one another during eating a meal together. Diners give a *guraša* to each other – turn by turn – until the meal is completely consumed. *Guraša* has its own procedure. Usually, the host begins giving a *guraša* to the diners as friends or family members eat together in an individual home. However, if dining takes place outside of home, e.g., in a restaurant, one of the diners can begin giving a *guraša*. In the course of dining on a meal, the host or one of the diners

will divert his food-filled hand away from its natural destination and place the morsel directly into the mouth of someone else, from among those sitting at the table or standing nearby [... T]he holding hand moves to fill someone else's mouth. (Salamon 2019:3)

The fundamental aim in *gurāša* is maintaining and fostering relationships. The national UAE magazine states the response of an Ethiopian interviewee, named Getahun, about *gurāša* as follows:

Gurāša is the principle that all relationships – ranging from the familial to friendships to a business deal – are ratified over a shared meal. (Saeed 2017:2; see also a companion site by Kloman 2024)

It is further stated,

Gurāša is not an act of showing an apathy or sympathy to a hungry person. It is rather an act of showing love, intimacy, togetherness and forgiveness. (Leulseged 2019)

Because *gurāša* is 'considered [as] a benevolent gesture, expressing love, affection, and care' (Salamon 2019:4), its communal aspect is very strong.

It is offensive to refuse *gurāša*. A person can only refuse to accept a *gursha* if she/he has a negative feeling or hatred to the other(s) in the group that eats a meal together. Just a simple rumour running about her/him causes a person to refuse a *gurāša*. A person might be told a rumour by someone external to the dining group as if the rumour originated from a group member. I will not go in-deep on this issue, because it is not my main concern, and it needs its own independent study.

Another aspect in connection with eating a meal is people's beliefs concerning divine intervention in their daily life. The traditional belief of Ethiopians highly regards the reality and importance of divine intervention. The tradition focuses on the belief that an intimate relationship between god(s) and diners is maintained by offering a morsel from the meal to god(s) before the group (be it family members or friends and colleagues) eats the food served to the diners.

Offering a morsel of food to god(s) is made through special agents (special in the sense of society's traditional understanding). Such agents are considered as special because the society believes that they possess a unique gift or spirit. Agents could be human beings or objects that traditional Ethiopians believe to be mediators. The objects could be big trees or known rivers. In this cultural context, witchdoctors are believed to be mediators between individuals and god(s). Objects that are believed to be mediators are consecrated by traditionalists and kept for the purpose they are assigned. Cutting such trees or polluting the river is a serious offence because doing so is believed to bring divine wrath. It is also believed that the god(s) will bless the meal to be eaten and a relationship with the divine is promoted and sustained if a morsel of food is offered to the god(s).

Towards an Appropriation of the Meaning of the Text

An appropriation of a theological meaning of the text is done by letting cultural practices and the text interact with each other through the negotiating pole of inculturation. However, before proceeding to discuss this issue, I will summarise my aforementioned discussion on the text and cultural context. Then after, I will move to identifying the similarities and dissimilarities between the contexts of the text and of an Ethiopian meal culture, followed by the issue of appropriation.

Ethiopian dining culture bears a strong symbolic meaning of relationships – the relationship among the diners and the relationship between diners and the Supreme God. These two relationships are expressed in two ways that are embraced when dining a meal is performed: *gurāša* and a belief on divine intervention, the former in relation to the diners and the latter in connection with the divine and the diners. *Gurāša* carries a strong symbolic meaning of fellowship by maintaining, nourishing, and strengthening relationships among the diners. The relationship between the Supreme Being and the diners is maintained by offering a morsel of food to god(s) through mediating diviners. The latter is done before eating a meal. It is given prior to eating a meal because it is believed that securing a vertical relationship is a foundation for a horizontal one, which helps diners to sustainably maintain their horizontal connectedness.

The communion aspect, both the horizontal and vertical relationships, also is the main theme of the Last Supper text in Luke. This is expressed in the text in different ways. Eating from the same bread and drinking from the same cup carrying with them the importance of the horizontal relationship. This is clear in Luke's narration of Jesus' words: 'Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "take this and *divide it among yourselves*"' (v. 17, emphasis added). The vertical aspect of the communion is shown in Jesus' giving of bread and cup that represents his body and blood for his disciples and, of course, for all humanity. The words, 'this is my body, which is given for you' followed by 'this cup that is poured out for you' (vv. 19, 20), bear the strong tie Jesus has with his disciples and all humanity.

The analyses made above on the Lucan Lord's Supper text and Ethiopian dining culture demonstrate that there are similarities and dissimilarities between the two. The question is now: how are these similarities and dissimilarities addressed in applying the text for today? This question is solved by applying a mediating third pole, i.e., inculturation hermeneutics. An application of inculturation hermeneutics becomes a mediating bridge between the pole of text and the pole of the culture. It brings similarities and dissimilarities in to the sight of each other that each may inform and reform, and be informed and reformed by the other. In this way, it helps to apply similarities in a harmonious way and settle dissimilarities in a productive system, because it helps to figure out ways of appropriation.

Thus, similarities and dissimilarities of the fellowship theme observed in an Ethiopian dining culture of *guraša* and intervention of the divine and the Lucan Lord's Supper text are discussed as follows. The similarities of the vertical and horizontal themes of fellowship become the prevailing theme both in the Ethiopian dining practice and in the Lucan Lord's Supper text, though the means by which the fellowship is maintain is different. As an act of *guraša* signifies a relationship of diners, sharing a loaf of bread and cup together also signify the relationship of the believers. The essential meaning in an Ethiopian culture of *guraša* is generous giving that reveals and maintains love and relationship among the diners. Thus, it lets readers understand how affectionate and benevolent giving is an important device for maintaining horizontal relationships. This informs readers of the Last Supper text that the

meaning of the fellowship in sharing the Lord's Supper lies in Jesus' giving of the loaf of bread and cup from the meal.

Yet, a transcendent nature of the communion still to be understood: the essence of the fellowship is not found in giving visible elements, but in what the elements signify or represent. Meaning sharing the body and blood of Jesus given in his impending crucifixion bonds all believers. Jesus gave himself in love for others. It is this meaning that is desired in the Lord's Supper text.

When it comes to the meaning of the vertical relationship expressed in Ethiopian culture and offered in the text, a vast dissimilarity is discovered. Ethiopian dining culture regards created things (like big trees, rivers, human beings) as mediators that help people to maintain a relationship with the Supreme Being. However, according to the text, it is Jesus by giving himself to others, in the form of visible elements that point to his death on the cross, who mediated between God and human beings. Hence, when the dissimilarities in the two contexts are brought to the sight of each other through the mediating inculturation hermeneutics, they challenge each other, leading each to inform and reform and be informed and reformed by the other. As shown in the discussion of the context of the text and in an Ethiopian culture, the vertical fellowship aspect in Ethiopian dining culture not only contradicts the communal aspect intended in the text, but it hinders one from understanding the true meaning of the relationship. Hence, the meaning of vertical fellowship expressed in the culture is informed and reformed by the meaning of fellowship offered in the context of the text, leading to an appropriation of the theological meaning of the fellowship offered in the text.

Conclusion

Dining in an Ethiopian culture of *gurāša* and the belief that the dining culture embraces about divine intervention carries both similarity and dissimilarity to the Lucan story of the Last Supper text in terms of maintaining fellowship. When similarity and dissimilarity in both contexts are brought into the sight of each other through the mediation of inculturation hermeneutics, the understanding of the communal aspect of the Lord's Supper becomes clear. By bringing the two into dialogue with each other, inculturation contributes by letting the two contexts challenge, inform and reform, and be informed and

reformed by each other. Thus, the horizontal fellowship discerned in *gurāša* of the Ethiopian cultural context helps readers understand the communal aspect expressed in the text because it expresses love, intimacy, togetherness, and forgiveness in a unique and distinctive way.

However, the vertical relationship maintained in the cultural context needs to be informed by the intended meaning of the text. Thus, the limited understanding the culture embraces that created things could mediate between divine and human beings is to be challenged by the meaning offered in the text, leading to the appropriation of true fellowship described in the text.

Finally, it would be possible to deal with other themes of the Lucan Last Supper text beside its communion aspect. For instance, the theme of abandonment of Jesus by one of his disciples can be approached from the dining culture of Ethiopians. In Ethiopian culture a person with negative thought against other(s) can share a meal together with friends. However, when she/he is given a *gurāša* (a mouthful), she/he refuses to accept because of her/his inner negative thought against one of the diners.⁸ Carefully analysing this in detail may help one to understand the character of Judas and the alienation of Jesus by his follower. Other themes, like suffering and the sacrificial aspect of the Last Supper can also be discussed, but time and space do not allow me to deal with every theme of the Last Supper in this article. Thus, this article invites and encourages further examination of other aspects of the text from an Ethiopian context for broader and complete understanding of the text.

⁸ In regard to refusing *gurāša*, Salamon (2019:3) states,

The size of the *gurāša* is understood to reflect the generosity of the feeding person, and one is obliged to accept the morsel in its totality, as a refusal to open one's mouth and receive *gurāša* is considered to be insulting.

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