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ASSESSMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL IMPACT OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST ON THE LIVES OF ROMAN CATHOLICS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN STATES OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assesses the spiritual impact of the Holy Eucharist on the lives of Roman Catholics in South Eastern States of Nigeria. The research questions alongside the relevant hypothesis were stated. The populations of the study were the youth and adult Catholics in the South Eastern States of Nigeria. There were a total of 3,170,268 of male and female Catholics in the South Eastern states of Nigeria. The youth and adult Catholics selected as sample for the study were two thousand in number (2000). In this study, a survey design was used. A set of questionnaire were employed for data collection. A total of 2000 copies of questionnaire were administered and 1898 copies were returned. In the analysis of the data, the research question was analysed with frequency and percentage. Also, the hypothesis was tested with mean, standard deviation, analysis of variance and t-test. The findings of study were quite revealing. The test of hypothesis did not reveal significant differences in the views of the respondents on spiritual impact of the Holy Eucharist on the lives of Roman Catholics in South Eastern States of Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypotheses were retained. Conclusions from the study indicate that Eucharist gives the graces Catholics need to relate mutually and lovingly with their fellow men and women. From the findings, it was recommended that since the Catholics see the Holy Eucharist as a spiritual food and nourishment for the soul, they should be enlightened through retreats, workshop and liturgical seminars. The Catholics should be meant to understand the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist through prayerful celebration.

Keywords: Assessment, Spiritual Impact, Most Holy Eucharist, Roman Catholics, Southeast Nigeria.

Background of the study

The Holy Eucharist is called the Sacrament of the Altar or the Blessed Sacrament or the Lord's Supper. It was instituted by Jesus Christ on the night before he was crucified. On that night, he took bread and wine and blessed them and instructed the apostles to do it in memory of him. Since then, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist has become the Centre of Catholic worship, the apex or the zenith of all the Catholic liturgical worship. Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the real body and blood of Jesus Christ represented by the bread and wine. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist exhibits the love the Lord has for his followers and that is

the reason why the Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist before He departed from the earth. This Holy Eucharist is expected to have its impact on the lives of the faithful socially, physically, psychologically and spiritually.

The Eucharist celebrated today in the church is foreshadowed in the event of the Passover in Egypt. The Passover memorial of Israel's deliverance from bondage is a prefiguration of the Eucharist. They were expressive of the fact that, on the basis of the offered and accepted sacrifice, God receives His people as guests in His house and unites with them in joyful communion, the communal life of the covenant (Philippe, 2015).

The account of the institution of the Holy Eucharist is given in three gospels; Matthew (26:26-29), Mark (14:22-25) and Luke (22:19-20) and also in the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (11:23-25). Matthew 26:26-29 gives the account of the institution of the Holy Eucharist in these words "Take it and eat, he said, 'this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he handed it to them saying, 'Drink from this, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'. Mark 14:22-25 gives his own account thus; "as they were eating he took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them, "take it,' he said, 'this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he handed it to them, and all drank from it, 'and he said to them, 'This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many.' While Luke 22:19-20 narrates his own account saying; "then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and said, "Take this and share it among your selves. I tell you that from now on I will not drink this wine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and gave it to them saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in memory of me." In the same way, he gave them the cup after the supper, saying, "This cup is God's new covenant sealed with my blood, which is poured out for you" (The Jerusalem Holy Bible).

St. Paul first letter to the Corinthians 11:23-25 gives the account of the institution of the Holy Eucharist thus: "The Lord Jesus Christ on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way He took the Cup also, after supper, saying, "This Cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me".

Canon 897 states that, "the most venerable sacrament is the Blessed Eucharist, in which Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered and received, and by which the Church continually lives and grows". The Eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord, in which the Sacrifice of the cross is forever perpetuated, is the summit and the source of all worship and Christian life. By means of it the unity of God's people is signified and brought about, and the building up of the body of Christ is perfected. The other sacraments and all the apostolic works of Christ are bound up with, and directed to, the blessed Eucharist. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the Blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely, Christ himself, our Paschal Lamb. It is the true body and blood of Jesus Christ together with the soul and divinity under the appearances of bread and wine.

It is also called a Sacrifice of Praise (Psalm 114:4-9), the Most Holy Sacrament and St. Ignatius called it medicine of immortality (Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 1). The Holy Eucharist is instituted by God and not man's invention. The heart of Christ invented it as a means of satisfying His Love, friendship, presence, ministration to men and a Passover of never-ending joy. It is the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated down the ages and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood (CCC, 2011). It is the living memorial of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. In the work of Burke (2012:34) "it is the great Sacrament by which we encounter the living Christ, and receive grace to allow him to rule more and more over our lives. It is truly the sacred banquet in which we are fed at God's table and grow into the holiness of the risen Lord" (Mamman, 2003).

All the other six sacraments in the Catholic Church have their meaning in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. For the Catholic Church, the Holy Eucharist is not only the life of the church but also divine or spiritual food to the members. It is the source of spiritual nourishment and strength to all who believe in it. The Eucharist also has its transforming effects on the faithful by drawing them to the Lord and assisting them to distant themselves from evil. Thus, it is the sacrament of union and reconciliation between one and another and with God as well.

Statement of the Problem

Physical food is necessary for healthy muscles that have strength to do work over a long time. The Eucharist is spiritual food that gives the strength and power to do mighty deeds: to study and master difficult subjects; to speak and uphold the truth, even in the face of fierce opposition; to perform endless household chores cheerfully; and the capacity to take on a major task or carry a heavy load for the long haul. The Eucharist serves as spiritual defence mechanism. Physical food strengthens the immune system, so antibodies can fight off germs that can harm or kill the body, and the Eucharist is spiritual food that equips a person to fend off temptations that can harm or kill the soul. The Eucharist fortifies a person's internal defence mechanisms, equipping the person with potent spiritual weapons that repel or neutralize the injurious and lethal attacks of the devil, and to preserve a sterile environment, a soul that is clean and pure.

The Catholic Church believes that the Eucharist is the centre and heart of her life. All the activities in the Catholic Church revolve around the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Eucharist is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. However, it seems that the lives of most Catholics do not tie with the teaching of the Church. Their lives seem to contradict what the Eucharist stands for.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the spiritual impact of the Holy Eucharist on the lives of Roman Catholics in the South Eastern States of Nigeria.

Research Questions

What is the Spiritual impact of the Holy Eucharist on the lives of youth and adult Roman Catholic in South Eastern States of Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

There is no significant difference among the opinions of youth and adult Catholics on the spiritual impact of the Holy Eucharist in the lives of Roman Catholics in South Eastern States of Nigeria.

The Eucharist as Spiritual Food

The Eucharist is spiritual food. By the Lord Jesus Christ's absolute and indisputable decision He wills that His own Body and Blood be the supernatural sustenance of those whom at Baptism He has made children of His Father in His own image (cf. Jn 6:60-71). This nutrition, called Holy Communion, enables those who receive it worthily to become more and more like unto Jesus Christ and, in that measure, more pleasing to God the Father. The nourishment one has from feeding on the Lord's flesh and blood should empower that person to live ever more completely in the likeness of the Son, in His total obedience, fidelity and love for the Father's will in all things. Sharing in the Eucharist is the highest point of union with the Lord, who is both the source of eternal life and the font from which one draws the strength to make the complete gift of one's self. Holy Communion is Jesus Christ's Pledge of eternal glory by initiating intimate communion between Himself and that person whom He will usher one day into the place He has prepared for those who follow him faithfully (cf. Jn 14:1-3).

The elements used in the Passover meal were staples of the Palestinian diet in Biblical times. Bread was available to everyone, the most common of foods. Wine was served as the normal table beverage even in the homes of the poor. More so, the Western Church uses unleavened bread, because unleavened bread was used at the Last Supper. St. Paul saw unleavened bread as a symbol of purity and newness (cf. 1Cor. 5:6-8). Unleavened bread was also more quickly prepared than bread with yeast, and hence it fit in with the "pilgrim people" idea associated with the Exodus. We are a pilgrim Church, and we receive our spiritual bread in a form that reminds us that we are still on the way to our promised land (Aumann, Hopko & Bloesch, 2008).

Wine was associated in popular thinking with joyful exuberance (cf. Ps. 104:15). The reference to the Good Samaritan's pouring of wine on the injured traveler's wounds (cf. Luke 10:34) and St. Paul's advice to Timothy that little wine is good for the stomach and recurring illness (cf. 1 Tim. 5:23) suggest that the ancient world also considered wine to be somewhat therapeutic. This symbolism is retained in the Holy Mass, where grape wine is still used. No doubt, Jesus Christ commands at the Last Supper to eat and drink with the same symbol. Jesus Christ had even foretold the nourishment aspect of this sacrament in His preaching: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst …. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (John 6:34, 55).

The Eucharist brings about the nourishing effect it symbolizes. This is achieved through the presence of Jesus Christ Himself and the bestowal of grace on those who receive Him according to their individual needs and the needs of the community (Semmelroth, 2005).

Realistically just as a friend makes himself generally available to a friend, or just as ordinary food is converted into whatever the body needs at the moment, the effects of this sacrament

are more comprehensive than those of the others and more adaptable to the particular situation and circumstances of recipient. It is the spiritual food that nourishes the body of the faithful.

The Eucharist is the primary way that Jesus Christ gives himself as food: first, in the liturgy of the Word, teachings that believers take in and digest. Jesus Christ's wisdom nourishes the believers' spirit and shows them the way forward step by step. Jesus Christ's teachings are so universal; they can apply to any era with only some modification for the culture. The gospel reading at Holy Mass provides rich food for the faithful spirits and close attention ensures believers don't miss any crumbs. Private reading of the following Sunday's gospel and discussion with a few other parishioners or friends would contribute immensely to a better assimilation of the meal – pre-dinner drinks with nibbles!

Then in the liturgy of the Eucharist, a sacred meal of bread and wine is laid out for the people on the table. The prayers make this clear. The Preface of the Holy Eucharist I says, "As we eat his flesh that was sacrificed for us, we are made strong, and as we drink his Blood that was poured out for us, we are washed clean." The feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish was a powerful sign of Jesus Christ's ability to nourish his people and anticipates the gift of the Eucharist. In John's gospel, this event is followed by a long discourse in which Jesus Christ strongly asserts his power to feed (John 6).

A detailed commentary on this rich but complex chapter is beyond the scope of this thesis, so I will limit myself to a few remarks. Jesus Christ chides the people for chasing him around the lake because they wanted more of the free food that Jesus Christ had given them. He says "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (John 6: 27).

He tries to lift their aspirations from the material to a spiritual level, and encourages them to believe in him, but the people ask for a sign, a work to warrant believing in him and they remind him their ancestors ate manna in the wilderness. Jesus Christ replies: it was not Moses who gave this 'bread from heaven' but God, and God would give them 'the true bread from heaven'. He then tells them "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6: 35).

What an audacious and momentous statement! No longer will Moses, the manna, Wisdom or Torah [Jewish law] provide sufficient nourishment. Jesus, the bread of life, will satisfy the deepest needs of humankind, all hunger and all thirst. (Moloney, 1998). By saying '*whoever* comes to me' Jesus Christ is again breaking down Jewish exclusivity; Jesus Christ is food for the world. Jesus Christ points out that those who ate the manna, even Moses himself, are now dead, but those who eat the bread that Jesus Christ gives will have eternal life.

Tillard (2008) justifies the role of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy in these words: "Since the essential purpose of the Eucharist is to lead the Church towards this gift, it is only in the power of the Holy Spirit that the Eucharist can be accomplished". Furthermore, the Spirit makes the crucified and risen Jesus Christ really present to us in the Eucharistic meal, fulfilling the promise contained in the words of institution. The emphasis is on the fact that the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is brought about through the power of the Holy Spirit and the

words of institution. Equally it is in virtue of the living word of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit that the bread and wine become the sacramental signs of Jesus Christ's body and blood. This corresponds to what in the Catholic theology is designated with transubstantiation (Oster, 2007).

According to Palmer (2009) the Eucharistic prayer both manifests the unity between the Church and Jesus Christ and the distinction between the Church and Jesus Christ. Only in thanksgiving to the Father for the gift of Jesus Christ does the Church speak the Eucharistic words of Jesus Christ through the priest and so receive the gift of the Father's love.

However, the Church does not dare to give the impression that it acts immediately in place of Jesus Christ. Through the thanksgiving prayer, it makes its relation of dependence on the true host of the meal visible in the rite (Delorme, 2006). The Church confidently invokes the Holy Spirit in order that it may be sanctified and renewed. It is therefore, the Holy Spirit, who through the Eucharist gives a foretaste of the kingdom of God, in which the Church receives the life of the new creation and the assurance of the Lord's return.

Methodology

The research design for this study is the survey type. A survey design is an organized attempt to analyze, interpret and report satisfactorily the specific findings by the researcher. It is used to determine information on the opinions, feelings and attitudes of respondents (Osuala, 2005).

The population of this study consisted of the Catholic Archdioceses and Diocese in the South Eastern States of Nigeria. The Archdioceses are: Onitsha and Owerri while the Dioceses are: include: Aba, Umuahia, Awka, Nnewi, Abakaliki, Awgu, Enugu, Nsukka, Ahiara, Okigwe, Orlu and Ekwulobia. According to Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), the population of the Catholics that make up the South Eastern States of Nigeria as of 2014 was seven million, five hundred and seventy- one thousand, one hundred and twenty three (7,571,123). This figure has since multiplied hugely in 2021.

The purposive sampling method was used to select five dioceses for the study. Samples for the study had been drawn from the population of Catholics in the five dioceses under study. Therefore, the sample size used out of the population of Catholics in South Eastern States was one thousand, eight hundred and ninety-eight (1,898) respondents. The researchers made use of the questionnaire.

Date analysis

What is the Spiritual impact of the Holy Eucharist on the lives of youth and adult Roman Catholics in South Eastern States of Nigeria?

Spiritual Impact of the Holy Eucharist

SN	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D
1	The Eucharist sanctifies the soul	1291	509	-	98	3.58	.744
2	It is the spiritual food and nourishment for the soul	18	370	-	1510	3.78	.480
3	It is the spiritual food the living and fore shadows the food of the saints	1386	436	29	47	3.67	.630
4	It empowers Christians spiritually	1413	330	42	63	3.68	.679
5	It helps the Christians to act like Christ	1118	552	72	156	3.39	.898
6	Some Catholics receive the Eucharist and still not firm in faith	1249	485	86	73	3.53	.766
7	Some Catholics receive the Eucharist and still not believe in its powers	938	807	66	87	3.37	.760
8	It energizes Christians in their faith	1171	616	22	89	3.51	.745
9	It gives Christians the impetuous towards reconciliation	1186	543	30	139	3.46	.849
10	It draws the Christians to live a holy life or aspire to perfection	1231	539	61	67	3.55	.724

Cumulative mean = 3.552 *decision mean = 2.5*

This Table shows the response of respondents on the spiritual impact of the Holy Eucharist. The result is positive since the cumulative mean of 3.552 is higher than the decision mean of 2.5 which indicates that there is a positive spiritual impact of the Holy Eucharist on the lives of the faithful that received it worthily. And this explains why the view that it is the spiritual food and nourishment for the soul obtained the highest mean of 3.78 with further details revealing that 1880 of the respondents agreed, 18 of them disagreed. It builds spiritual growth on the faithful and energizes them to be more committed in their faith. The second highest mean value of 3.68 was obtained by the view that it empowers Christians spiritually with further details revealing that 1743 of them agreed, 105 of them disagreed which means that the respondents accept that the sacrament empowers faithful to be firm their belief.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference among the opinions of youth and adult Catholics on the spiritual impact of the Holy Eucharist on the lives of Roman Catholics in South Eastern States of Nigeria.

Summary of respondents from States.

States of Origin	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error
Abia	125	57.4928	7.01640	.59728
Anambra	344	56.4269	7.14980	.39064
Ebonyi	121	57.9098	6.15514	.53372
Enugu	755	57.8521	7.24050	.60761
Imo	553	57.8046	7.15463	.33286
Total	**1898**	**57.8046**	**6.99392**	**.23644**

The Table is the summary of the mean scores of respondents' responses by their states of domicile. From the result, Abia State has mean score of 57.4928, Anambra has 56.4269, Ebonyi has 57.9098, Enugu has 57.8521 and Imo has 57.8046. The imbalance in the sample size was due to the clustered population of Roman Catholics in the states being studied. Hence, it is logical for the sample to reflect the variation in unequal target population. However, the trends of the mean scores are affirmation of uniqueness of spiritual benefits of the Holy Eucharist.

One Way Analysis of Variance on the Spiritual Impact of Holy Eucharist.

Variables	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16.286	4	5.429	.111	.954
Within Groups	42735.296	1894	49.065		
Total	**42751.582**	**1898**			

The result in the Table reveals that the observed value of .954 is greater than the alpha (P>05). This means that the null hypothesis is retained. There are no differences in the opinions of respondents from different states regarding the spiritual impact of Holy Eucharist on the lives of Roman Catholics in their respective states of domicile. Meanwhile, it is necessary to find out the strength or degree of the agreement through Scheffe post hoc test that is presented in the table

Scheffe Test of Respondents on the Spiritual Impact of Holy Eucharist.

(i) State	(j) State	Mean Difference (i – j)	Std. Error	Sig.
Abia	Anambra	-.41702	.85115	.971
	Ebonyi	-.35936	.83730	.980
	Enugu	-.36006	.67952	.964
	Imo	.71599	.95787	.906
Anambra	Abia	.41702	.85115	.971
	Ebonyi	.05766	.84524	1.000
	Enugu	.05696	.68928	1.000
	Imo	-1.13683	1.03217	.750
Ebonyi	Abia	.35936	.83730	.980
	Anambra	.05766	.84524	1.000
	Enugu	.00070	.67211	1.000
	Imo	-.42084	.66206	.939
Enugu	Abia	.36006	.67952	.964
	Anambra	.05696	.68928	1.000
	Ebonyi	.00070	.67211	1.000
	Imo	.84088	.66303	.903
Imo	Abia	-.71599	.95787	.906
	Anambra	1.13683	1.03217	.750
	Ebonyi	.42084	.66206	.939
	Enugu	-.84088	.66303	.903

In determining the degree of agreement, the result of Scheffe post hoc test in Table 16c reveals less than 100% between and among Abia and Imo States with other states. There is 100%

agreement between and among Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu States in all the items of the instrument. It can be assumed that Holy Eucharist has tremendous spiritual impact on the respondents irrespective of the states they come from. Hence, there is no significant difference in the views of respondents on the spiritual impact it exerts.

The Hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the opinions of Catholics from five states on spiritual impact of the Holy Eucharist on the lives of Roman Catholics in South Eastern States of Nigeria reveals that the observed value of .954 is greater than the alpha (P>05). This means that the null hypothesis is accepted and retained. In determining the degree of agreement, the result of scheffe *posthoc* test reveals than 100% between and among Abia and Imo their states. There is 100% agreement between and among Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu States in all the items of the instrument. With this, one can say that the Holy Eucharist has tremendous spiritual impact on the respondents irrespective of the states they come from. And in accordance with Carter (2015) that points out that the Holy Eucharist grants us the spiritual life in Jesus Christ and makes us abide in Him; so we grow and become strengthened spiritually.

The findings of the research show that the Holy Eucharist gives spiritual strength to whoever receives it worthily. It invokes intimacy, faithfulness, devotions, reverence and heals the soul. It is the Spiritual food and nourishment, medicine for sin or antidotes for sin. From the responses, it not only inspires deep faith, perfection but for one not to revenge but to forgive. Considering the findings of the study, the research conclusions that Eucharist gives the graces Catholics need to relate mutually and lovingly with their fellow men and women. It nourishes and gives spiritual strength that Catholics need to work in the way of God's Commandments.

Boylan (2008) aptly puts it "whatever our sins have done to us, the Holy Communion can repair; and whatever our sins have done to God, the Eucharist can restore". This means, we must have unlimited confidence in God's love for us and His willingness to do whatever He can to bring us to himself. The more love we have for Jesus Christ and others, the less self-love we have. Equally the more we love God, the more we can resist temptation, the Eucharist gives this strength spiritually (Philippe, 2015).

Finally, the faithful draws spiritual life from Jesus Christ and they abide in Jesus Christ as Jesus Christ in them as the gospel of John chapter 6:56 states that "he who eats me abides in me and I abide in him".

Recommendations

Based on this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. That effort should be made to ensure that the Eucharist is prayerfully and meditatively celebrated in order to invoke reverence, devotions and active participation of the lay faithful.
2. That since the Catholics see the Holy Eucharist as a spiritual food and nourishment for the soul, they should be enlightened through retreats, workshop and liturgical seminars.
3. That the Catholics should be taught the difference between the personal guilt of venial and mortal sins to enable them develop conviction and positive attitude towards the Holy Eucharist.

4. That importance of regular confession and penance should be emphasized as a mean to promote desirable attitude and disposition toward the Holy Eucharist.
5. In line with living holy lives in their communities, the Catholics should again be encouraged to live their daily lives born out of the inspiration derived from the participation in the Holy Eucharist.
6. That to worthily receive the Holy Eucharist, that Catholic faithful should be enabled to see the need of adequate spiritual preparation before reception.

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