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## **NEW SCHOLARS**

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### **EUCHARIST AND SPIRITUALITY IN LIBERATION THEOLOGY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GEORGE M. SOARES-PRABHU AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER**

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Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life. Eucharist is the formula for the redemption of the humankind and of the entire cosmos since it focuses on a new world order founded on justice, peace, love and integrity of creation. It is a symbol, a commemoration and a participation in Jesus' Liberative action and hence it is dynamic and revolutionary.

Theology to be truly liberating today must respond to the negative impacts of globalization. Globalization has not invalidated – but only sharpened – the basic issues that led to the development of liberation theology. According to liberation theology, the first step towards salvation is the transformation of society. This will involve both

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struggle and conflicts. Today the crucified Jesus Christ is present in the hardships of poor and excluded people. Solidarity with the *crucified people* in their struggle for justice and dignity is therefore inevitable to grasp the salvific significance of Jesus' life and death.

The existing world order (or disorder) is contrary to the values of the Eucharist. Poverty, hunger and suffering are emergent facts of life. The world system is greedily exploitative and the relationship dictated by it destroys persons and peoples. Human beings caught in this globalized web of materialism are tempted to domesticate the very concept of Eucharist and over spiritualize it. By masking the true Eucharistic spirit with a veil of sentimental piety, human beings have commodified it and tweaked its dimensions to their own 'individual salvation.' When individual interests become the loci, communitarian interest gets sidelined. Thus the very essence of this sacrament of sacraments is almost lost.

Liberation theology was one of the early attempts to redeem the Eucharist from the diluted understanding it had been subjected to. It understands sacraments as subversive in nature. In sacraments, the dichotomy between the secular and sacred is overcome. For the liberation theologians sacraments provide the prophetic stamina to break the institutional structures when these no longer enshrine the Kingdom values. Sacraments are valid and efficacious to the extent that they are the celebration of human liberative action in history.

Liberation theologians consider human beings as the sacrament of God, as God's presence in the other is a sacramental reality for them. Whoever rejects the human beings who are the image and likeness of God rejects God himself.

Liberation theology does not see the Eucharist as a pious ritual but as a community's socio-religious praxis, vibrant with transformative demands. It calls for mutual responsibility in love and for the construction of a social order free of discriminations. For the liberation theologians the Eucharist is a call to break walls and build bridges and to sustain the hope that God's Kingdom effectively evolves here and now. In a society where there is a wide disparity between the rich and the poor, where the powerless and the excluded are discriminated, the Eucharist is an affirmation of equality and sharing.

For George Soares the Eucharist is the explicit proclamation of the lordship of Christ. His lordship excludes all other lordships over humanity, and in him we have become finally free. His understanding of table-fellowship aims at developing a contemporary interpretation of Eucharist to create a new world order based on the principles of the Kingdom of God. He sees the Eucharist as the culmination of a series of table-fellowships Jesus had with his disciples and friends, especially

the poor and the excluded ones of his times. George Soares opines that through the table-fellowship with the publicans and the sinners, Jesus radically challenged the whole existing social order.

For George Soares Eucharist is the monument of the highest form of love revealed in Jesus Christ – the love which he commanded to be shared with one another. Jesus said “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (Jn 13: 34). Here Jesus does not say: “love me as I have loved you” but rather “love one another as I have loved you.” To partake in the Eucharist is to enter into the dynamism of Jesus’ self-giving love. By celebrating the Eucharist Christians are challenged to take a stand against injustice by committing themselves to participating in the transformation of society.

### **Spirituality in Liberation Theology**

Christian Spirituality is the daily life-style of the believing Christian. It is a life of faith which has Jesus at the centre. Spirituality shapes the life of a person as well as brings about a perceivable change of society. Christian spirituality is corporate and is given and received in a fellowship. True spirituality is a process of breaking and bringing forth true humanity. This takes place in the community.

Liberation theology came into history as a saving grace redeeming spirituality from the dualism which made it dry and truncated. Liberation theology sees spirituality as Liberative spirituality. It gives people hope and strength in their strivings for a just and participatory world. This spirituality compels one to see life from the perspective of Christ and embraces the poor and the oppressed.

For the liberation theologians spirituality is a journey according to the spirit. Therefore, Liberative spirituality is a life according to the Spirit - the spirit of love, peace, and justice. For the Liberation theologians commitment to liberation arises from a deep spiritual experience, for such commitment is possible only in encounter with God.

For George Soares, the spirituality of a Christian must be based on Jesus’ spirituality. His spirituality can be seen as a paradigm for a spirituality of struggle and liberation. This stand of George Soares elucidates his understanding of spirituality which clearly indicates that solidarity with the oppressed on the one hand and confrontation with the oppressors on the other form two essential dimensions of an integrated Christian spirituality.

### **Cotemporary Realities – The Present World Scenario**

Globalization is the domination of a uni-polar economic system, facilitating the free movement of capital and trade. Globalization, on

the one hand is a cultural process in which human fellowship and solidarity are promoted through international networking and collaborations leading to a community. On the other hand it is a new form of hegemony of developed countries over the underdeveloped countries. There is economic domination, cultural aggression, and political imperialism. In a society governed by the market, a person is valued for what he has than what he is. The spirit of globalization is unjust to the weak and to the poor.

### **Eucharist as an Antidote**

The Eucharist boldly challenges the highly individualistic, consumeristic logic of globalization. The commonality of the image of God makes humanity a universal brotherhood and sisterhood. This is being proclaimed by the Eucharist. Eucharist creates a covenant community and fosters this dynamic relationship. This covenant community has responsibility for each other, serving without expecting anything in return through self-giving as Jesus did.

### **Conclusion: Altar as an Alternative**

Altar is an alternative to the present day world which is divided on numerous grounds. Altar draws everyone around it. Eucharist signifies Jesus' brokenness-for-others and thus becomes the life-giving celebration of an existence-for-others. The Eucharistic power which has the innate essence to transfigure people can ensure a shift in human lives by opening a channel to a new and abundant life.

Perhaps one of the most powerful effects of Eucharist is to break spatial boundaries, thereby reducing the world into a local assembly. In the market there is no space for many but in the Eucharist there is space for all. The Eucharistic community is an inclusive and participatory community.

*Altar is an alternative* to the present globalized world which promotes dangerous individualism and insatiable greed. As Jesus Christ is the hope and the liberator of the world, Eucharist is also the sacrament of hope and liberation. The primary purpose of "Altar" is to create hope for an alternative community in which new human beings are born in Christ. Participation in the Eucharist is a pledge to commit ourselves to the cause of this new world order. It is thus a celebration of hope.

In a world where the poor countries are exploited by the unfair trade mechanism of globalization and burdened by unjust international debt, the Eucharist is a prophetic protest against neocolonialism and its market principles. In a world where there is discrimination the Eucharist will be a celebrative affirmation of equality and sharing. The theological contribution of George Soares in this context is

exemplary and intensely relevant. The Eucharistic social order calls for all gaps of distrust and division to be bridged, hurts healed, confidence restored, hope rekindled, and the bonds of union strengthened. This gives birth to a new genre of people – the Eucharistic community living with a Eucharistic spirituality. This was the all-pervasive vision of George Soares-Prabhu.