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PRAYER AS CELEBRATION : TOWARDS THE MERGING OF THE DIVINE HUMAN MILIEUS IN THE BIBLE

"The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; *repent* and believe the good news" (Mk 1:15).

With these words Jesus of Nazareth inaugurated his public ministry of proclaiming the good news of the salvific presence of God in the world. Here we find the programmatic summary of Jesus' message. These words encapsulate the whole mission of the Messiah. Jesus states concisely the method of appropriating the Kingdom of God to oneself: repent and believe. The first act inevitably leads to the second. Indeed, it implies the other act. The call to believe does not form part of the original proclamation of Jesus. It distinctly echoes the language of the preaching of the primitive church (cf. Acts 11: 17f; 20 : 21). Hence it is probable that the invitation to believe the good news found place in the Gospel according to Mark as an explanatory kerygmatic note of the early Christian tradition. The call to repentance formed the core of Jesus' proclamation (cf. Mt 21: 11; Lk. 7:16).

1. The Dialectics of Turning

The word "repent" fails to exhibit the exuberant connotations of the Hebrew verb *shûb* which literally means "turn". The text refers to turning to God. Transcending the individualistic horizons, this turning process assumes cosmic proportions. First of all, *shûb* denotes turning to God with the whole person. Physical, moral and spiritual faculties are totally involved in this process. To borrow the famous biblical expression, it is turning to God "with all your heart and all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"

(Deut 6:5). Here comes into play the convergence of the physical and psychological, intellectual and spiritual attitudes and aptitudes. Achievements and aberrations, agitations and aggrovements, attachments and animosities, defects and difficulties, temptations, emotions and passions, miseries and misfortunes, vicissitudes and victories, virtues and vices—all are to be reckoned with. Man has to seek the divine encounter not in his best Sunday clothes with faked-up devotion and a flashing smile at God. A sincere turning brings the existential man and not 'behaving' man to the divine presence. The socio-economic, cultural and cultic milieu comes in here. One brings with him his kith and kin, town/village folk and state—country men—their existential countenance to God. Indeed, the turning embraces the whole of mankind. But it does not stop there; it extends to animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms. Animate and inanimate beings form part of this turning process. In other words, Jesus invites each individual to turn to God with the entire cosmos. He has to bring the universe back to God; it amounts to restoring "all things in the heavens and on earth into one under Christ's headship" (Ep 1:10). In the design of God, the beings in the universe constituted one family. It was a heart and soul fellowship, destined to build up God's kingdom on earth—to grow into the cosmic face and voice of the creator and "to celebrate his praises. But sin marked the origin of chaotic divisions and bitter hostilities among the created beings. Now Christ comes to reconcile to God all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col 1:20). He "the firstborn over all creation" (Col 1:15), "the firstfruits of resurrection of the dead" (I Cor 15:20, 23), and the glorified "firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29-30) re-established the initial concord and concurrence between God and man, between man and man, and between man and the universe. Christ became the perfect *shûb* of creation. This definite turning act of Christ opened up new vistas in the story of the cosmos. It provides the paradigm and pledge for man's turning to God and celebrating the praise of the divine glory. Now the entire cosmos can groan with him, share in his joys, sufferings and struggles, and wait with eager expectation for the total liberation (cf. Rom 8:18-22). Man, together with the universe can meet his creator. Or, in Christ, the liberator, human beings can be transformed into the cosmic face and voice of God. Here the sacred-profane dichotomy is transcended. The earth bears the aureole of heaven. Terrestrial realities assume celestial dimensions. Everything

and everyone become the living sign of God's loving presence. Human milieu verges on divine milieu. It is the prayer which provides the experience of this merging of the divine-human milieus. The existential man in his whole person, together with animate and inanimate beings, stands before God. He encounters the Lord as the cosmic face and voice of creation. He becomes the *shûb* of creation.

2. The Divine Roots of Prayer

In Christ, the authentic *shûb* of creation, human beings turn to God. Paul succinctly puts it in his Letter to the Colossians: "By him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together" (1:16-17). Christ's prayer has its source, basis and goal in his deep-rooted relation with God. He is the Son of God, enjoying perfect union with the Father. "I and my Father are one" (Jn 10:30). He can claim that "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine" (17:10). This total belonging-to-the other results from the natural fellowship. The Son of God adorns at the same time the title of son of Man. Being constituted as "the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb 9:15; 12:24) Jesus mediates between God and men (I Tim 2:5). In him humanity is promised the covenant relationship by which the Lord becomes their God, and they his people (Jer 31:33). They can now experience the Christic reality of fellowship expressed in the covenant declaration, "I am yours, you are mine." They belong to God and God belongs to them. The relationship assumes such a proportion that they become one body and soul. This phenomenon is illustrated by having recourse to the analogies of marriage and family. The other is designated as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"¹ (Gen 2:23; cf. also 29:14; Judg 9:2; II Sam 5:1; 19:13, 14). Yahweh declares to his vassal David, "I will be his father and he shall be my son"² (II Sam 7:14). Jehoshaphat declares his covenant oneness with his ally in I Kgs 22:4: "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." Non-biblical texts from the Ancient Near East use different types of imageries to

1. Paul Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant* (A 88), (Rome: 1981), pp. 209 f.
2. F. C. Fensham, "Father and Son Terminology for Treaty and Covenant", in H. Goedicke (ed), *Near Eastern Studies in Honour of W. F. Albright*, (London: 1971), pp. 121-135.

illustrate this intimate fellowship.³ "Everything of my house is yours and everything of your house is mine" (PRU, IV, 228-29) "This land is my brother's land" (EA 19:70); "What is in my stores is in his stores" (HSS, V, 26:9-10); "My enemy is your enemy, my friend is your friend" (ANET, 203-205): "Indeed, my death should be your death, indeed, my life should be your life" (ANET, 532-33): "Their joy will be his joy, their sorrow will be his sorrow" (ARMT, VIII, 1:4-5). All these instances depict the merging of the attitudes and aptitudes of the parties concerned. Jesus' relationship with his Father evokes in a perfect sense all the ideas implied in these formulas. The Christic covenant fellowship between God and man consists of the same notions. God becomes their father, brother, sustainer, saviour, leader, defender and avenger—the ideas contained in the concept of family, God in the Patriarchal and tribal times. The word 'people' connoted the close familial fellowship, similar to that of children and their father. Covenant makes them children who, as the true images of God, have to live his ideas and ideals. Jesus, the true son, gave human form to God's vision in the universe. And God proved himself as an authentic Father who glorified his name (Jn 12:27), proclaimed him as his beloved son in whom he takes delight (Mk.1:11) and constituted him as His only voice which the disciples are asked to interiorize and appropriate.

It is in prayer that Jesus, as the new Adam, turns to God. At the baptism he assumes the form of sinful humanity and prays (Lk 3:21). This act brings heaven to earth ("the heaven was opened"), and the spirit of God descends upon the new man. Jesus prays on the mountain, (6:12; 9:28; 22:39) the locale of God's covenant encounter where by mankind is elevated to the status of God's children (Ex 19:24; 34). Prayer produces God's turning to men through the calling of messengers (apostles: "those who are sent", Lk 6:12). They are presented and consecrated to God in Jesus' communing with the Father (Jn.17). Then the new humanity is taken to the Father so that they may be

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3. Paul Kalluveettil, "Covenant and Community", *Jeevadhara* 11 (1981) 95-104, *Declaration and Covenant*, pp. 93-111.
 4. Paul Kalluveettil, "The Covenant Reality in the Hebrew Society", in *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, D. S. Amalorpavadas, (ed) (Bangalore : 1981) pp. 510-19.

brought to complete unity and love (17:20-23). Luke 9:28ff. illustrates the transfigurative aspect of prayer. The Son of Man is turned to Son of God. Human milieu merges with the divine. One is privileged to see "his glory". Tabor-Calvary relationship is revealed as that of two sides of the same coin.

The word-deed proclamation of Jesus is related to his communing with the Father (Lk 5:16); thereby he appears before God laden with the infirmities and ignorance of humanity. He carries the tragedy—death and tears to God (Jn 11:38-42). With the chalice of human sin Jesus turns to his Father, and bearing the anguish of man, prays more earnestly (Lk 22:41-45). There merges the human will into the divine. Becoming the soul of the repudiated and despondent, he utters Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). Jesus' recital of Psalm 31:6, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46), turns the distress of man into trust. Luke 22:32 is destined to turn man back from the clutches of Satan. The praying Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray (Lk 11:1-4). The "Our Father" (Mt 6:9-13) brings heaven (vv. 9-10) and earth (vv. 11-13) together. It begins with praise of the divine: human needs such as food, forgiveness, freedom from temptation and deliverance from the devil are then taken to God. These existential needs are understood and defined from the divine perspective. Thus the whole prayer evolves into a celebration of praise of those who live in the Kingdom of God. This celebrative dimension becomes the hall-mark of Jesus' prayers. Indeed, all other forms of his prayer—petition, lamentation, thanksgiving, etc.—tend to grow into declarative praise. Some instances are evidently celebrative. Jesus, having delved into the inner depths of the sublime Eucharistic event, the sign of the new covenant, bursts into singing the praises of the Lord (Mk 14:26). At the tomb of Lazarus he celebrates the praises of his Father ("Father, I praise you since⁵ you have heard me; I knew that you always hear me . . ."; Jn 11:41-42)—a prayer which resulted from the supreme confidence and joy of one who enjoys complete union with God. His eyes are raised to heaven and the sign

5. This hymn of praise exhibits the literary style of the declarative psalms of praise, as identified by C. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, Atlanta. pp. 81-115: The psalm begins with the declaration of the intention to praise Yahweh, followed by the motive clause ("for. . . ."). Luke 10:21 provides another instance.

of heaven comes down to earth (cf. also Mk. 6:41, 7:43). Jesus praises his Father as the Son—the type of the new humanity who has in him the guarantee of being heard and accepted (cf. Jn 14:12-13; 15:16; 16:23, 26). The Son joyfully celebrates in anticipation the glory of his Father in which the audience will later participate in faith (11:4, 42).

Prayer as celebration of praise is in full bloom in the laudatory exclamation of Jesus in Lk 10:21f and Mt 11:25f: "I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth . . ." Jesus utters this hymn in the joy of the Spirit ("He rejoiced in the Spirit"). This rejoicing spirit dominates the whole context. The disciples return with joy (Lk 10:17). They narrate with great joy the success of their proclamation of God's Kingdom. Jesus opens up for them the sublime dimensions of eschatological rejoicing (Lk 10:20). In this divine milieu they are the privileged little ones whose simple and humble spirits most willingly appropriate into themselves the mysterious Kingdom. Jesus, the babe archetype, experiences now the Spirit dimension of this joy which bursts into a hymn of praise. The rejoicing finds its reason in the downfall of Satan's Kingdom—(v.18), symbolized in the healing, exorcising and preaching ministry (v.17). Both the external and internal evils are eradicated (v.19). The physical, moral and spiritual shackles are shattered. Sacred-profane barriers break down. Earth reaches up to heaven. Heaven comes down to earth. "Love and faithfulness meet together righteousness and peace kiss each other" (Ps 85:10). The Father becomes the Lord of heaven and earth (see the form of address of Jesus). The liberated man together with cosmos turns to God. Jesus, the symbol of the redeemed universe, gives vent to the exhilarating joy of the animate and inanimate creatures. His hymn of praise echoes the acclaiming and proclaiming heart and soul of the cosmos. In Jesus they celebrate—they exult, shout, sing and revel, "Day unto day pours forth speech. Night unto night unfolds knowledge" (Ps 19:2). "The rivers clap their hands, the mountains shout for joy together" (Ps 98:8) God's Kingdom dawns at the celebration. They solemnize the Kingdom. These blessed ones can hear and see what was till then unheard and unseen: the voice and face of the Lord of heaven and earth (Lk 10:23-24). The inaugural proclamation of Jesus (Mk 1:15) becomes a realized event. The end-time's (*Endzeit*) new prayer/song (Rev 14:1-5), which brings out the firm fusion of divine-human horizons, appears here in a pre-edition form. Jesus' prayer of praise echoes the solemn celebrative act of the eschatological times when the entire

cosmos totally turns to its Alpha and Omega: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come . . . You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory, honour and power, because you did create all things; by your will they were created, and have their being" (Rev 4:6-11).

To sum up, the *shûb* dynamics of cosmic beings is deeply rooted in the person of Jesus, the covenant mediator, who re-creates the primeval bond of amity and community between God and the cosmos. In him the covenant relationship, the mutual belonging-to-the-other is established. Jesus' prayer, his communing with the Father enacts in a sublime way the merging of divine-human milieus. This prayer comes out as a celebration, a declarative or descriptive song of praise. And it serves as the paradigm of every prayer.

3. Psalms as Celebration

Psalms anticipate the prayer of Jesus and his covenant community. These cultic songs tend to him and assume Christic dimension and pattern. Psalter provides the means to encounter the covenant God in the existential situation of man. The dynamics of 'turning' finds its best articulation in these songs. Man, in the nakedness of being, stands before the Lord. With his entire self, with animate and inanimate beings he approaches the Deity. He brings with him heaven and earth, seas and stars, seasons and streams, birds and beasts, friends and foes. Man turns to God with his love and hate, indignation and condonation, curses and blessings, joys and sorrows, defeats and defects, disease and death. This cosmic-community-consciousness converges on his covenant beingness. The divine dimension of his existence makes him a daring creature and confident son. The Deity whom he encounters has a personal and historical face. It is before the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that he pours out his heart. He addresses Yahweh, who "came down" (Ex 3:7), championed the cause of the marginalized of Egypt, liberated them, won for them a land "flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:8) and bound them to him with a covenant bond. Yahweh had committed himself under pain of curse to be their God, in the biblical sense of the term. Their trials, troubles and tribulations are his own misfortunes. Their humiliations pose a threat to his honour. Those who stand against them become his own enemies.

Transparency of the relationship demanded his decisive option for them. The intensity and interiority of prayer language mark the covenant consciousness of this mutual belonging-to-the-other:

Rest not O God:
O God, be not silent, and be not still,
See how *your* enemies are astir,
how *your* foes rear their heads.
Against *your* people they lay crafty plans,
and conspire against *your* treasure.

(Ps 83:1-3)

Words of anger and accusation, complaint and contention gush out of the embittered soul.⁶ Yahweh has rejected and spurned his anointed one and the royal covenant, defiled the crown in the dust, and broken the walls and strongholds of the country (cf 89:38-41). The accusation does not stop there:

You have exalted the right hand of his foes;
You have made all his enemies rejoice.

(Ps 89:42)⁷

The fragmentation and subversion of the covenant "I = thou" relationship into "I Vs thou" attitude escapes human comprehension. "Why" and "How long" questions are hurled at the covenant Overlord:

Why O Lord, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Ps 10:1)⁸
How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts

6. The so-called "Lamentation psalms" belong to this category, See Harmann Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*; 3 (Goettingen : 1975), pp. 117-139; 172-265. This type of psalms, however, pinpoints the aspect of complaint rather than lament.
7. Yahweh's refusal to involve himself in the battles, which are actually his own battles, are bitterly resented of. Psalms 44:9-14, 19; 60:10; 89:43.
8. Some other "why" types: psalms 22:1; 43:2; 44:23-24; 74:1; 88:14.

and every day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

(Ps 13:1-2)⁹

The slothful sleeper is reproached:

Awake, why do you sleep O Lord ?,
Arouse yourself do not reject us forever.

(Ps 44:23)¹⁰

The sluggard is incited to action, to contend, attack, and vindicate the suppliant:

Attack, O Yahweh, who attack me,
combat those who combat me.
Grip the shield and buckler, and rise to my battle
Brandish spear and javelin to confront my pursuers.

(Ps 35:1-3)¹¹

The covenant perspective provides the rationale for the cursing dynamics in these prayers. The fusion of divine-human spheres revolutionizes the concept of enemy: Whoever or whatever stands against the physical, social, political, spiritual wholeness of man will be considered as the adversary of God. Curse with its magical sacredness was considered in the ancient world as the spontaneous and efficacious action against the foes.¹² It deserves not condemnation but commendation.¹³

The complaint dimension of prayer does not enjoy the form of a complete prayer. Psalms never exhibit laments as the model of perfect prayer. Laments naturally lead to praise. Covenant conscious-

9. Psalms 6:3; 35:17; 79:5; 89:46; 94:3 offer some other instances of the "How long" formula.

10. Call to "awake" and "arise" occurs in Psalms 7:6; 9:19-20; 10:12; 17:13; 35:23; 44:23; 59:4-5, 94:2.

11. Other Instances: Ps. 35:23, 24; 43:1; 83:9-18.

12. See J. Pedersen, *Der Eid bei den Semiten*, Strassbourg, 1914, pp. 64-118.

13. Psalms provide instances of curse: 35:4-8; 58:6-8; 109:6-15; 129:5-8; 137:8-9; 140:9-10.

ness gives certainty to the liberative intervention of God. Man is replete with the salvific feeling of the divine presence. The cry of indignation is then turned to cry of jubilation and laudation.¹⁴ Here emerges the celebrative aspect of Psalms, the apex of every biblical prayer. The man who experiences in himself the merging of the divine-human milieus has a fore taste of his eschatological beingness of celebrating the praises of God (cf. Rev 4:6-11; 14:1-5). There follows a heart-and-soul endeavour to give a terrestrial articulation to this celestial celebration (cf. Ps 22:23; 35:18; 107:32; 109:30). This *shûb* dynamics involves his whole person (soul, "all that is within me" 103:1; "my whole being" Ps 35:10). Celestial beings such as heavenly hosts, mighty ones, angels and "servants" are invited to participate in this celebration (Ps. 103:20, 21; 113:1; 134:1; 135:1; 148:2). The turning includes the elected community: the devoted ones (Ps 30:5), Zion (Ps 147:12); houses of Aaron, Levi and Israel (Ps 135:19). Different age groups, young men and maidens, old men and children, extol Yahweh (Ps 148:12). Kings, princes and rulers form part of the praising community (Ps 134:4; 148:11). The vision embraces the families of nations and all peoples (Ps 47:1; 66:8; 96:7; 117:1). All the earth (Ps 66:1-2) and all together (Ps 34:3) bless the Lord. Everything that breathes (Ps 150:6), wild animals, cattle, reptiles and flying birds (Ps 148:11) are added to the list. All the works of Yahweh (Ps 103:22) join in the celebration. The inanimate beings form part of the choir: heaven and earth, sun, moon and stars, sea, ocean-depths and waters above the skies, lightening and hail, snow and smoke, storm winds, mountains and hills, fields, fruit trees and cedars (Ps 96:11-12; 148:3-4, 7-9).

Prayer as a cosmic celebration naturally tends to the praise of vow to the Lord. Mere declarative praise does not satisfy his divinely touched soul.

What shall I render to the Lord
for all his goodness to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord.

14. Cf. Ps. 28:6; 59:16-17; 41:13; 106:48; 116:12-14; and the entire Psalm 136.

I will fulfil my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.

(Ps 116:12-14)¹⁵

The celebrative prayer needs not be qualified as thanksgiving attitude. Properly speaking, the Hebrew language does not possess an expression for "to thank".¹⁶ Thankfulness is something that one has in him as a feeling or attitude. For primitive man an attitude does not exist except in its expression. It is an activity directed toward the other person, which we call "praise"—a concrete action orientated to the other in the community of fellow beings.

4. Dynamics of Celebration

Corporeal dimension of praise deserves special mention. It plays a cardinal role in the celebration so as to earn the designation "prayer of the physique".¹⁷ Gestures and postures convey the celestial meaning of celebration. Indeed, they become celebrations.¹⁸ These actions release the inner energies and spiritual urges, and realize body as God's or Spirit's temple (I Cor 3:17; 6:19; II Cor 6:16). In celebration this temple honours the Deity (I Cor 6:20) by allowing the Spirit to worship God in truth (Jn 4:23). Movements of the body, hands, limbs, together with the facial expressions,¹⁹ accompanied by the ringing of cymbals and beating of drums create a rhythmic ecstasy. The egoistic fetters are shattered to pieces. An aura of love and devotion emerges. The ennobled body is lifted out of itself into the realms of divine ecstasy and heavenly bliss. It is lifted up to Paradise, the third heaven (II Cor 12:1-4). The celebrant is granted the realization

15. Some instances of vow: Ps 27:6; 54:6; 66:13-16; See also Genesis 28:20-22 (Jacob), I Samuel 1:11 (Hannah).

16. The word *hōdāh* which is usually translated as "thanks" comes from the root *ydh* which primarily means "to praise". See, W. Baumgartner *Hebraeisches und Aramaeisches Lexikon*³, (Leiden: 1974), p. 372; C. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, pp. 25-30. The absence of the word "to thank" in *Rigveda* is noteworthy.

17. It can be compared to the classical yoga spirituality.

18. Indian sages have developed the interiority of the rich variety of *mudras* and *āsana*s employed in dances and other cultic rituals.

19. Bharata Muni mention four Indian expressions: *āngika*, *vāchika*, *Sāttvika*, *aharya*.

of "True Reality". The lissom body seems to float with the effortless ease of the winged denizens of the air.²⁰

In this extolling act man forms part of the cosmos. The celebrative rhythm is echoed throughout all forms of nature. The whole universe is in celebration. These "faces" of God become voices of praise.

The heavens declare the glory of God,
the skies proclaim the work of his hands,
There is no speech or language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

(Ps 19:1-4)

Crystal springs, forest glades, flower-filled trees and bushes, birds and animals exult and extol, spring and shout in festive glee—thus bringing back to life the earliest times of Paradise, the acme of joy and jubilation.

The mountains danced like rams
The hills like lambs. (Ps 114:1-8)

Ecstatic experience of salvation is especially celebrated by the sacred Lebanon and Sirion. (Ps 29:6), Tabor and Hermon (Ps 89:13). The cosmos becomes one with man; man becomes a cosmic being in celebration.²¹ Trance-like bliss and sacred lyrics make the whole universe one great temple of God.

Man exalts God (30:1; 118:28; 145:1), since he is exalted by the Deity (Ps 9:13; 18:48; 118:16). Indeed, the celebration dynamics

20. On the celebrative postures and gestures, see: H. J. Hermission, *Sprache und Ritus im altisraelitischen Kult*, (Neukirchen: 1965). F. Heiler, "Koerperhaltung beim Gebet", *MVAG* 22 (1917) 168-177; A. Parrot, "Gestes de la priere dans la monde mesopotamien", in *Maqqel Shaqedh*, Montpellier, 1960, pp. 177-80.

21. In Indian terminology they join together in *bhāva. rāga, tāla*.

emanates from Yahweh.²² The divine artist rejoices in his works (Ps 104:31). Genesis emphasizes the aesthetic elevation of God at the irradiating beauty of creation by repeating refrain type words like "saw" . . . "good", in Psalms 1:10, 12, 18, 19, 25, 31. It leads to God's enstasis (*shābat*: 2:2-3) which bestows on creation the blessing of involution. The festal dimension of the divine *samādhi* renders possible the conjunction of the divine-human worlds. Genesis 3:8 speaks of Yahweh's rhythmic steps in the cosmic garden, which is perhaps a reference to the continuing celebration of creation. Normally those twinkling steps forming a lilting song provided the *joie de vivre* for the primeval human couple. They had the privilege of joining the divine company, thus becoming the concelebrants of creation. This saturating point of intimacy later became the cause of consternation. They hid themselves from the Lord. Like the Canaanite God Baal, Yahweh is sometimes depicted as celebrating his creation victory over his chaotic foes by uttering cultic shouts from his temple. Nature spontaneously participates in this divine jubilation. The heaven fertilizes the earth, animals writhe in giving birth, and men and mountains whirl in dance and festive glee.²³ Yahweh, the source of celebration (Ps: 22:25) participates in the cultic procession (Ps 24-10; 47:5; 68:18, 24-25; 132:8) accompanied by singing, shouting and dancing. To sum up, the celebration dynamics of the cosmos and its human maestro provides a terrestrial reflection of the creative and liberative bliss of god.

The Bible abounds in postures and gestures of celebration. David assumes squatting posture in prayer.²⁴ II Samuel 7:18: "Then King David went into the Tent of Meeting and sat before the Lord." This was his joyful response to Yahweh who has done great things for him. This posture of ease and peace pertains to that of a disciple setting all eyes and ears, at the feet of *guru* (II Kgs. 4:38; 6:1; Lk 10:39). David, in the joy of intimacy, celebrates his master's praise, thereby growing into the true image of his *guru*. Revelation 11:15 speaks of 24 elders who are seated before God.

22. The celebration-dynamics of the Deities is lavishly brought out in Hindu mythologies. The dances of Shiva, Kali, Krishna, Parvathi and Apsaras illustrate cosmic-celestial unison; see Enakshi bhavnani, *The Dance in India*, Bombay, 1965, pp. 4-13.

23. See F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, (Cambridge : 1973), pp. 147-194.

24. Zen buddhism makes sitting (*zazen*) the essential means to reach the way.

The standing posture refers to a servant-lord relationship. It shows the readiness of the servant or vassal to respond instantly to every gesture of the lord or King, and to fulfil his wishes. It carries overtones of submission and surrender for service (Gen 18:8; I Kgs 1:2, 10:8; 17:1; Jer 7:10). The servants hear the wisdom of their lord (I Kgs 10:8) and respond in blessing him (Ps 134:1; 135:2; Rev 7:9, 11; 14:1). Prayers of blessing mention the standing posture in I Kings 8:22 and Lk 18:11. Solomon, the vassal of Yahweh stands before the altar of Yahweh, and spreading forth his hands to heaven, celebrates the praises of his divine Covenant Overlord. The Pharisee assumes the position of a loyal servant. He stands in the temple and blesses God for the graces he has received from the Lord.

The acts of kneeling down (*kr, brk*), fall (*npl*) on, the face, fall to the ground and worship (*hishtah*, literally means deep prostration) are spontaneous responses of man to an overwhelming experience of the Glory of God. The kneeling posture, though it generally symbolizes the penitent or suppliant attitude of prayer (e.g. Lk. 2:41), may accompany celebrative praise: The jubilant Psalm 95 invites the congregation:

Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker,
for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care (Lk 2:6-7).

Solomon also assumes the kneeling position during his solemn dedication of the temple. I Kings 8:54 uses a peculiar expression to indicate the intensive nature of the act: "kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven." This attitude brings into the limelight the creature status of the celebrant. The gesture of falling to the ground (Mk 14:35), or falling on the face (Gen 17:3; Mt 26:39; Rev 4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:15; 19:14) demonstrates the servant/vassal-Lord relationship. The texts from the Book of Revelation speak of the 24 elders and 4 living creatures in the context of solemn celebration of praise of the God of Majesty. These texts readily mention the worshipping act of the elders and creatures. Psalms of praise invite the whole earth to worship Yahweh in the splendour of his holiness (Ps 29:2; 96:9; 138:2).

The eyes, hands, lips and feet—all are at the service of Yahweh to proclaim his glory. Loving gaze at Yahweh formed part of the celebrative praise (Ps 17:15; 27:4, 13; 63:2). Man's very call consists in contemplating "the wonderful works of the Lord" (Ps 8:3; 107:24). "My eyes are ever (directed) toward Yahweh"—exclaims the devotee (Ps 25:15; cf 23:1; 121:1; 141:8). This vocation of man finds external expression in the names of person: Elioenai (Ezra 10:22, 27), Elihoenai (I Chr 26:3) and Elienai (8:20), with the meaning "My eyes (are fixed) on God." Only the "poor", those who are rooted in Yahweh, can enjoy this inner vision—which leads to celebration (Ps 69:39). The celebrative praise of Jesus is initiated by the gesture of lifting the eyes up to heaven: his prayer of glory (Jn 17), working the signs of glorious resurrection (Jn 11:14), eschatological liberation (Mk 7:34), and heavenly banquet (Mk 6:41; Mt 14:19; Lk 9:16). Only the sons and servants of God, those who adhere to him in loving loyalty, could elevate their eyes to heaven and celebrate the divine praises (Lk 18:13).

Hand gestures,²⁵ like lifting up the hands and clapping them, contribute to the celebration dynamics of prayer. Psalm 134:2 exclaims, "Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord." This act amounted to the elevation of the soul itself: "To you Yahweh I lift up my soul" (Ps 25:1). Solomon's prayer gesture, spreading forth of his hands to heaven, has already been mentioned above (I Kgs 8:22, 54). Contemplation of the mighty acts of Yahweh fills the mind with the feeling that God has "girded me with gladness" (Ps 30:11). This leads to the cry:

Clap your hands, all peoples!
Shout to God with loud songs of joy (Ps 47:1).

Even the cosmos is invited to join in the jubilation:

Let the rivers clap their hands
Let the mountains sing together for joy (Ps 98:8)²⁶

25. See the Indian hastas.

26. See also Isaiah 55:12; Ezechiel 25:6; II Kings 11:12. Egyptian goddess Mert embodies cultic jubilation, hands upraised for clapping.

Another member of the body, mouth, now comes forward to participate in the celebration. At the overwhelming experience of the mighty acts of Yahweh,

Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy (Ps 126:2).

This exuberant joy originates from Yahweh himself:

"From you comes my shout of joy in the great congregation"
(22:25, cf. Ps 65:8).

These long-drawn-out cries²⁷ were usually uttered during cultic processions with music and songs, to celebrate the victories of the mighty King: "The singers in front, minstrels then, between them maidens playing timbrels: Bless God in the great congregation, O, You who are of Israel's fountain" (Ps 68:25-26). These long shouts of joy were rhythmically broken by striking the neck with the fist. The Book of Revelation also attests to this celebrative shout. The great multitude, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in hands, cried out in a loud voice:

"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God" (Ps 7:9-10; 19:1).

Dance, with patterned stepping, accompanied by rhythmizing, trilling and lyrics, stands out as the most fascinating expression of celebrative prayer in the Bible. Here souls vibrate in unison with the Deity. It produced a transfixing trance-like bliss. Exodus 15:20-21 provides the pattern of the spontaneous prayer-celebration of the redeemed ones: "Miriam. . . . took a timbrel in her hands; and all the women went out after her with cymbals and dancing. And Miriam sang to them: Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider he has hurled into the sea."²⁸ This prayer of physique occurred not only in great festivities of processions and pageants

27. On the significance of cultic shout, see, E. Lipinski, *La royauté de Yahwé. dans la poésie et le culte de l'ancien Israël*, (Brussel: 1968), pp. 352-355.

28. Cf. also Psalm 149:3, For instances of celebrating human victories, cf Judges 11:34; I Samuel 18:6-7.

but also in ordinary hymnic praises of Yahweh (Ps 87:7; 150:4) and in individual thanksgiving celebrations (Ps 30:11). There existed two types of cultic processions: In one, Yahweh is said to take part in one kind of rhythmic movement (Ps 24:7-10; 47:5; 68:18, 24-25; 132:8, cf Rev 14:4;) the other type concerns the solemn advance of the people to the sanctuary (Ps 24: 3-7; 84:7; 118;122). II Samuel 6 describes the celebrative dancing procession with the Ark of Covenant. God has blessed David with every kind of blessing. The heart and soul response of David consisted in the solemn bringing of the Ark to Zion. "David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals" (v.5). "David wearing a linen ephod danced before the Lord with all his might" (v.14). Disrobing himself he sprang before Yahweh. In him heaven and earth merged. David grew into this type of celebrating man and reproduced in himself the cosmic dance of creation. His nakedness proclaimed freedom from space-time laws and limitations.²⁹ The authentic man was born in him. Like Adam he walked naked with God, being clothed like his creator "with splendour and majesty", being "wrapped in light as with a garment" (Ps 104:1-2).

Musical instruments used in the celebrative prayer deserve special mention.³⁰ The texts refer to three kinds of instruments: Tambourine (timbrel), cymbal and sound-sounding cymbal belong to percussion type of instruments. Wind instruments consist of horn, trumpet or trombone and flute. Two different types of lyres, called *kinnôr* and *nēbēl* formed the string instruments. Exodus 19:13, 16, 19 seems to suggest that Yahweh himself blew the ram's horn on Mount Sinai. God himself provides his elected with harps and they sing his songs (Rev 15:2-3)

5. Themes of Celebration

The people celebrated the past and future salvific events of Yahweh. Their prayer became a memorial or, rather, a revival or reenacting of

29. The naked dance of the goddess Kali provides a fascinating parallel. This goddess, being clothed in space, symbolizes the transcendence of mind and speech categories of the world.

30. See Othmer Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, (London, 1978,) pp. 339-352.

these episodes. The celebration served as means to contemporarize the past and present.³¹ They enjoyed a two-fold experience: Festive recital of the creation act of Yahweh took them to the primeval era (Urzeit) where they, with the creator, celebrated his victory over the chaotic forces. Cultic proclamation of the eschatological salvation brought the end-time (Endzeit) to the present and so they could anticipate here and now the eschatological joy. Thus they celebrated the salvific acts of creation, Exodus liberation, Yahweh's enthronement and eschatological restoration. In these events the congregation experienced God's glorification as their own personal triumph, and exulted in Yahweh as well as exalted him. They hear, see, look at, touch (cf I Jn 1, 1) and taste these divine acts; they become contemporaries with God; they enter into the divine realms—here we have the essence of celebration. This profound experience engenders fear of the Lord, trust in him (Exodus 14:31), gives rise to gestures of prostration and worship (12:27). For them past or future are not mere words, but living events, inexhaustible "reservoirs-of-meaning".

Psalm 8 offers an illustrative instance of how creation becomes a celebration. The prayer begins with a proclamation of the majesty of the Lord's name everywhere on earth. The vast horizons of the heavens attest to God's glory in creation. When it comes to man, the Psalmist is amazed at the munificence of Yahweh. The blissful contemplation leads to the joyful praise of God:

"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all earth" (Ps 8:9). Another creation Psalm, 104, ends with celebrative shouting "Praise the Lord, O my soul, praise the Lord."³²

The theme of liberation exhibits the basic concept of the Bible. Even the act of creation is often described as God liberating the earth from the destructive forces of Leviathan (Ps 74:13-14) or Rahab (Ps 89:9-11). Everything then is considered as the continuing act of liberation. Healing of sickness, defeat of personal or national enemies, elevation of the hungry, the poor and the needy, assumed salvific perspectives. The beneficiary felt God's loving presence in his personal life. In the ensuing prayer of praise, he, as a member of the saved

31. Mircea Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, (New York, 1959,) pp 91f, 68f, 104f.

32. For the motif of praise of the Creator, see Ps 19A; Amos 4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6.

community, blessed the Lord. As Moses and the people experienced and celebrated Yahweh's victory at the Red Sea (Ex 15:1-15, 20-21), so the congregation exulted with jubilant cries at the divine triumph:

Come and see the acts of God
 He has turned the sea into dry land;
 they went across the river on foot,
 let us then rejoice in him (Ps 86: 5-6).

Psalm 114:1-4 enumerates the salvific response of nature (sea, Jordan, mountains and hills) at this liberative act of God. (cf also Ps 29:6). Israel's deliverance amounted to cosmic redemption. And they rejoice at it. The cultic community relives that experience. Liberation becomes celebration for them.

Moses' celebrative song ends with the cultic acclamation, "Yahweh will reign forever and forever." According to the Canaanite and Babylonian mythologies the creative—liberative acts of the victorious deity culminated in his enthronement. On the same pattern the accession of Yahweh at Zion forms the theme of celebration in Psalms 47, 93, 96-98.

Yahweh is king, let the earth rejoice
 let the many isles be glad
 The people see his Glory (Ps 97:1-6).

The accession event created the occasion for the congregation to join in the divine and cosmic rejoicing, to renew their allegiance and render homage to their king. The royal procession to the divine sanctuary was re-enacted:

God goes up amid rejoicing
 Yahweh (goes up) to the sound of the ram's horn.
 Sing for God, sing,
 sing for our King sing!
 God has become King of all earth,
 sing a psalm of praise (Ps 47:5-7).

Psalm 24 describes the ceremonies at the arrival of the procession at the temple gate. Psalm 47:8 refers to the accession act of Yahweh.

The entire world is invited to participate in joyful homage to the King (Ps 96:6-12; 98:4-8). The ultimate call of the cosmic beings consists in singing the glories of God and prostrating before him;³³ in other words, becoming his song, glory and adoration. This eschatological praise becomes a present reality in cultic prayer. Accession becomes a celebration.

To the desperate people who lived as slaves in Babylon, the prophets announced salvation. A new exodus, a recreation, a re-turning to the primeval times is envisaged:

The desert and wasteland shall exult;
And the wilderness shall burst into bloom
Like the crocus it shall burst into bloom,
And shall rejoice, yea rejoicing and singing
They shall see the glory of Yahweh,
The splendour of our God.
And eternal joy shall be on their heads,
Gladness and joy shall overtake them (Is 35:1-2. 10).³⁴

Deutero-Isaiah couched his proclamation in the language of praise.³⁵ Exultation cries abound in his Book: 42:10-13; 44:23; 45:8; 48:20f; 49:13; 52:9f; 54:1f. These songs of praise were utilized in liturgy. In celebration the community made the times to come a present reality. The "now" becomes the beginning of the programmatical eschatology. Having imbibed the Spirit of praise, the community celebrated Yahweh's final victory and glory. The life gets orientated to the end-times. Eschatology becomes celebration.

6. Paradigms of Celebration

The Bible presents persons whose prayers illustrate the celebrative aspect of the encounter with God. These individuals begin by extolling God, and in that act of praise enter into the divine dimensions. They grow into types of liberated humanity. As paradigms of cele-

33. See the texts from the book of Revelation.

34. Cf. also Zephaniah 3:14; Zechariah 9:9.

35. See Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40:66*, (London: 1969), pp. 13-15, 44-45.

bration they exhibit the fascinating phenomenon of the human milieu being merged into the divine. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and Mary, the mother of Jesus deserve to be cited here.

The barren Hannah formerly personified the marginalized of the Hebrew society. This "woman of a sorrowful spirit" (I Sam 1:15), "prayed to the Lord in bitterness of soul and wept sore" (v. 10). This prayer for a child is qualified as "speaking in the heart" (v.13), "pouring out the soul before Yahweh" (v. 11), "speaking out of the abundance of complaint and grief" (v.16) and making a vow (v.11). Her prayer was granted. Now she celebrates the merciful acts of the Lord, and in that act turns to be the praise of his glory (2:1-10). Her personal experience of the divine mercy acquires a new dimension. It becomes a participation in the divine graces showered on the people of Israel. Hannah, the symbol of "the poor of Yahweh", the true elected community, stands as a guarantee for God's future condescension in the history of mankind. She represents the authentic member of the covenant community. The dynamics of "I-am-yours-and-you-are-mine"—consciousness made her "heart rejoice in the Lord", and delight in his salvation (vv.1-2). This portrait of Hannah anticipates the story of Mary, "the highly favoured one" (Lk 1:28), "the blessed among women" (vv.14, 48). Inebriated by the saving experience she exulted in Yahweh and exalted him (vv. 46-55):

My soul magnifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour (vv. 46-47)

The historical acts of the Deity provided Hannah and Mary with the source of jubilation and celebration. Human self 'involved' in with the divine Self. The passionate dwelling on the divine acts becomes a prayer, praise and celebration. As symbols of the redeemed community they relished and doted on the radical reversal of fortunes in history (I Sam 2:4-10; Lk 1:51-53). The story of Yahweh turned out to be the history of Hannah and Mary. And their story got the divine orientation. The song-prayers embrace both past and future. The praise indicates the pattern to be followed for God's optional intervention in favour of the marginalized. The individual acquires community dimension, and community appears before God in the garb of this individual. And this new person merges into the person of God. Here comes into existence the divine roots of the worship in spirit and

truth. Liberated from sin and self, structures and systems, Hannah and Mary assume the cosmic face and voice of God. In the consciousness of this new existence they celebrate the divine glories. Prayer meant then living, moving and having one's being (Acts 18:28) in the eschatological dawn of the Kingdom.

7. Conclusion

Celebration may be characterized as "the house of Being"—to borrow the phrase of Martin Heidegger. This body-spirit language proclaims the authentic beingness of man. The dynamics of celebration illustrates the true meaning of creatureliness. Indeed, it brings one nearer the divine shore. God, the celebrating—Being-in-history "is enthroned on the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3). Blessing is the fascinating self-expression of creation. Celebration makes man's deeper, inner response to the glory and wonder of the creative and redemptive presence of the Deity. In prayer, man builds up the cosmic choir and enters heaven with other beings in singing:

The Kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and his Christ,

and he will reign forever and ever (Rev 11:15).

Cosmos becomes a community which re-creates the primeval times as well as anticipates the end-time. In this most characteristic mode of existence man is nurtured to the status of God. This tree, being planted by streams of "living water" (Jn 7:38) yields on earth fruits of eternity (cf Ps 1:3; Jer 17:7-8). He is nourished by the bread of angels (Ps 78:25), by the fruit of the tree of life (Gen 3:22). In celebrative praise he enters the Kingdom of God and abides there, eagerly responding to the invitation for eschatological celebration: "The Spirit and the bride say, come; one who hears say, come" (Rev. 22:17).