

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: THE 'LITURGY OF LIFE' IN THE 'HEART OF THE WORLD'

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1. Introduction

While reflecting on the 'thing' (*res*) and tenor of *worship* in the present day life I, living in Bangalore, find the initiatives of this modern city a relevant point of departure. It is, now, no more religious centres like Banaras or Saranat, but cities like Bangalore and Delhi that offer what is called 'the vision thing' to the ongoing silent redefinition of the cultural-scape of the new politically and economically resurgent India. To its credit, Bangalore is known as a city of IT, Bio-Tech, Fashion, apart from its customary titles, like 'garden city' or 'silk-city'. It is now becoming a hub of spiritual initiatives and adventures inviting attention on a national level and beyond. Recently, in connection with the 50th birthday celebrations of their renowned guru Sri Sri Ravishankar, about a half a million people from every corner of the globe flocked just to 'breathe' (even though Bangalore is quite infamous for its pollution!). Bangalore is a home of the world famous gurus, Sri Satya Sai Baba and Sri Sri Ravishankar. While the former translates worship in terms of '*prema*' (pure love) the latter sees 'breathing' (*sudarsanakriya*) which envisions a new paradigm of spiritual life known as "Art of Living." In this context a mention must also be made on another renowned living saint of global following, Mata Amrtanandamayi who sees worship as "hugging" (*vatsalya*, motherly love of God), and considers herself as the instrument of God, leading people to Divine *vatsalya*. Thus, we find different redefinitions of worship in the ongoing initiatives of spirituality, like '*prema*', '*sudarsanakriya*', or '*vatsalya*' which look palatable to the modern wo/man while s/he finds it hard to strike a balance between peace and pace of the high-tech fast-track life.

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Coming to “Art of Living” as a new translation of worship, today, thousands of people from every walk of life, from the school going children to CEOs of multinational companies, do the *sudarshanakriya* (a unique mode of breathing) as a religious ritual. There is now a mushroom growth of centres of “Art of Living” in Bangalore and other cities of India and abroad. It has become almost like a new religion/worship pattern in which both sacral and secular find a mutual harmony in the ethos and pathos of present day generation. Though ‘Art of Living’ is not a religion in the customary sense, it has become a *sadhana* of life (a secular worship!) without any religious bias, for many a people today.

If we look at the dynamics of *sudarsanakriya*, first it may look very ‘physical’ because the breathing exercise will oxygenate the whole body making it as a fireball of energy. But, unaware, this invoked ‘physical’ energy turns out an inner source of Divine power or presence within us, and mentors us subtly and surely from our inner sources to a celebration of life in terms of gratitude, commitment, and focus in one’s karma. It consummates into a self-surrender to the universal energy. To phrase it differently, the existence becomes an exuberance of Life-Force, acquiring a rare quality of transcendence as well as inscendence. The inner fibres of our being are naturally ‘touched’ and, as a result, one feels being subtly transformed. We find ourselves under the spell of a new enthusiasm and devotion wells up from the interior zones towards the mystery of life, and this will sequentially empower us to face life and its responsibilities at ease.

Can we call such a surge of energy without any so-called hallow, ‘worship’? But it looks certain that these new forms of religiosity vibrate with the humour of the present M-generation of multi-tasking with media.¹ The present youth who are brought up in a media-savvy (visual) culture, have a creative genius of blending and bonding the diverse strands of cultures and traditions without being unnecessarily biased by ideologies or religious moorings. In this matter, the present generation looks bold, confident, and creative in search of innovative idioms and paradigms in articulating life and its meaning. It is all the same a fact that the present cultural scenario compels the youngsters to take on such initiatives. In the present emergent globalized scenario that one encounters in a ‘frontier-culture’ which is oft-called “Third-Space,” where cultures mutate and

¹See Dilip Bobb, “Wired Generation,” *India Today* (November 20, 2006), 48-60.

permutate in an unbridled fashion; the customary homogeneous and territorial understanding of a culture (and even a religion) is slowly becoming irrelevant in the liminal contexts of the post-modern society. The globalized politics and economics are positively contributing to this development. The very concept of culture is undergoing a radical change in the dialogue of cultures.

In this context, these new forms of 'worship' are *experientially* validated to a great measure for they nurture and promote in a proactive frame an inclusive tolerance in the present generation. In an ethos of "Third-Space" of the globalized world, what is needed is a spiritual praxis (Art of Living) that gives consistency and harmony while living in a society of multiple options. A perceptive mind can understand that these new forms of worship promote a praxis that is deeply grounded in *life*. The relevance and vitality of the new forms of 'worship' abide in the fact that they are ways of celebrating life, in which a unity in diversity or rather 'a diversity in unity' attains a rare rhythm and rhyme, with a proactive and futuristic thrust. Such an emergent 'worship' seems resonating with the sensibilities of the present pluralist-multicultural ethos.

Moreover, a new equation between sacral and secular is credibly accomplished in these spiritual initiatives or *sadhnas* on account of the fact that 'worship' is envisioned in virtue of *life*, here and now, in a very promising and optimistic frame. The emergent worship forms, be they "*prema*" or "*vatsalya*" or "*sudarshanakriya*", help one to become the celebrant in the 'Playfulness of Life'. For example, the core of 'Art of Living' is the celebration of life by recognizing its blessedness in the Divine, and its innate participation in the Divine creativity through a devotional surrender to Divine Presence.

But one salient aspect of this "Art of Living" is not often enough brought to light in its literature, though it is profoundly implied. If we are perceptive enough, we can infer that "Art of Living" is constitutively rooted in the mystery of "Art of Dying." Otherwise, "Art of Living" will be a very superficial celebration of life. One has to become the 'celebrant' (priest, prophet) of life so that art of living becomes a 'Liturgy of Life'. This can be achieved only through an equation of "Art of Living" and "Art of Dying" in the worship. When *death* and *life* are integrated in the Art of Worship, worship becomes a Liturgy of Life in which sacral and sacred achieve a rare harmony. Christian understanding of 'worship' will, indeed, offer new insights on the mystery of the encounter between '*life*' and

'*death*' in the present paradigms of worship which primarily uphold the vibrant and celebrant nature of *life*.

2. '*Life*' as the Scenario and Spectrum of Christian Worship

If Christian worship is envisioned in the biblical panorama and vision it is verily a 'Liturgy of Life'. If one surfs through the Bible, it can, indeed be stated that 'Life' is the core experience and vision of biblical legacy. Naturally, worship is conceived as participation in the pilgrimage of Life, which commenced from the 'chaos' towards 'cosmos' from the time immemorial; this journey continued over the past millions of years, and it will continue through the millions of years to come till the "New Heaven and Earth." To phrase differently, the whole biblical story can be seen as an ever unfolding narrative of liturgy of life in which the divine and humans are the active celebrants. That is to say, Christian worship is to be situated in the covenantal dynamics of human-divine dialogue which has acquired a new meaning and intensity on 'Calvary'. This dialogue has to continue till the *eschaton* when everything will finally be restored in the vision and glory of God.

A brief survey through some key biblical passages in this regard will substantiate that the biblical 'world-view' unfolds in a 'Liturgy of Life'. The biblical story is narration of a journey of life from "Tree of Life" (Gen. 2:9) to "Tree of Life." (Rev. 22:1, 2). This journey started when the humans began to breathe the Breath of God (Gen. 2:7). Down through the history, God continuously 'blessed' the humanity and the creation through the chosen ones (Gen. 12:2, 3). Biblical meaning of blessing is 'life'. God's 'blessing' accomplished a unique depth and promise when he sent his own Son so that humans would partake in eternal life (Jn. 3:16). The mission of Jesus is promotion of life. Jesus says: "I have come that they may have *life*, life in all its fullness" (Jn. 10:10). Jesus has always communicated his message through the symbols, metaphors, narratives, and parables of a "*culture of life*": bread, wine, water, light, wheat, seed, salt, Good Shepherd, Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, etc. Various healing miracles of Jesus, his options, preferences, fellowships, attitudes, and indeed his teachings on the Kingdom of God bubble with abundance of *life*!

Before Jesus died he promised that he would send his Spirit who would dwell within us and, thus, become the spring of eternal life (Jn. 16:7, 13; 14:17; 4:14). Moreover, the risen Jesus "breathed" his Spirit on

his disciples (Jn. 20:22) just before his ascension, and empowered them to continue the ministry of life. Thus, Jesus has become a paradigm of life, and his story of life a 'parable of life'. The biblical story consummates in the vision of a "New Heaven and New Earth" where the river of the Water of *Life*, bright as crystal, will flow from the throne of God and on either side of the river, the "*Tree of Life*" which will "heal" the nation, will grow (Rev. 22:1, 2). This journey of life accomplished a new intensity and perspective when Jesus offered his life for the eternal reconciliation between God and mankind. Jesus' death on the Calvary became supreme worship because it gave birth to New Life to the whole of humanity.

3. A Critical Overview of Christian Worship

Any discussion on Christian worship can validly be engaged in the perspective of the Eucharistic liturgy which is the re-enactment (memory) of the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ. Naturally, the Eucharist is the "source and summit" of Christian worship.² Indeed, it is a fact that there existed a trichotomy between liturgy, spirituality, and secular engagement in the praxis of Christian life. Often, the ritual, juridical, external, and hierarchical elements of Christian worship had been over emphasized in the Church (*1917 Codex Juris Canonici*), and the liturgy was reduced to a ceremonial and formal part of Catholic worship; it was more a 'Church-liturgy' than a 'liturgy of life'. But we find earnest attempts to rediscover the centrality of the Eucharistic liturgy in the Christian life. To cite a few examples, the Jesuits tried to incorporate a personal and contemplative spirituality into the liturgy to de-ritualize it. Whereas the Benedictine school, led by Beauduin (following Gueranger of 19th century), tried to redefine it as the ecclesial continuation of the Christ-Mystery. They insisted that a spirituality which was not liturgical was not ecclesial either. Liturgy was the exercise of the total Christ. Spirituality was neither a prelude nor an accompaniment or a supplement to liturgy, but was itself coextensive with liturgy or Christian worship. This new understanding of liturgy was affirmed by the encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947). All these reform movements consummated in the vision of Vatican Council II that the liturgy is the "source and summit" of Christian worship and life.³

²See, Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §9.

³Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, 4.

An honest assessment of the post-conciliar decades has another story to tell. The conciliar instructions were often interpreted and executed with a pre-conciliar rubrical mentality. The Roman Curia failed to make the “paradigm shift” from the canonical definition of liturgy to the conciliar understanding of worship. Many renewalists were busy introducing vernacular texts, composing new prayers and songs, simplifying vestments, improving gestures, changing the position of the altars, and so on. But the end result was that liturgy often became a new series of rubrics and activities. Contrary to the conciliar teaching on liturgy, what happened was often a change of rite, and not a change of life. Once the new rite lost its novelty, the church was back to square one. Look at the new rules and instructions coming every now and then in both the Latin and Syrian churches making the liturgy more formal and ritualistic.

When Liturgy stops to play its central role in the lives of people, soon spirituality is to be again imported from outside to vivify the liturgy. Oriental mysticism and charismatic renewal are invading the church worship, often, sidelining liturgy. Devotions to *Corpus Christi*, the Precious Blood, the Five Wounds, Sacred Heart, Marian devotions, and the like, emerged as liturgical reductions and substitutes when the liturgy was neglected from time to time in the history of the Church. Consequently, the liturgy is divested of spirituality and social commitment, and a trichotomy develops among worship, spirituality, and social action. Why do we continually fall into this rut? Why this circularity? Maybe, Church has somewhere in the course of its history, devalued the most crucial dimension of worship, the liturgy of life, which is the context of a living encounter with God in Christ.

4. Situating Christian Worship in the Matrix of Human Struggles

If Christian worship is uprooted from its natural environment, which is the Paschal Mystery of Christ continued in the (secular) lives and struggles, in the deaths and triumphs of his members, it loses its vitality and relevance. Christ died not in a temple. His death on ‘Calvary’ is simultaneously a critique of the worship in the Jerusalem Temple as well as is a new translation of worship in the matrix of human songs and sighs. Christian worship is enacted where there is Christ, who is the embodiment of the true worship. Where there is Christ there is the Christian community (*ubi Christus ibi ecclesia*) which may not be other way about where there is the Church there is Christ (*ubi ecclesia ibi Christus*)!

Wherever the human struggles for peace and liberation are engaged, the paschal Mystery is enacted; there, Christ is present and there only a true worship which causes the Christian fellowship. For, the praxis of Christ's priesthood is always realized in victimhood. Thus, Christian worship is an enveloping experience of a liturgy of life where a mutual appropriation of worship, spirituality, and social commitment is accomplished. The biblical legacy substantiates this wholesome understanding of Christian worship.

Indeed, the Septuagint had restricted the word 'liturgy' to mean levitical worship and, consequently, the ritualistic nature was prominently upheld. Authentic Christian worship was seldom conceived as 'liturgy' in the New Testament. But the prophets of the Jewish Bible always insisted that true worship was personal and communal holiness. It entails the fidelity to the covenant, obedience to God, and the practice of justice rather than external sacrifices (Jer. 7:21-23, 45ff.; Amos 5:22-24; Isaiah 1:10-20; Hosea 6:6ff.). Jesus carved out his identity in this prophetic legacy and took a stance which was anti-temple, anti-ritual type of worship (Jn. 4:19-26). The new tenets of sanctity were thought out in terms of fidelity to the new covenant; the gospel of love becomes the criterion of sanctity. Jesus was led to death for upholding and practising this genre of radical worship. The martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6:12-14; 7:47-53) and the first persecutions unleashed on the early Christians were the consequent of a radical Christian praxis. St. Paul is of the opinion that it is a "sin against the body of Christ" and anti-Eucharistic and anti-ecclesial when one eats sumptuously while others starve (see 1Cor. 11:21, 27).

The Vatican Council II embodied the above mentioned New Testament spirit. The decrees, especially, *Gaudium et spes* and *Lumen gentium* radically upheld the integration of secular and sacral in Christian liturgy. The Council teaches that Eucharistic liturgy means the holiness of Christian life constituting the spiritual sacrifice of the self-oblation made to the Father by the whole body of Christ united in his spirit with him. The Eucharist is an act of thanksgiving consisting of a covenantal gesture of breaking, sharing, and pouring out one's life for others. Thus, the Eucharist becomes the ultimate Christian worship ("source and summit"). However, it has also been the case with Christianity, as in any other religious traditions, that the Eucharist is often institutionalized and becomes a 'possession' or a 'tool' of clerical caste to show its power and glory. Consequently, the disheartened people go in search of mysticism as

it happened in the 4th century. ‘Desert’ was a protest against a church absorbed in the imperialist worldliness of Rome. The recent fascination of the people towards charismatic movements is the sign of the estrangement from the institutionalized Eucharist liturgy. If uprooted from the day to day struggles, Eucharist can no more be a Christian form of worship.

5. Shift from “Church-Liturgy” to “Liturgy of Life”

To recapture the lost momentum of the Eucharistic worship there is a silent but resilient movement at the grass root level, especially in the Basic Christian Communities, to situate the Christian worship in the very struggles of life. Eucharist is indeed the paradigm of Christian worship in which the primordial worship of the Incarnate Word is re-enacted. One can, then, truly fathom the depth and breadth of Eucharistic worship only in the narrative of Jesus’ life. In line with the present reflection, as delineated at the outset itself, Christian worship is an “Art of Christic Living.” It implies and entails a radical shift from the church-liturgy to the liturgy of life. Edward Schillebeeckx, the theologian of sacraments, proposes a new paradigm and a new spectrum to recapture the ‘thing’ (*res*) of Eucharistic worship.⁴ Within the purview of Jesus, the man, he interprets the very “secular life as worship.”

Phenomenologically, religion is a qualified manner of being in the world. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, speaks of this ‘art of living’ as presenting our “bodies” as “living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” and as “spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1, 2). “Bodies,” in the Semitic sense, implies ‘totality’ of human existence – human solidarity, responsibility towards the creation, sinfulness, the reborn status in Christ as a “new creature,” the call to holiness so and so forth. There is a Christian secularity that shares with the still “groaning” in the “new creation” (Rom. 8:22). It implies that Christian worship as an ‘art of living’ in the perspective of “new creation” in the ‘secular world’ simultaneously entails an “art of dying’ for the commencement of the “New Order” of justice, peace, and love.

Interpreting the epistle to the Hebrews, Schillebeeckx proposes a “secular liturgy.” The integration between the ‘secular’ and ‘sacral’ is achieved in a unique sequence in this Epistle by bringing ‘Calvary’ and ‘Temple’ in a mutually clarifying equation. Obviously, Jesus did not die in

⁴See Edward Schillebeeckx, *God, the Future of Man*, Trans. N. D. Smith, London, Sydney: Sheed & Ward, 1969, 91ff.

a liturgical solemnity but in secular combination of circumstances; he was crucified on political reasons. However, the religious motives were quite obvious in crucifixion. "Calvary was not a Church liturgy, but an hour of human life, which Jesus experienced as worship... We have not been redeemed by an act of pure worship, a liturgical service; our redemption was accomplished by an act which was part of Jesus' human life, situated in history and in the world."⁵ The author of the Hebrews interpreted Jesus' death on Calvary through Jewish cultic categories and, thus, sacred character was associated with the 'secular' death of Jesus. Thus, it is possible to state that the Eucharistic worship in which we primarily commemorate and enact Jesus' death is a "secular liturgy." In this perspective, the very human life can be construed as a liturgy or as worship of God. Thus, Christian cult has acquired a new meaning and frame in the New Testament; sequentially, a new concept of worship is unveiled: "Human life itself experienced as liturgy or worship of God." For "on the basis of Jesus' self sacrifice Christian life in this world can now become worship." The life that is shared in solidarity with fellow-beings and creation after the pattern of Jesus life, are verily 'spiritual sacrifice', and hence, forms of Christian worship.⁶

This way of re-conception of Christian worship as secular liturgy is validated in the Christian theological understanding of "common priesthood," in virtue of which everyone is entitled to offer sacrifice acceptable to God through Christ (1Pet. 2:5). Again, faith itself is a "sacrificial offering" (Phi. 2:17); every act of love is "a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18). Doing good, sharing what you have with others are sacrifices pleasing God (see Heb. 13:16).

More importantly, the eschatological life that came along with Christ is another argument of the authenticity of 'secular worship'. The 'secular' ('profane') has grown into a valid spectrum (*mandala*) of mankind's reconciliation with God in the person and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev. 21:22); maybe because of this reason the first generations of Christians did not have churches or altars. Because of the absence of churches and temples, early Christians were called

⁵Schillebeeckx, *God, the Future of Man*, 99.

⁶Schillebeeckx, *God, the Future of Man*, 99.

“atheists” or “godless people.”⁷ They did not feel the need of churches because the “breaking of the bread” in the ardent expectation of imminent eschatological era had been the “liturgy of life” in which ‘secular’ and ‘sacred’ bonded and blended seamless. No doubt, this conception of ‘secular-worship’ of the early Christians would definitely have had the bearing of the Old Testament prophetic legacy in which ‘justice’ and ‘thanksgiving’ are true forms of worship.⁸

Such a liturgical vision existed in the early church because they were not preoccupied with the building up of an organized, cultic church after the pattern of pagan religions. Rather, their engagement was with the coming Reign of God in which the whole of the created world was included. This eschatological Christianity saw Christ not merely as the head of the Church but as the universal Lord of the whole world. In Christ they were not subjected to the powers of evil, but they had become the masters of the world; everything belonged to them because they belonged to Christ (1Cor. 3:22, 23). In virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ this world is a “new creation;” the fate, the *moira* or *fatum* of the “old world” is no more; secular is de-deified and de-demonized. *Amen* could be said to the secular for “all the fullness of God” (Col. 1:19) has appeared on earth on account of Jesus.

Consequentially, the secular life – Christian commitment to justice and peace for ordering the human society – becomes “spiritual worship.” Christian worship is not a flight *from* the world into the Church’s liturgy; it is a celebration of, as well as commitment to the coming of God’s Reign of peace, justice, and love in the occurrences of the world. Christian faith, then, is an affirmation of the meaningfulness of human life in the world. In this manner Christian worship becomes truly a “liturgy of life” (“secular

⁷B. Koep, “‘Religio’ und ‘Ritus’ also Problem des frühen Christentums,” *Jahrbuch für Ant. und Christentum* 3 (1962), 43-59, cited in Schillebeeckx, *God the Future of Man*, 100. The pagan Celsus censured Christians: “Your eyes cannot bear temples, altars and images of God” (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VII,62) – for Christians, these were “idolatry.” Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VII,63. Minucius Felix (2c) wrote: “We have no temples and no altars.” Octavius, 32, 1, CSEL II, 45; Justin observed: that which struck the pagans was absence of “religion” in this sect of Christians. Justin, *Apologia*, I, 13, 1-2.

⁸“Do not trust in these deceptive words: This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord ‘...truly amend your ways and your doings, ... truly execute justice one with another” (Jer. 7:4,5; see also Hosea 6:3-6 Ps. 50).

liturgy"). Thus, the eschatological vision which is expanding and challenging a Christian to participate in realization of the Reign of God, is offering a new meaning and praxis to Christian worship.⁹

At this juncture, along with Schillebeeckx, one can raise a vital question: Is Christian worship merely an "intensified human solidarity" (secular liturgy), or is it also a "song of praise," a *paneguris* (Heb. 12:22) and a "festal gathering" (church liturgy)? It is a choice between the *hierarchical basis* (church liturgy) and *baptismal basis* (secular liturgy). Or, can we strike a balance that brings about mutuality between the two? Indeed, one is not a substitute or alternative to the other!

In the conciliar liturgical vision the answer is quite clear: church liturgy is the "source and summit" (*fons et culmen*) of the "liturgy of life." The Christian commitment (*sequela Christi* or following Christ) originates and culminates in the Eucharistic liturgy. If one gives primacy to the humanity of the historical Jesus to resolve the complementarity between these two, "church liturgy" ("festal gathering" and "song of praise") would originate and culminate in the "liturgy of life," which is the primary guarantee of salvation, and not the other way around. Aloysius Pieris says that "being engaged," "placed under arrest," and "held hostage for the Other" are the constituent elements of the incarnational divine selfhood. The incarnation is not a thirty-three year experiment but the permanent mode of God's engagement to save. The biblical drama of salvation is the story of God's own self-realization in finitude! It implies the incarnate Christ of history continuing his presence "sacramentally" in the flesh and blood of human beings (the least and the lost) crying for the dawn of the kingdom of justice, not primarily in a gnostic Christ who is worshiped in an institutionalized community with an institutionalized pattern of worship. The institutional church is invited to offer the occasion to 'transubstantiate' this human flesh and blood, broken and shared in the struggle for true peace; this flesh and blood may become the "celebration of the Eucharist" – Jesus' own song of thanksgiving and hope. If the 'church-liturgy' is utterly incapable of offering the "brokenness of humanity," it is cut off from its head, the Christ. It would then cease to be the locus of the *fons et culmen* of worship. What is needed is to primarily situate Christian worship in the historical dimension of Jesus. It was Jesus' style of building the church through Calvary, through the hour of human

⁹Vatican Council II, "Pastoral Constitution," § 21; see also §§ 39, 43, 34, 41, 11.

life that he experienced as worship.¹⁰ It implies that the authentic Christian worship can be realized by subordinating “church liturgy” to the “liturgy of life.” That is to say, the focus and locus of Christian worship is primarily and ultimately Christ. It is not the gnostic Christ whom human reasoning has invented but the one whom we encounter in the “story of Jesus.” Succinctly, Christian worship is ultimately configured in virtue of Christology in which humanism and theism meet and merge and become one *mythos* and *mysterion*, challenging and invoking us to “liturgy of life.”

6. Christic Humanism, the Heart of “Liturgy of Life”

As Schillebeeckx has put it, Jesus is an equation of “paradigm of humanity” and “parable of God.”¹¹ This equation neither entertains ‘a theist supernaturalism’ nor a ‘humanist atheism’; rather it entails a humanist theism. Of course, the Christian faith upholds that the incarnate Christ of history is the supreme witness of the divine-human encounter. It is in this Jesus, in his historical-human dimension, that the locus of the “*fons et culmen*” (source and summit) of true liturgy is to be sought. When Christian worship is re-conceived in the ‘humanist-theism’ accomplished in Jesus Christ *par excellence*, the church liturgy of “song of praise” and “festal gathering” (especially Eucharistic celebration) is subordinated to the liturgy of life. It is Jesus’ style of bringing about the worshiping community through Calvary – ‘hour’ of human life experienced as supreme worship. When ‘liturgy of life’ acquires precedence to ‘church-liturgy’ (“liturgical solemnity” or hierarchical role in the liturgy) the *baptismal basis* of the Christian worship gets primacy. According to Paul, baptism is not a mere rite but a mystical union with Christ, a dying and rising with him in one’s day-to-day life (“secular liturgy”). Eucharist as the second baptism (Mt. 20:22) is an act of thanksgiving consisting of a covenantal gesture of breaking, sharing, and pouring out one’s life for others¹² and, thus becomes the unsurpassable paradigm of Christian worship rooted in the humanist theism. The paschal dimension of Christian worship is quite self-evident in the humanity of Jesus. The humanist Christ is to be searched today in the “liturgy of life,” the continuation of Paschal Mystery in the day to day struggles for the accomplishment of “New Creation.”

¹⁰See Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 10ff.

¹¹See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, London: Collins, 1979.

¹²Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 7.

Moreover, the humanist Christ brought alive in the "liturgy of life" invokes the liberational potentials of Christian worship. The re-conception of Christian worship in the ambit of the humanism of Christ will make us interfaced with a human Christ whom we encounter in the "Story of Jesus," a Christ compelling his disciples for deeds of love: a (*dalit*) Christ, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, homeless, and fettered by social chains (Mt. 25:31-46), Christ the labourer's son (Mt. 13:55), Christ without a place to be born (Lk. 2:7), to lay his head (Mt. 8:20), or to be buried (Mt. 27:60); an activist Christ who was a threat to the oppressive system, and hunted down by the authorities (Mt. 2:13), was defamed before the court of law (Lk. 23:1-8), a criminal among the criminals (Lk. 23:39); a prophetic Christ who became the victim of priestly fanaticism and political opportunism (Mt. 27:11-23), and, finally, an unwanted leader (Jn. 19:14-15).

This human Christ who is worshipped in the "secular liturgy" invokes Christian humanism of our times, and makes his disciples aware of the hidden roots of dehumanization in the present systems and, finally, empowers us to struggle for the Reign of God with hope in divine grace. The Christ who emerges from this humanism is not merely a Good Friday Christ of pathological messianism in the social problems, but a figure of Christ who is risen, a Christ who heals, a Christ who feeds the multitude, a Christ who removes social stigmas (e.g., leprosy), and reintegrates outcasts into society. In short, humanist Christ who is worshipped in the "liturgy of life" is restorer of all things, whose *risen body* still bears the scars of human brokenness; who suffers but struggles in hope. He is the Exalted on the cross!¹³

The challenging mystery of the humanist Christ who appears in Christian worship is the harmony of "death and life," "despair and hope," "suffering and happiness," and "victim-victor" in the perspective of the "New Heaven and New Earth." That is, the Christian worship deeply rooted in the "Story of Jesus" is "liturgy of life" in the heart of the world, in which a rare creative harmony between "art of living" and "art of dying" is achieved to take on life with its concerns in a futuristic perspective of hope and trust in the risen Christ. The humanity of Christ which is commemorated in Eucharistic celebration makes Christian worship inclusive and hospitable. This openness of the Christian worship

¹³See Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 13.

is its missional dimension, and gives space to all, irrespective of religious adherence, to partake in the Good News.

7. Eucharistic Hospitality

Once the “source” and “summit” of Eucharist liturgy becomes the humanist Christ, the Christian worship accomplishes a universal hospitality. Jesus, as an “anthropological constant” generates an “anthropological space” in which the whole mankind can confidently take part.¹⁴ Eucharist as the commemoration of a humanist Christ embodies a dialogical and inclusive hospitality as its ontology. Such an envisioning of the Eucharistic worship is quite relevant and the need of the present ethos of dialogue between religions and cultures. The question of Eucharistic hospitality is quite alive in the theological conversation in India because of the multi-religious context. Theologians like Karl Rahner talk on a “world liturgy” in the context of wider ecumenism and ecological concerns. In the recent past, an all India Seminar on *Sharing Worship* held at the National Biblical, Catechetical and Catechetical Centre (NBCLC), Bangalore, sheds light on the significance of the inclusive hospitality of Eucharistic worship especially in a multi-religious situation: “The saving experience of the one living God in all believers and our awareness of that presence in them is the foundation and starting-point of ‘sharing worship’, since all symbols and rituals are related to the *one* sacrament of humanity, Jesus Christ... Eucharistic hospitality to followers other religions could be our expression of a common bond that exists *de facto* within the universal economy of salvation.”¹⁵

Moreover, the innate hospitality of Eucharistic worship rests on the nuance of ‘meal’ and ‘commemoration’ associated with it. Eucharist is a sacrament of “Communion Meal.” Sacraments are customarily analyzed in term of matter and form in their theological formulations. But, at the same time, the sacraments are primarily community actions on a religious spectrum. As symbolic religious actions, they bring about new relationships among members as well as between community and God. When the emphasis is shifted from the minister (as in the traditional understanding) to the new relationship brought about in the sacramental theology, the community becomes the celebrant or, rather, the community

¹⁴See Edward Schillebeeckx and Mary Catherine Hilkert, “Encountering God in a Secular Suffering World,” *Theology Today* (October 2005), 376-87.

¹⁵Puthanangady, ed., *Sharing Worship*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1988, 790, 800.

itself becomes the sacrament. Traditionally, the effect of sacrament is understood as *res* (thing) and the institutional structure is called *sacramentum* (ritual). One experiences the 'thing' as a new relational meaning. Now, the third element is the new community that mediates between *res* and *sacramentum*. The *res*, that is, the new relationships are symbolically expressed at the social and ritual levels.¹⁶

In this new understanding of sacramental theology, Eucharistic worship as a meal provides immense space of hospitality for generating new relationships in multi-religious context, especially if it has the humanist Christ as its source and summit. It is a common phenomenon in India that our brethren belonging to other traditions of *dalit* and folk religions, Hinduism, Islam, etc., are regular participants in the Eucharistic liturgy. For example, in the National Centre (Bangalore) of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, where I am stationed, a Muslim lady is a regular attendant in the Eucharist celebrations and many Hindus, both men and women, are choir members! In certain pilgrim centres like in Velamkanni, Tamil Nadu, the Infant Jesus and St. Mary's churches in Bangalore, our brethren adhering to other religious faiths outnumber Christians. The feast of Mary (Srimatha) in the St. Mary's Basilica (Bangalore) is celebrated with high solemnity. It was a rare experience for me to associate with Hindus and Muslims who walk the whole way, in early hours, from the different corners of the city to the church for nine days to participate in the novena and the Eucharistic liturgy. It is another face of the high-tech Bangalore that a multi-religious community takes part in the Eucharist. In the North India, *Christubhaktas* (Hindu devotees of Christ) have become a phenomenon. In ashrams like Mater Dam in Varanasi, thousands of *Christubhaktas* come together to recite *Jesukirtans* and receive *prasada* during the Eucharistic liturgy. A detailed discussion on this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper. Let me make some observations on this happening from the perspective of Christian worship as 'liturgy of life'.

Though many people partake in the Eucharistic worship they do not want to become fully members of the Church because of the cultural, social, and political reasons. Still, they feel a great fellowship with

¹⁶Michael Amaldoss, "Eucharistic Hospitality: Searching for a New Paradigm," in Francis Gonsalves, ed., *Body, Bread, Blood, Eucharistic Perspective from the Indian Church*, New Delhi: Vidyajyoti/ISPCK, 2003, 3ff.

Christian community and they celebrate their friendship with us in the Eucharist. The Eucharistic hospitality offers a congenial space to further deepen the friendship and helps them to know Jesus as their divine guru. I find this emerging Eucharistic hospitality as the universal inclusiveness of Christian worship centred on a humanist Christ. People see their own story of life in the “Story of Jesus.” Jesus resonates with their “liturgy of life,” a life of struggles and failures, hopes and dreams, and they surrender to the benediction of Christ and, thus, are empowered to carry on their pilgrimage of life.

Evidently, in all traditions, meal is a veritable social praxis for furthering and deepening human relations on a religious spectrum. Jyoti Sahi, an artist-theologian based in Bangalore, associates it with a spiritual journey: “I am convinced that in Indian culture, and Far Eastern culture generally, the entry point in the Holy is the shared community meal. Food is life, it gives strength, it gives strength for the way (*viaticum*)... It is only after receiving this food that the soul is able to take the long and arduous journey inwards to find that inner ‘still small voice’ ... This spiritual journey proceeds from Communion to Baptism and Real Presence.”¹⁷

It is Jesus who is the host of this Eucharistic meal. As Michael Amaladoss writes, “it is Jesus who is active in and through the community. It is the presence of Jesus that makes the community, not closed and exclusive one, but an open one offering hospitality to all.”¹⁸ This Eucharistic hospitality of Jesus is quite obvious in the “Story of Jesus.” Any number of incidents in the story of Jesus and his parables can be cited in this regard; for example, his admiration of the faith of the centurion (Mt. 8:10-11) and his praise of Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk. 7:24:30). The Eucharistic inclusiveness can be seen in his parables which have a special reference to the eschatological era and post-Easter incidents of Jesus’ story. The Eucharist hospitality, thus, enhances the understanding of Christian worship not as a ‘liturgical solemnity’ or ‘festal gathering’, but a people oriented, context specific “liturgy of life” celebrated in the very heart of world.

Above all, Christian worship as a collective remembrance contributes

¹⁷Jyoti Sahi, “An Artist’s Response to the Question of an Indian Church,” *Vidyajyoti* 50 (1986), 53; see also Sara Grant, “Towards a Practical Indian Ecclesiology,” *Vidyajyoti* 49 (1985), 29-35.

¹⁸Amaladoss, “Eucharistic Hospitality,” 15.

to the idea of Eucharistic hospitality. The memory of Jesus is invoked and enacted in the 'community meal' and, thus, its vital communion with its source is sustained alive and alert. Memorial meals are part of human heritage. In such table fellowships the collective memory is evoked, and the experience of group cohesion and bonding is celebrated and deepened. In such *com-memoration*, we are again *re-membered* in a cultural horizon or religious intentionality. It emphatically implies a futuristic nuance as well. That is to say, the memorial meal is simultaneously a "memory of the future" (hope). Thus, memorial meals foster the community identity in the perspective of past, present, and future.¹⁹

What is commemorated (*anamnesis*) in the Eucharistic prayer is the miraculous deed that God has wrought in our humanity and in its history. In this context it is insightful to compare the two accounts of Last Supper found in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Johannine Gospel. We do not find the "washing of the feet" in the Synoptics while John's Gospel highlights the incident. Many biblical exegetes maintain that "washing of the feet" (service to one's fellow-beings) powerfully embodies the Eucharistic significance. While the Synoptics give an account of the *sacramentum* (ritual aspect) – 'church liturgy' – John gives an account of the *res sacramenti*, the 'thing' signified or to be realized – the true fraternity with all humans in Christ.²⁰ After the "washing of the feet" Jesus instructs the disciples that they should do the same so that his 'memory' is celebrated. The core of this Eucharistic memory is a humanity built up through service and love. Thus, the 'thing' of the Eucharistic worship is the sacramental hospitality in which the whole humanity is invited to participate. The missional nuance of the Eucharistic worship is strikingly present in this Eucharistic hospitality of fraternity accomplished by service and love. That is to say, the "real presence of Christ" is brought alive and vibrant in the assembly of people who stand and live for justice and love for all humanity. Thus, the secular activity acquires a Christic nuance and

¹⁹See George Gispert-Sauch, "The Memory of Jesus and Eucharistic Remembering," in Gonsalves, ed., *Body, Bread, Blood, Eucharistic Perspective from the Indian Church*, 32-47.

²⁰See Schillebeeckx, *God, the Future of Man*, 112.

becomes the part of Eucharistic sacrifice. This is how the Eucharistic worship becomes 'liturgy of life', the *sacramentum mundi*, in the very navel of the world.

8. Conclusion

While advocating that Christian worship is "secular liturgy" or "liturgy of life," it is not implied that profane is the category of the reign of God. Profane is a provisional category in the purview of eschatological Kingdom. The benediction of the Eschatological Lord, however, penetrates the whole of reality in and through the profane. Obviously, we commemorate the *Maranata*, "the Lord who comes," in the Eucharistic worship. The task of the Christian is to make the history, a realm of God's salvific action. It is possible only through "spiritual sacrifice" of everyday life in this world with one's fellow-beings. This Christian commitment to bring about the Reign of God in and through the world becomes a "secular liturgy" or, rather, a "liturgy of life" in virtue of God's "new creation" in Christ. Thus, Christian worship which is enacted through "Eucharistic Memory" and "Eucharistic Hospitality" right in heart of the world is an "Art of Living" entailing an "Art of Dying" for building up a social order of love, justice, and peace in the perspective of an Eschatological era when "God will be all in all" (1Cor. 15:28).