

Eucharist - A Political Orthopraxis

**Dr. G. Valentine Joseph,
St. Paul's Seminary, Tiruchirappalli.**

Introduction

On the occasion of the Great Jubilee 2000, attempts have been made to revitalize eucharistic theology as a source of new life offered by God in the third millennium. Reflections on Eucharist given by the congregation of faith¹ summarize the classical doctrine of the Church and pave ways for further reflections. In fact, theologizing in the local context is the responsibility of the eucharistic assemblies that celebrate Eucharist as the source and summit of their life and mission. In India, eucharistic theologies developed in the past have been either translations of the classical framework in the Indian concepts or adaptations of some of the Hindu religious notions into the eucharistic reflections. Inculturated theologies on Eucharist have not yet been developed on the basis of Church's life in the socio-political context of the Indian Christian communities. This article is aimed at giving some outlines to develop such a local theology on the basis of the vital struggles of Christian life in a country where Christianity is a minority religion amidst multiple cultures and religions.

It is not an easy task to identify the vital struggles of the Indian Church which are different due to multiple cultures and languages. In spite of these differences, it is the political life that unites Christians of India as one group. Political life of the minority community becomes the common identity of the Indian Church in a democratic system. It

1. **The Eucharist, Gift of Divine Life**, prepared by the Theological-Historical Commission for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Trans. Robert R. Barr, Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 1999.

is not an exaggeration to say that the political life is the only factor in which economical, cultural and social life converge. Moreover political decisions of the Church have assumed importance in recent years due to the threat to its very existence from the different fanatical religio-political movements which dominate the present politics. To develop a eucharistic theology in the political context of the Indian Church would be one of the effective ways of understanding the riches of the eucharistic celebration and its contribution in the realization of Church's mission in the global context of the Indian society.

The scope of the article is to give a general framework for doing a theology of the Eucharist in the political context of the Indian church. By political context what we mean here is the political decisions through which church articulates its identity and mission in the mainstream of the Indian society. The political decisions taken by the community in the light of its faith determine its way of life. These decisions give orientation to its direction towards the future. Our concern here is not the particular political decisions. We are interested in the dynamics of the eucharistic celebration that would shape the political decisions of the Christian communities in the light of the Christian faith.

Orthopraxis

Orthopraxis is the term utilized in political theology to refer to the process of action and reflection. The word 'praxis' that is often used in recent German theological thinking refers to the 'purposeful, intentional and reflectively chosen ethical action' of a particular group in view of a better future. Praxis does not mean an act that puts into practice a particular theory. It is a process of twin movements in which reflection and action are united dialectically. The articulated theory that arises from this process results in further praxis.²

Praxis is an action that affects the whole human engagement in the world. Primarily it is reflective of self, one's own constitutive knowing and ultimately, it is a social identity. Past, present and future are involved in the praxis: it is a critical memory in which one uncovers the consequence of the past in the present; it is a critical

2. Thomas H. Croome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco: A Division of Harper Collins Publication, 1980, 137 - 154.

reason which evaluates the present, noticing the obvious in the present; it is also an ideology which shapes the future as a creative imagination that envisions the further in the present.

The term 'orthodoxy' refers to a research on the authenticity of Christian faith.³ Going to the biblical, patristic and liturgical sources in view of establishing the original experience of the early Christians has been a concern of modern theologians with regard to the question of orthodoxy. For us, orthodoxy means the foundation and '*a priori*' principle in the Christian faith: the way in which God acts in our particular historical context. This principle is not a fixed doctrine that we defend apologetically. It is a search for the revelation of God in the present context in a manner of His revelation in the biblical history.

Orthopraxis, therefore, is a political action motivated by a critical consciousness in which one evaluates the events of life in the light of the Christ event and takes particular options in hope of an eschatological promise of God for a better society.

Orthopraxis of Jesus

One could rediscover the above orthopraxis evidently in the life events of Jesus in His political context.⁴ There are crucial events that express clearly His political options and effect tremendous political consequences in the society. For example, the event of chasing away the traders from the temple is a political event that shook the whole authority of the temple. The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is considered as one of the main reasons for His death on the cross. These events are political actions motivated by His critical consciousness. These events symbolize His political options that are the driving forces of His mission. These events bring him to a cruel death that He accepts in an eschatological hope on God's promise in the future. Soares-Prabhu even goes further in calling every action of Jesus toward the poor as praxis and distinguishes their pedagogical features as identifying with the poor, active and affective concern, finding remedy to social poverty and call for a spiritual poverty.⁵ Therefore, the life events of Jesus could be interpreted as orthopraxis.

3. Johannes Panagopoulos, "Orthodoxie (Eglises et théologie)" Translated by H. Rochais, *Dictionnaire de Théologie*, Paris: Cerf, 1996 (2nd edition) 637 - 644.

4. Avila Rafael, *Worship and Politics*, Translated by Alan Neely, New York: Orbis books, 1981, 31 - 36.

5. G. Soares-Prabhu, "The Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus", in Felix Wilfred, ed., *Leave the Temple*, New York: Orbis, 1992, 100 - 114.

Table Fellowship as an Orthopraxis

In the context of Eucharist, one could identify the table fellowship of Jesus with the sinners and outcastes as an orthopraxis since the last supper of Jesus could be considered as the continuation and climax of different fellowship meals which Jesus participated in the different contexts of His life.⁶ Soares-Prabhu sees the table fellowship of Jesus with sinners as a revolutionary praxis in which Jesus identifies himself with the outcastes of the world. For the Jews, table fellowship was a sharing of life and fellowship before God and it was the foretaste of the eschatological meal prepared by God. The Pharisaic fellowship considered 'purity' prescribed in the Jewish law as an important criterion for the participation in the meal and that preoccupation went to the extent of discriminating people on the principle of purity and pollution. For Jesus, holiness has a radically different meaning. It is essentially mercy which is noting but inter-human compassion. God reaches out to all people in compassion that is beyond the gradation of places and persons. The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation achieved in table fellowship is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God.⁷

Even though we do not equate the table fellowship of Jesus with the present eucharistic celebration, we could clearly note the orthopraxis dimension of the Eucharist in the light of the above definition. The critical, eschatological and political dimensions of the table fellowship of Jesus give way to further reflections on the Eucharist as an orthopraxis. Our reflections have three stages. In the first stage, we reflect on the celebrating dimension of the Eucharist and in the second stage, we reflect on the content of the celebration and in the third stage, on the practical dimension of Eucharist that could be verified in life situation.

Symbolic Interpretation

In presenting the concrete celebration of Eucharist as an ortho-praxis, we depend on the symbolic interpretation of the

-
6. J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, London: SCM Press, 1966, 204 - 205. Cf. Enrico Mazza, *L'action Eucharistique: Origine, développement, interprétation.*, Paris: Cerf, 1999, 315 - 322.
 7. G. Soares-Prabhu, "The Table Fellowship of Jesus" *Jeevadhara*, XXII, 1992, 141 - 159.

sacraments that has been developed recently in the Sacramental theology.⁸ The renewal of liturgy on the inspirations of Second Vatican council⁹ has made the sacramental theologians to follow different approaches.¹⁰ We could enumerate them as Historical, Biblical, Juridical, Phenomenological, Anthropological, Charismatic and Liberating approaches.¹¹ The gradual progress in these approaches has led the theologians further into inter-disciplinary and integral approach to the sacraments which complement each other for a better understanding of the sacraments.¹² This integral approach could also be seen in the works of the liturgiologists who develop

-
8. For a historical survey of the development of 'symbolic interpretation', see William R. Crockett, **Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation**, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989, 227 - 263.
 9. S.C. no. 59. The purpose of the sacrament "is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God."
 10. For a summary of different approaches, See. Kevin Irwin, "Recent Sacramental Theology: A Review Discussion" **Thomist** 47 (October 1983): 592 - 608. Also see. D. Power, R. Duffy, K. Irwin, "Sacramental Theology: A Review of Literature" in **Theological Studies** 55, 1994/4, 657 - 705.
 11. Historical approach is the classical approach of Vatican II which is interested in the source of the sacraments. For example, See. Joseph Martos, **Door to the Sacred: A historical introduction into the Sacraments in the Christian Church**, London: SCM Press, 1981. The Biblical approach also goes in line with the historical approach and tries to see the beginnings of sacraments in the early Christian community. For example, See. Micheal Quesnel, **Aux sources des sacrements**, Rites et Symboles 7, Paris: Les Editions Du Cerf, 1977. Juridical approach concentrates on the liturgical and Canonical laws of the sacraments. For example, See. Thomas Richstatter, **Liturgical Law Today: New Style, New Spirit**, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977. Phenomenological approach is interested in the roots of sacraments in human activities. For example, See. Tad Guzie, **The Book of Sacramental Basis**, New York: Paulist Press, 1981. Anthropological approach is interested in the religious experiences in and through rites, myths, symbol and language. For example, See. Bernard Cooke, **Christian Sacraments and Christian personality**, New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1965. Charismatic approach bases itself on the process theology and the spiritual experience one gets in the sacraments. For example: See. Donald Gelpi, **Charism and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Conversion**, New York: Paulist Press, 1976; London: SPCK, 1977. Liberation approach wants to take sacraments as the vehicles for social liberation and a means to raise the Church's consciousness to its responsibility for the oppressed. For example, See. J.L. Segundo, **A Theology for Artisan of a New Humanity**, Vol. 4, **The Sacraments Today**, trans. John Drury, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974.
 12. As an example for the inter-disciplinary approach to sacraments: Herbert Vorgrimler, **Sacramental Theology**, trans. by Linda Maloney, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.

sacramental theology from the study of liturgical texts.¹³ From these integral approaches, the symbolic interpretation of the sacraments has emerged recently as the distinctive approach to the Sacramental theology. The authors like David Power, Lukken, Houssiau, Irwin, Vaillancourt, Louis Dupré advance in their line to utilize symbol as the overall integrating factor in the understanding of sacramental theology. The contribution of Louis Marie Chauvet in interpreting Sacraments in the symbolic perspective is something remarkable on which we base our reflections of Eucharist as an orthopraxis in the context of the Indian society. First we explain the symbolic dynamics of Eucharist in general in the light of the contributions of Chauvet. From that, we develop the theology of Eucharist as an orthopraxis in the political context of the Christian communities.

Symbolic Exchange

The dynamics of symbols in the celebration of the sacraments, in effecting relationship between God and the community of believers, is the main focus of this symbolic approach. Sacrament is an event that consists of exchanging gifts, in which God initiates His relationship through the gift of love. The initiative of God in the event of sacramental exchange is a gratuitous gift that surpasses all human deservingness. Receiving and responding to the gift of God by the believing community is a gracious event, which involves the whole life of the assembly.¹⁴ In this symbolic exchange, attitude is more important than the mere content of the exchange. It is an attitude of '*gelassenheit*' through which, one lets oneself enter into the presence of the Other. This basic attitude is beyond the values common to the commercial or social symbolic exchanges.¹⁵

13. For example, See. David Power, *Unsearchable Riches: The Symbolic Nature of Liturgy*, New York: Pueblo, 1984, 213. He gives three criteria for the validation of the sacramental practice: the fullness of language, adequacy to experience, and celebration's relation to the ortho praxis of gospel freedom and solidarity with the suffering.

14. The famous book of L. M. Chauvet, *Symbole et Sacrement: une relecture sacramentelle de l'existence chrétienne* is translated in English. For our further reference of the book, we use the English translation only. L. M. Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, Trans. Patrick Madigan, S. J., and Madeline Beaumont, Colledgeville, Minnesota: Pueblo Book, The Liturgical press, 1995, 108 - 109.

15. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 103 - 104.

The relationship effected in the symbolic exchange could be explained in four different ways: revealer- operator, presence - absence, recognition - anticipation and letter - corporality.

Revealer - Operator

As a symbolic language, sacrament reveals "the already-there of grace in the experience of faith"¹⁶ The anterior human existence is changed into the proper human existence in which one recognises, with gratitude, the actions of God in one's own life with its personal and communitarian dimensions.¹⁷ As an operator, it does the function of identification in which one is converted to a different way of relationship revealed in the exchange.¹⁸ The symbolic exchange that is happening in the sacraments reveals the moments of God's grace in the actual life situation of the believer and leads him to identify himself with the grace and to have a different orientation in life. For example, through the symbolic action of the eucharistic praise, a believer realizes the graceful moments of his life where God has encountered him with His generous self-giving love. This realization changes his whole attitude towards life and creates a sense of gratitude that continues in his whole life.

Presence - Absence

The transition from presence to absence of God that takes place in the symbolic exchange is a 'mature proximity to the absence of God' in the actual life situation.¹⁹ In anthropological language, 'absence' is constitutive of 'presence' that one cannot be separated from another and one is always illuminated by another. In the symbolic exchange of the sacraments, presence always opens up the reality of the absence and it is 'coming into presence' which is inscribed in the body of human existence.²⁰

In the Eucharist, the presence of Christ is celebrated and this presence naturally leads the community to His absence, which they sense in the actual life situation. But, the absence is encountered by the believing community with an unfailing hope and maturity of the presence that is an inseparable other side of absence.

16. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 431.

17. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 431.

18. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 437.

19. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 404 - 405.

20. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 405.

Recognition - Anticipation

Recognition - anticipation is an eschatological process in the symbolization which leads one to the celebration of the future in the present and to the identification of it in the totality of life. The eschatological realities become the existential realities through the symbolic exchange in the celebration. The eschatological hope is recognized and anticipated in the event of the celebration.

The process of recognition and anticipation of the future in the Eucharistic celebration could be well explained in the event of Eucharistic meal. The fellowship created in the event of eating together becomes the process of recognizing the other as the body of Christ and this recognition becomes an anticipation of the eschatological future in which the Christian fellowship reaches its climax.

Letter - Corporality

The transition from letter to corporality is a process that breaks the duality between saying and doing and touches the very corporality of the human person, both physical, social and cosmic body.²¹ The transition that is effected from the symbolic exchange is so profound that affects the total corporality of the person in his existence.

For example, in the context of caste differences in the liturgical assembly, the symbolic exchange that is happening in the Eucharistic meal touches the very body of the individual believer who has already constituted his life according to the purity and pollution theory. The change that is effected in the 'bodiness' of a person is an organic change that incorporates an oneness that comes from the body of Christ.

Chauvet summarizes the whole process of symbolic exchange in the following way:

Sacraments are symbolic figures, allowing us entrance into, and empowerment to live out, the arch-sacramentality - cross- which is the very essence of Christian existence.²²

21. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 266 - 289. These pages explain in detail of what we have summarised here as transition in symbolic exchange of the sacraments.

* 22. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 2.

Thus, sacraments are the privileged movements of grace filled communion. It allows us to enter into a radical relationship with God by an attitude of gratitude that is beyond the values of ordinary life and it could be verified always by a life of graciousness. This radical involvement of the relationship evokes the power of God that Chauvet calls as 'empowerment'. This empowerment is the 'other relatedness', the state of being for others. The Christ event is the paradigm of the other relatedness. It leads the community to a Christian identity which is nothing but a life of other centeredness.

Symbolic Dynamics in Eucharist

Celebrating the memory of Christ event is the 'central axis' in which the whole symbolic exchange of the Eucharist is functioning. David N. Power summarizes this complex dynamics as the process of 'narrative > blessing > Gift'.²³

The event is brought to narrative. The narrative is brought to blessing. The blessing transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood. The body and blood is received as a gift from Christ, communion in Christ's life and a communion in the presence of the Passover event in history. The entire action, based as it is on narrative remembrance, looks forward to the fulfillment to the covenantal promise and puts all historical experiences into this horizon²⁴

The power of this symbolic exchange in the Eucharist is further explained by Power through two linguistic concepts, '*illocutary*' and '*performative*'. On the linguistic level, the concept *illocutary* denotes an act that is effected in the saying. The position and the relationship of the subject changes by the very fact of the act of enunciation. The concept *performative* in the linguistic level is utilized as an action-language which evokes an attitude of engagement. It is an act of enunciation which changes the very position of the subject by the very fact of the act.²⁵ In the religious language, these concepts *illocutary* and *performative* signify a religious experience in which a subject enunciates its attitude of engagement to a relation which is

23. David N. Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalising the Tradition*, New York: Cross Road, 1995, 51ff.

24. Power, *Eucharistic Mystery*, 51.

25. J. L. Austin, *Quand dire, c'est faire*, Paris: Seuil, 1970, 144.

binding the whole life. In the liturgical language, these concepts mean the praxis of identity which renders present the reality that it expresses in symbols.

The memory of Christ in the Eucharist is an act that establishes a new relation between God and the community and between the members of the community. By the very act of memory of Christ, the relationship among the members of the community change.²⁶ Power calls this change as an 'act of eventing'. For him, it is a creative and transforming movement of the tradition in a particular historical context.²⁷ This 'eventing' draws the community to an experience of graciousness. It is an experience that reshapes and revitalizes the present way of life in the pattern of the Christ event.²⁸

Content of the Celebration

The 'orthodoxy' celebrated in the Eucharist is the memory of Christ event. The memory of Christ event in the Eucharist could be explained in three ways: dialectical, eschatological and political memory.

Dialectical Memory

The word 'dialectic' means the change that is happening in the fusion of two different realities. In our context, we mean the way God has encountered the community in the particular history and the change that is happening in the life of the Christians by this encounter. Eucharist celebrates this memory of God's encounter in the history of the Christian community. It is the memory of God's initiative for a profound relationship and the community's response to it. The change that is taking place in the community through this relationship is dialectic that is beyond the normal evolutionary progression. Christ event itself is a change in opposition in which the death has been transformed into the resurrection through the loving relationship of the Triune God. In the eucharistic celebration, the memory leads the Christian community to a profound relationship of fidelity which offers different historical possibilities of life which are beyond the normal human expectations.

26. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 132, 230, 427 - 430.

27. Power, *Eucharistic Mystery*, 311.

28. Power, *Eucharistic Mystery*, 45.

This dialectical process in the symbolic exchange of the Eucharist could be seen in two ways: the identification of Christian existence and its verification in ethical life. In the eucharistic celebration the community tries to identify the already-there of grace in the present life situation. The promise of God for a dignified human life in a particular context and the initiative of God in directing the events towards that goal are identified through various symbols. The proclamation of the memory of Christ event is a process of identification. The proclamation leads the community to identify itself in the life events where God's unconditional love is manifesting itself in a dialectical way. This identification is made as a source of power by the relationship of the triune God that is offered as a gift in the eucharistic celebration. The fidelity of God to His promise, the commitment of Jesus to this relationship of love and the power of the Spirit in effecting this relationship make this Christian identification as an act of grace by giving a new meaning to it. This empowering with new meaning of life gives a new liberty that makes the believer venture into new possibilities for the future with the hope of its final fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.

Verification in ethical life is another dimension of this dialectical process. It is not something external to the celebration, it is an intrinsic part of it. The manner of appropriating the grace of God revealed in the Christ event is our solidarity with the victims of the evils of the society. According to Paul, the discerning of the body of Christ in the weaker section of the society is the primary verification of the identity of Christianity (I Cor 11:29). This solidarity with the victims is an ethical action that is brought to the very core of the celebration and it is revitalized as the spiritual sacrifice of praise in the Eucharist.²⁹ An ethical life of superficiality that is contrary to this proclamation is constantly challenged and transformed by the celebration.

Reversal of value in the relationship between the members of the Eucharistic assembly by the radicality of the cross event is another ethical verification that is happening in the eucharistic celebration. The weak and the rejected of the society become the symbol of God's grace in the celebration.

29. Power, Eucharistic Mystery, 64.

Eschatological Memory

The memory that we celebrate in the Eucharist is an anticipatory memory. Through the symbolic exchange, we recognize and anticipate the eschatological future in the present moment of the celebration. The dialectical movement of God in the event of the resurrection of Christ becomes the guarantee for this anticipation. The liberty of God's children becomes the reality in the anticipated memory of the eschatological future. The community experiences a union of love with the triune God in the act of this anticipatory memory and this moment becomes the privileged moment of Grace for the present life.

Eucharist is not only the moment of the celebration of the ultimate reality, it is also the celebration of the concrete realities of fulfillment. We celebrate 'every small fulfillment of the historical future' in a fidelity to the promise of God that is our ultimate future. Every small fulfillment in the concrete history is recognized and made as the beginning of the ultimate future. This anticipatory memory of Christ that is celebrated through symbolic exchange becomes the source of confidence and hope in the way of life that is shaped by the cross of Christ. This experience of anticipation is beyond the ordinary logic of common life and this 'proclamation of Christ event until he comes' becomes the real experience of hope that gives a radical force in taking risks in view of fastening the eschatological end.

The transition from the presence to the absence of God that takes place in the symbolic exchange is another dimension of this eschatological process. It gives a 'mature proximity to the absence of God' in the actual life situation. This transition is an attitude of letting oneself enter into the presence of God. It is a 'gracious attitude of letting oneself be the gratuitousness of being and of letting oneself be spoken by it'.³⁰ There is a basic openness of being to the absence that is constitutive of the presence. The absence of God in the life situation does not create a deficiency or fear. It does not create emptiness rather it starts a relationship. In the words of Chauvet, "The absence is precisely the place from which humans can come to their truth by overcoming the barriers of objectifying and calculating reason."³¹ This mature proximity to the absence of God is actually a creative praxis

30. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 60.

31. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 63.

that gives a confidence in the fidelity of God in spite of the happenings that are contrary to the very core of God's promise.

Political Memory

The symbolic exchange in the eucharistic celebration is also political in nature. There are studies which develop the symbolic events of gathering around the common table, re-reading the history of the world in the light of the Christ event and the sharing of life through bread and wine as political praxis through which a political stand is taken in favor of the victims of social injustice.³² As Chauvet says,

The element 'sacrament' is thus the symbolic place of the on-going transition between Scriptures and Ethics, from letter to body. The liturgy is the powerful pedagogy where we learn to consent to the presence of the absence of God, who obliges us to give him a body in the world, thereby giving the sacraments their plenitude in the 'liturgy of the neighbor' and giving the ritual memory of Jesus Christ its plenitude in our existential memory.³³

The symbolic transition from letter to corporality happening in the Eucharist gives various possibilities in discerning this political strategy. In this symbolic transition from letter to corporality there is a process of attestation and contestation. Attestation here means the assertion of our radical christological dependence for our Christian identity. Contestation is a challenge and consent to the individual body, believing community and history which makes this Christian identity a fully human reality. This is an obligatory process from historical body of Christ to the ecclesial body through the sacramental body.³⁴

The radical christological dependence naturally leads us to a critical consciousness that evaluates the events of life according to the criteria given by the cross of Christ. Particular interests of the persons

32. James I. Empeur S.J., and Christopher G. Kiesling, O. P., *The Liturgy that does Justice*, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1990, 109 - 130. See also. Herman Schmidt, David N. Power, eds. *Politics and Liturgy, Conclium 92*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1974.

33. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 265.

34. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 270 - 274

in their ideologies and activities of social life are reviewed in the light of Christ event. The 'other-orientedness' of Christ event becomes the norm of life in judging the way of life of the community.

The process of contestation leads us to political strategies in actualizing the memory. These political strategies are formed in a dialectical and eschatological manner, on the basis of a feedback relationship between hope and planning. We could explain the dynamics of this political strategy by analyzing their ritualistic mechanism.

Establishing a radical difference and at the same time seeking an integration is the specific strategy of a ritual.³⁵ In the Eucharist, the radical Christological dependency slowly breaks away the cultural code of a particular society and constitutes a new cultural code. That new code becomes a symbolic programming and reiteration in the ritual context and it is programmed in such a way that it becomes the identity of a person in the society.

This programming of the new cultural code is communitarian in nature. It functions digitally rather than analogically by delimiting the group and integrating individuals with different roles and effecting a change. In this digital process, representing, exhibiting and proclaiming of identity become radical means of implementing the reversed values in the corporality of the community. This programming of the new cultural code is not limited to the individual and Christian community alone. It also simultaneously assumes the function of integrating others in their own level. The whole celebration is an 'ad esse' towards others. It is integral and relational in its very essence.³⁶

We have explained the orthopraxis of the Eucharist from the point of view of celebrating the memory. Dialectical memory of the Eucharist makes the community to identify the privileged moments of God's grace in the life situation and it calls the community for an ethical verification as a response to God's initiative. Eschatological memory that is an anticipation of the future in the present gives the community a mature proximity to the absence of God in the concrete

35. Chauvet, *Symbol*, 352 -353.

36. Cf. C. Perrot, « L'anamnèse nèo testamentaire » *Revue de l'Institute Catholique*, Paris, 25, (1982) 33 - 35. X. Leon Dufour, *Le partage du pain eucharistique selon le Nouveau Testament*, Paris: Seuil, 1982, 72.

life situation. Political memory of the Eucharist projects a new cultural code of life and makes the Eucharistic celebration a ritual force in achieving the new culture in the concrete life situations. These reflections naturally lead us to the 'praxis' dimension in actual life that we call as verification process.

Ethical Verification

The eucharistic orthopraxis that is the celebration of the memory of Christ could be verified in the line of the categories of J. B. Metz, 'remembrance, narration and solidarity'.³⁷ These three categories are inseparably connected with one another as it is explained by Metz himself.³⁸ They help us to articulate the praxis dimension of Eucharistic celebration in the actual life.

Remembrance

'Remembrance' is an act of identification of Christian existence and constant verification of its authenticity in the Eucharistic assembly.³⁹ In the eucharistic celebration, it is an act of reversing the personal history into the salvation history by identifying the dialectical encounter of God in one's own history. It is an act of interiorization in which one realizes his liberty as a subject of his own history and leans towards its fulfillment by finding out different new possibilities in history. It is also an act of discovering new possibilities of relationship with the people who want to be the subjects of their own history amidst the dominating oppressive systems that try to make them mere objects.

In the celebration of the Word, the community affirms the dialectical initiation of history by God, both in the Christian community and the society. This affirmation is not an utopian and abstract idea. This is not either a Marxist affirmation that believes in the capability of human solidarity alone. It is an affirmation of God's dialectical encounter in the actual history. Affirming the

37. J. B. Metz, *Faith in History & Society*, Trans. David Smith, New York: The Seabury Press, 1980, 184 -237.

38. Metz, *Faith*, 183.

39. Cf. Crockett, *Eucharist*, 258 - 259.

transformability of the society is a performative act that is taking place in the celebration of the Word.

In the Indian Christian context, it could be the re-reading of the conversion event that is the initiation of new history in the socio-political context of Indian society. Though the conversion events of recent years are interpreted in the line of social mobility, they are the dialectical initiation of God for a new life amidst the oppressive socio-economic conditions of the particular communities. Each community could go to the 'memory' that has brought forth this new life and its continual process in the present history. This act of remembering is an affirmation of God's action and the reshaping of the history of the community in the light of God's continual presence in the life events.

Narration

Narration in the Eucharist is an act that stands between historical and eschatological memory of Christ.⁴⁰ After analyzing different approaches to liturgical narrative, David Power concludes that it is an act towards 'eschaton' and an anticipation of the Kingdom of God.⁴¹ For him, it is 'a remembering of a past in virtue of what is anticipated in the future as fulfillment of desire'.⁴² By anticipating the future of memory, the kingdom of God, through the symbolic exchange in the Eucharist, one discovers new possibilities of creating a better future.

This anticipatory narration, first of all, is a source of confidence and hope. It creates a confidence to come away from the shell of security. It changes the unnecessary anxiety and suspicion into a relation of confidence. Secondly, narration becomes a new political and social vision of the Kingdom in the Eucharistic celebration.⁴³ It

40. "Les sacrements nous donnent de vivre dans la mémoire eucharistique, l'histoire passée du Christ qui est, selon Moltmann l'anticipation proleptique de l'avenir." Jean-Louis Souletie, *La Croix de Dieu: eschatologie et histoire dans la perspective christologique de Jürgen Moltmann*, Paris: Cerf, 1997, 265.

41. "It is not the story of a divine redeemer or some heroic figure coming from another realm to bring something into the world, but the story of human persons who deal in darkness with the conflict and struggle of life, yet who still come to an ideal resolution as envisaged in the narrative, so that all their actions can reveal truth and meaning in virtue of their openness to this end." Power, *Unsearchable Riches*, 119.

42. Power, *Unsearchable Riches*, 121.

43. "The Eucharist opens up the vision of the divine rule which has been promised as the final renewal of creation, and is a foretaste of it. Signs of this renewal are present

presents the Kingdom of God that is, in the Indian context, equality and justice based on love. It transforms the present in view of the future and in that way, it becomes the 'source and summit of all evangelization' and a 'vehicle of both disclosure and commitment' to the Kingdom of God.⁴⁴ Thirdly, this narration hastens the future by reducing the difference between present and future. This is done through the celebration of small fulfillment that is done towards the eschatological fulfillment. For example, the privilege of ministry in the eucharistic assembly could be given to the low caste members of the community as a counter cultural act in a society where all the ritual services are reserved to the high caste members only. This anticipation of the future always indicates the radical difference between present and the future. But, this difference is not something that threatens us by its wider gap. It inspires us to search for new possibilities of reducing the gap.

Anticipation of the future in the present context of Indian Church would be the maturity and hope which could manifest in the situations of threat and domination. Minority complex and the fear of security sometimes blind the church from its mission. The Christian communities are more preoccupied with their own rights and securities rather than mission and meaningful existence in the milieu of different cultures and religions. As we have explained before, the process of 'narration' leads the assembly towards a 'mature proximity' towards the future and gives liberty to a life of mission.

Solidarity

Solidarity, according to Metz, is the practical side of remembrance and narration. The interpersonal relationship that we have spoken of in the above two categories becomes political in the category of solidarity.⁴⁵ It is a decisive moment in which other is recognized as subject of his own history. It is the moment where the victims of unjust social structures are empowered with a fellowship that enables them to become subjects of their own lives.

in the world wherever the grace of God is manifested and human beings work for justice, love and peace. The Eucharist is the feast at which the church gives thanks to God for these signs and joyfully celebrates and anticipates the coming of the Kingdom in Christ (I Cor 11: 26; Mt 26: 29)." BEM. (WCC) 14.

44. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5. Cf. also Souletie, *La croix*, 281.

45. Metz, *Faith*, 229 - 236.

In the Eucharist, solidarity means 'political responsibility' assumed by the members of the assembly for one another and in a special way the victims of injustice. The relationship fostered among the members by the symbolic exchange leads the members towards this responsibility. This process involves a suffering of contradictions and a gradual reshaping of relationship by the sacrificial memory of Christ. In that way, Eucharist becomes a praxis of passing painful moments in the process of deepening the relationship of grace.

The suffering of contradictions and evolving a relationship of grace in the Eucharist could be psychological, ideological or political. There could be psychological contradictions like caste that need confrontation and gradual healing. Normally the Christian assembly does not want to be disturbed by such confrontations. It avoids these problems by amplifying its supernatural and personal dimensions. But, the symbols of the Eucharist actually create a rupture in the normal dominant psychological attitude of the persons, effecting a suffering in the psychological level.

In the process of symbolic exchange, there could be also ideological contradictions among the members. Eucharist confronts different ideological groups in the Christian community through a praxis based on the reality of the cross. The power of liberty in confronting these ideologies and the sense of ethical responsibility towards the victims come from the solidarity that emerges in the Christian fellowship. Political assertion of domination through rituals has become the norm in Indian way of life. In the Christian community also, directly or indirectly, eucharistic celebration is made use of as a means of political assertion. One has to be constantly vigilant in keeping away the eucharistic celebration from the political purposes that are contrary to its very nature.

The eucharistic celebration is inevitably a political praxis but, the political responsibility expressed by it is totally different from the political assertion of the dominant groups. The symbolic exchange of Eucharist clearly expresses a political option for the powerless and victimized people. This political option is more than an ideology or an action plan. It is a symbolic and ritualistic action of relationship in an eschatological perspective. This relationship identifies itself with particular ideological options and action plans in the history, but at the same time, courageously differs from them from the point of view of its eschatological hope. It is both a compromise and a confrontation, a process of 'suffering in love' in its manner of confronting the contradictions. This love is not only critical about the dominating

cultures and the manipulation of the ritual power, but also it creates relationships by a painful process of reconciliation and consensus.

Pieris envisions this dimension in a process of 'becoming poor'.⁴⁶ According to him, Church has to be really poor instead of serving the poor. Poverty and religiosity has to go together in being solidarity with the poor. Amaladoss wants the church to be the liminal community that suffers with the marginalized people of the society.⁴⁷ An affective relationship with the poor that makes them subjects of their own history is the basic character of the Eucharistic solidarity.

Conclusion

This article has tried to interpret Eucharist as an orthopraxis in the light of the symbolic interpretation of the sacraments developed in recent years. We have envisioned the dynamics of the Eucharistic celebration in the point of view of the political theology developed in recent years. These different dimensions could be related to any particular political option of the church in a particular context. These reflections help the Christian communities to re-examine their political ideologies and decisions in the light of the Eucharistic ortho-praxis. This article could give a different orientation to the eucharistic theology in the present context where the devotional and individualistic dimension of the Eucharist play a major role that has obscured its explicit connection with actual life problems. It considers the solidarity with the victims of the society as final verification of the Eucharistic celebration. As well said by Raymond Panikkar,

The great challenge today is to convert the sacred bread into real bread, the liturgical peace into political peace, the worship of the Creator into reverence for the Creation, the Christian praying community into authentic human fellowship. It is risky to celebrate the Eucharist. We may have to leave it unfinished, having gone first to give back to the poor what belongs to them.⁴⁸

46. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, New York: Orbis books, 1990, 48

47. M. Amaladoss, S. J., *A Call To Community*, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1994, 126 -127.

48. Raymond Panikkar, "Man as a Ritual Being" in *Chicago Studies* 16, 1977, 27.