

# **Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue**

## **Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations**

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## Chapter 11

### TOWARD AN OPEN EUCHARIST

Richard Kearney

“A restricted Eucharist is false. . . . Whoever ‘loves’ his brother has a right to the Eucharist.”<sup>1</sup>

— Abhishiktananda, 1998

In this chapter I wish to make a case for an open Eucharist. I will be speaking as a philosopher of Catholic formation paying special attention to two pioneering priests who struggled to share the Body of Christ with people of other faiths. In revisiting their testimonies, I hope to show how such figures—and others after them—helped pave the way for a less restrictive, and in my view more deeply Christian, approach to the Eucharist. But first, let me offer some remarks from a more personal narrative perspective.

#### *1 D’où parlez-vous?*

My Paris teacher and mentor, philosopher Paul Ricoeur, used to greet students entering his seminar with the question: “*d’où parlez-vous?*” Where do you speak from? So let me begin with some stories of Eucharistic sharing and nonsharing which I experienced as a young citizen of “Catholic Ireland” in the second half of the twentieth century.

First, the sharing. I had a very devout and beautiful mother who took me to Mass every morning, where I served in a local Cork convent as altar boy from the age of seven to eleven. These were magical moments and I will never forget the experience of daily Eucharist received from a kindly priest (and a keen rugby player), Father Buckley, to the sounds of an angelic choir and the perfume of sweet incense, beeswax candles, washed nuns, and altar wine. The wafer first thing every morning was heavenly food indeed. On Sundays, our large family (seven children) would attend public Mass in the city where we trooped up to the communion rails of a packed church with every class and character of Cork citizenry—“rich, poor, and indifferent”—an inclusiveness I have always cherished in my Catholic religion. Later, at a Benedictine boarding school in Limerick, I continued to participate in

daily Mass, singing and playing music in the choir. The plain Gregorian chant of the robed monks added to the sense of sacred presence.

My monastic education was sufficiently broadminded to encourage us adolescent students to receive the host daily rather than agonize over endless inventories of sins (like so many of my parents' generation). In short, the Eucharist was Word made flesh every day of my life from the age of seven to seventeen: the divine made present in the most simple material ingredients of edible bread and heartwarming wine. I felt blessed to receive such an extraordinary sacramental gift—the daily host—and as I became increasingly familiar with those of other faiths, I wished to share it with them.

But not all in my Church agreed. My first rude awakening occurred during an ordination at my monastic school. The sacrament was performed by the local Bishop and while the Abbot and monks were extremely open—hosting annual ecumenical meetings for the different denominations in our conflicted island—the Bishop in question was decidedly less so. When the widow of a local Protestant Dean, who had a close relationship with the Abbey, came to receive Holy Communion at the conclusion of the ceremony, the Bishop turned his back. As she stood there in front of him, at the top of a long queue with hundreds in attendance, he declined to share the Eucharist with her. A holy monk participating in the Mass, said to me afterward: “That was one of the most unchristian acts I ever witnessed.” I could not but recall the foreign Phoenician woman saying to Jesus, “even dogs receive the crumbs from your table ...” (cf. Mk 7:28).

I was deeply shocked by how the Body of Christ—offered for *all* the “hungry” of this world: Jew or Gentile, Pharisee, Samaritan, or Syrian—could be used in this way as a mark of exclusion and exclusivity. If not for my largehearted monastic friends, I think I might have left the Church that day. And, God knows, with the multiple scandals of child abuse, paternalism, Vatican banking, condemnation of gay love and contraception (even to prevent AIDS, venereal disease, and unwanted pregnancies) as “morally evil,” there were other reasons to abandon my religion at that time. But there was, I must confess, something particularly chilling about the Eucharist—the sharing of the presence of Christ with those most in need: the wounded, the lost, the searching, the sick, the hopeless, the faithless, the hungry—being refused to a woman clearly wishing to participate in one of the most sacred Christian rites of love and hospitality. If Christ identified himself as the stranger (*hospes*) five times in Matthew 25, who had the right to refuse his body to other strangers? Was it not with hungry, thirsting strangers *above all* that we should share this blessed food? Was not interconfessional communion a Christian imperative? These were some of the questions which buffeted my young soul as I was faced with the public humiliation of an Anglican widow genuinely desiring to be in communion with the Church I knew and loved.

My second story is of more public proportions. Mary McAleese, as President of Ireland, received Communion at the Protestant Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin in 1997. The then Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Desmond Connell, denounced her participation as a “sham.” He not only rebuked President McAleese as a Catholic receiving a Protestant Eucharist, but also later chastised the Protestant Bishop of Ireland, Walton Empey, for offering the Eucharist to Catholics in the

first place. Archbishop Connell claimed that Anglican ministers who welcomed all baptized Christians to celebrate the Eucharist were failing “to respect the faith and obligations of our members.” He said: “For Roman Catholics, when we receive Holy Communion, it is a statement that we are in full communion with those people with whom we are taking Communion. But our Communion with the Church of Ireland and other Protestants is incomplete; because we and they do not have the same faith about, for example, the Eucharist.” Reverend Empey responded by saying: “At times like this, I feel that Jesus is weeping and the Devil is doing a dance.” He said the Church of Ireland “welcomed to Holy Communion all those baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.” I too felt I could hear Jesus weeping that day, unable to comprehend how one of the highest representatives of the Catholic Church in Ireland (my church) could not acknowledge the healing power of intercommunion between our religiously divided peoples.<sup>2</sup> That the Eucharist could be the occasion of ongoing acrimony in our war-torn land was a matter of deep sadness and shame.

Ironically, shortly after the election of Pope Francis, fifteen years later, there were reports in *The Irish Times* that Mary McAleese might be elected the first woman cardinal of the Catholic Church! And it was a source of great relief for many Irish Catholics to hear Francis bravely declare that the Eucharist should be considered food for the “hungry” rather than a toll-house reward for rule-keepers.

Witnessing such ungenerous experiences—and others where the consecrated host was denied to remarried divorcees or practicing gays—I asked myself how the Eucharist, of all sacraments, rituals, and gestures, could be the cause of such egregious hurt? “One Bread, One Body,” my fellow Catholics chanted as they knelt to receive Holy Communion—but, according to official Church doctrine for centuries, that was *only* if you were members of the “True Church”: Roman Catholicism, as dogmatically defined by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The rest—non-baptized in the one true holy and apostolic Church—were “not” part of the One Body. And even if Vatican II put an end to the injurious notion that there was “no salvation outside the church” (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*—a doctrine that ran from the Lateran Council in 1215 to 1964) (Sullivan 1992; Sesboüé 2004; D’Costa 2011), the rule still pertained that the most holy of sacraments was *not* to be shared with “strangers”!

Given these dispiriting examples, it was with relief and joy that I later discovered not only the generous sacramental ecumenism of many monks and nuns within my church, but also the exemplary witness of two pioneering priests of an inclusive Eucharist, Abhishiktananda and Teilhard de Chardin.

## 2 *Passing East: Abhishiktananda and Teilhard de Chardin*

### 2.1 *Abhishiktananda (Henri le Saux)*<sup>3</sup>

“The discovery of Christ’s I AM is the ruin of any Christian theology, for all notions are burnt within the fire of experience.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1948 the Benedictine monk Henri le Saux left his monastery in Brittany, France, and sailed to Pondicherry in India. Like several missionaries before and after him, Henri le Saux (renamed Abhishiktananda in India) felt compelled to revise some of his Catholic dogmas when confronted with “strangers.” It seems to be no accident that, after his encounter with a spiritual culture deeply foreign to his own, his approach to the Christian Eucharist underwent radical questioning and finally resulted in a real opening to other faiths.<sup>5</sup>

One such opening occurred in 1972, during an Easter Saturday Vigil in Pune (north-west India). His friend and disciple, Sara Grant, a Sacred Heart sister from Scotland and a fine theologian, described the ceremony as a major “breakthrough” in interreligious communion. She writes of how her CPS ashram at Pune—a “multi-religious household” functioning as a center of liturgical “experimentation”—hosted a particularly meaningful Eucharist with Abhi and a Hindu Panditji, as well as other Hindu and Jewish guests during that Easter weekend. The ritual was performed out of conviction that “liturgical celebration is the setting par excellence for reflection on the mystery of Christ in the light of both biblical and non-biblical scripture” (Grant 2002: 72).<sup>6</sup>

Though Abhishiktananda was the chief celebrant, he himself seems to have written little about this event—yet there are some telling hints in diary entries which I shall consider below. It was the host, Sara Grant, who provided the best account, describing the Vigil as a genuinely “trans-cultural celebration” which was much more than a “preparatory para-liturgy.” And while the sharing of scriptures from different biblical and Vedic sources was central, what was most striking for her personally was the “*bodily* aspect of the being and the fact that we experienced it *as community*.” She explains: “suddenly we realized that until his death, Jesus was bound by history and its limitations, but through his death and resurrection he had burst the bonds of space and time and could be recognized as not only Lord and Christ but as *Sat purusha*, the archetypal Man of Vedic tradition in whom every member of the human race can recognize the truth of his or her being” (Grant 2002: 72).

While I have not been able to locate any explicit reference to this “breakthrough” event in Abhishiktananda’s published works, I did discover a number of journal entries which provide some revealing context for what transpired.<sup>7</sup> On Good Friday (March 31, 1972), the eve of the sharing between Abhi, Grant, and their Hindu guests, Abhi writes: “The disciple of Jesus does not ‘boast’ that in the Cross he knows some higher secret of wisdom. He lives in conformity with his experience of the Cross and in all humility he gives an account of it to anyone who asks him.” On Easter Sunday (April 2, 1972), the day after the Vigil, Abhi adds this note on the importance of interreligious insight: “Grace is the answer of both the Christian and the *bhakta* (seeker of God) ... Jesus is still only understood by Christians as the guru who is other—*anya iva*—as the Purusha, Creator, Sacrificer, Savior. Only too rarely has the flash of ‘Thou art Thou’ (*tat tvam asi*) shone forth and the I am! (*aham asmi*) sprung up simultaneously.”

Six days later, still reflecting back and forth across Christian and Hindu scriptures, Abhi expands on this idea that Christianity discovers its true self by journeying out through the other, the stranger, the outsider. He describes this pilgrimage from self

to other as a revolution of the Spirit: “Truth cannot be formulated. . . . Christianity is neither knowledge, nor devotion, nor ethics and ritual—nor is it duty, religion (formulas, institutions). It is an explosion of the Spirit. It accepts any religious basis (*jnana/bhakti/karma*) to the extent necessary in each case.” And he adds, quizzically: “But what makes the Christian inspiration distinct? Why this search for distinction, for identity? . . . Christianity is the *discovery of myself in the other*” (April 8, 1972).

On October 25 of the same year, just one year before his death (October 6, 1973), Abhi’s interreligious hospitality stretches to more explicit formulations: “Do I call him Christ? Yes, within one tradition, but his name is just as much Emmanuel—Purusha. Can he be Krishna? Rama? Shiva? Why not, if Shiva is in Tamilnadu the form of that archetype which seeks to become explicit at the greatest depth of the human heart?” (October 25, 1972). And while Abhi normally refrains from mentioning the actual role of the Mass as such (silence being his preferred voice), on November 1 he explicitly addresses the question of the Eucharist, making the bold claim that “when you pass beyond the *namarupa* (external forms), the mystery takes all forms (*sarvarupam*). The clash is not with a particular *namarupa* but with those who absolutize it. The Church is so immense a mystery that the apologists water it down in trying to make it fit into their narrow historical views!” And then, at this crucial point of critical reflection, he poses the question: “The liturgy, the Mass—is it not a necessary compensation for the drastic *neti*, negation of *advaita*?” suggesting that “psychic health spontaneously (unconsciously) calls for this complement . . . to keep one’s balance! However liturgy, Mass, should never be forced. Read the breviary, celebrate the Mass, never out of duty, but as if by instinct, spontaneously” (November 1, 1972). The Mass is conceived here, in other words, as a kataphatic corporeal counterpart to the apophatic emptiness of “beyond God.” It is the affirmation which accompanies negation, the resurrection after the kenosis of the Cross, food and wine after hunger and thirst, the sharing of Emmaus after the solitude of Gethsemane. Advent after Advaita. But if participation in the Mass requires dismissal of his closest Hindu brothers in Spirit, it is a price too high to pay. Abhi would never renounce the deepest spiritual epiphanies of his life, experienced in a cave on the holy Hindu mountain of Arunachala in close proximity to the ashram of his beloved Sri Ramana. Rarely is Abhi’s profound commitment to double belonging—as Christian and Hindu—so pronounced:

If to become Christian again I had to give you up, O Arunachala, to abandon you, O Ramana, then I would never be able to become Christian again, for they have entered into my flesh, they are woven into the fibers of my heart. How could I become Christian again if I had to forget Ramana and the people of the mountain . . . all those who were my companions on the way, and were each in his own way my helper or my guide toward the great enlightenment. If to say Mass I had to give them the slip, then I could never again say Mass. (Abhishikhananda 1998: 175)

But there is more. As death approaches, Abhi’s interreligious convictions become even clearer. He has moved from being a Christian guest to his Hindu

host to becoming a host in his own right. In the Spirit, guest and host become interchangeable. The timeless I AM of Christ and Purusha traverse historical divisions. On February 17, 1973, he claims that:

The mythos of the Purusha (Spirit) is wider than that of Christos; not only does it include the cosmic and metacosmic aspect of the mystery, but it is also free from the attachment to time entailed by the mythos of Christ. Rather it recognizes all the symbolic value contained in the mystery of Time, but refuses to compress the absolute separately into a particular point of time.

“The Purusha,” Abhi insists, “is simply there, like the Atman, Sat, Brahman, once the human being awakes to himself. ‘Before Abraham was, *I am*.’” In short, the mystery of the divine is greater than any particular confessional mythos in time, place, and history. It is transconfessional and transhistorical, without denying the indispensable need for symbolic, ritual instantiations. In the same entry, Abhi goes on to see the “symbols of Christ” as “bearers of universality” and offers this explanation: “They radiate their Catholicity (ecumenism = universality). They exist *ad* (toward) the totality, *pros* (toward) the totality = *sarvam prati!*” And he follows this immediately with one of his most radical claims for interreligious communion—a key statement for my case: “A restricted Eucharist is false. ‘Leave your offering before the altar!’... Whoever ‘loves’ his brother has a right to the Eucharist.” To host the stranger from other religions has now become the ultimate meaning of the Communion Host.

These end-of-life insights into interconfessional hospitality were accompanied by some of Abhi’s most acute theological reflections. Several weeks later, struggling with illness as he prepared a series of lectures for the Jesuit faculty at Delhi (Vidyajyoti) on Christology, Abhi penned some extremely subtle journal entries on the question of the “unicity” and “uniqueness” of Christ. The singularity of Christ becomes the very basis of his university. In one particular entry, he suggests that the most elective “only one” contains the most expansive “only one.” The ostensible paradox, he insists, contains a sacred mystery, calling for a delicate balance between unique election and inclusive embrace. He offers the following articulation of this astonishing insight:

If Christ is the “only one” for me ... may I discover in him the glory of the Only One. And what does it matter if I discover the glory of the Only One in *whatever created form there may be!* For the glory of the Only One is in all one. This alone is important: that Christ should be Everything for me. ... *Let every human being be the only one for me*, my everything to whom I give myself totally. In this alone I will have the experience of the Only One. (March 22, 1973)

In other words, the point of most ostensible exclusivity (Christ is the only one) becomes in truth the most intimate point of inclusivity (Christ is each “only one,” that is everyone I welcome in their singular uniqueness and “thisness”). It is not stretching things, I think, to hear echoes here of Christ’s identification with each stranger (*hospes*) in Matthew 25. The singular and universal in one. And perhaps

even an echo of the beautiful Scotist notion of divinity being incarnate in each person's irreducible "thisness" (*haecceitas*) (Osborne 1999: 68, 106–7, 150–65, 185–9), an idea so central to Gerard Manley Hopkins' entire religious poetics.

On April 21, 1973, one year after the interreligious Easter Vigil with Sara Grant at Pune, Abhi returns to the idea of intercommunion. Perhaps it was the lapse of time, offering a certain interval of reflection, which enabled him to return to the "breakthrough" experience after the event, *après coup*, *nachträglich*. The repetition of the Paschal ritual, one year later, seems to have triggered a revisiting of the original event—an event as ineffable as it is profound: "Easter night, night of the awakening to being (*sambodhi*). The vigils of *Sakyamuni* which culminate in the Awakening... Neither Jesus nor Buddha *described* their Awakening." And it seems Abhi is following suit. Yet on April 28, he breaks his silence and strives to say the unsayable in the following terms:

People are converted. ... They become Christian, Muslim, Sufi, Vedantin, etc. All those are superimposed forms. Whereas the essential thing is to strip oneself of all that is superfluously added. ... The *advaita* formulation is just as much a superimposition as are the Koranic or the Trinitarian formulations. And people fight to defend their own formulations and to condemn those of others!

Two days later, brushing the limits of "negative theology," he touches on the ana-theist notion of a God who is reborn "after" (*ana*) the death of God. Citing John of the Cross's notion of the Night in which we witness the "disappearance of God," Abhi observes that "the God that I project, the God of superimposition is surely dead ...;" and, consequently, he claims, it is out of this demise that emerges—paradoxically and mysteriously—the "dazzling light of the true 'I.'" From this flows a refusal of all dogmatic apologetics and a revolutionary embrace of interreligious pluralism: "One who knows several mental (or religious and spiritual languages) is incapable of absolutizing any formulation whatever—of the Gospel, of the Upanishads, of Buddhism, etc. He can only bear witness to an experience—about which he can only stammer..." But out of this apophatic stammering may arise, Abhi insists, the Awakened person who "rides upon the Spirit. His place is 'open space'" (May 4, 1973). This proclamation of an open space of the Spirit—underlying Abhi's plea for an open (i.e. "unrestricted") Eucharist—was made less than six months before he finally passed away.

These ruminations in the year leading up to his death can, I believe, be read retrospectively as a radicalization not only of Abhishiktananda's Pune liturgy but also of his first insight when setting up an interreligious ashram in Shantivanam in 1958. This is how he formulated his original founding vision:

Should we say that the Revelation of Christ has absolutized Semito-Greek "ideology"? (That is the point of view of *Humani Generis*.) Or else should we say that this Revelation, although providentially poured into Judeo-Greek culture, so transcends it that there will be new, deeper, purer, more real expressions of

this Revelation that will develop providentially in other cultures, and above all in this far-eastern world of *atman-nirvana-Tao*. (June 4, 1958)

What an extraordinary act of trust in interreligious communion made by a young Benedictine from Brittany arriving in India for the first time! It was an act which was to blaze trails for many Christian interreligious pioneers who followed in his Indian footsteps—from Bede Griffiths (his immediate successor at Shantivanam) to Sara Grant, Sister Vandana, Murray Rogers, Raimon Panikkar, and Bettina Baumer, not to mention the countless Hindu swamis (Ramana, Chidananda, Shivananda) and Buddhist lamas who engaged with him on his interreligious journeys from Pondicherry and Shantivanam to Rishikesh and Gongotri. By the end of his interreligious journey, Abhishiktananda had embraced the idea of an “unrestricted” Eucharist involving the sharing of Spirit and food. In his life and testimony, the Eucharist expanded outward and upward from a specific Catholic rite, which he always cherished, to a more inclusive act of hospitality to strangers—a missionary expansion which he believed was one of the most fundamental messages of Christianity: namely, “the discovery of oneself in another. ... For whoever loves his brother has the right to the Eucharist.”

## 2.2 Teilhard de Chardin: Mass of the world

Teilhard de Chardin was another prophetic missionary of the Eucharist. Also traveling east—in his case to China rather than India—he too discovered a passion to share an open Eucharist with the world.

In an early essay entitled “Cosmic Life” (1915), the young French priest spoke of a cosmic communion with the earth leading to a communion with God. Echoing Paul’s Eucharistic notion that “because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, because we partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10), Teilhard envisaged forms of “sacramental communion” which bring unity to the Mystical Body of Christ. The earth itself, matter in its lowliest forms (and what is more simple and alimentary than bread!), is part of a ‘sanctifying moment’. “Since first, Lord, you said, ‘*Hoc est corpus meum*,’ not only the bread of the altar, but ... everything in the universe that nourishes the soul for the life of Spirit and Grace, has become *yours* and has become *divine*—it is divinized, divinizing, and divinizable” (King 2005: 9).<sup>8</sup>

In a timely and engaging commentary, entitled *Teilhard’s Mass*, Thomas King SJ details Teilhard’s various efforts to formulate a “Mass on the World” (King 2005). From early in his life, as both priest and expeditionary, Teilhard envisioned the flesh of God extending outward into the universe from the tiny Host in the monstrance. “It was as though a milky brightness were illuminating the universe from within, and everything were fashioned of the same kind of translucent flesh,” he wrote, “through the mysterious expansion of the host the whole world had become incandescent, had itself become like a single giant host” (King 2005: 10). Teilhard spoke accordingly—and I think this is one of his most signature insights—of “*extensions* of the Eucharist,” each amplifying out from the consecrated host to

the “infinite circle of creatures (which) is the total Host to consecrate.” And by the same token, the “crucible of their activities is the chalice to sanctify” (King 2005: 10). The *bread*, for Teilhard, was conceived as the element of nourishment and growth, the *chalice* that of suffering and pain—both elements needing to be blessed.

It seems there were few limits to the range of this sanctifying Eucharistics, embracing all forms of organic matter. Indeed, Teilhard recorded how as a child he first recognized God in stones! “The Sacramental consecration,” as he later put it, “is haloed by a universal, analogical consecration” (King 2005: 11). Nothing is alien to this sacramentalizing of the universe, and the role of the celebrant is to “Christianize the organic and spiritual currents from which come forth the Body of Christ” (King 2005: 11). No one is excluded from the cosmic Eucharistic body, which is why Teilhard saw his vocation as a call to become “more widely spiritual in my sympathies and more nobly terrestrial in my ambitions than any of the world’s servants” (King 2005: 11). No small mission! The operative words here are *sympathy* and *terrestrial*. Teilhard’s ontology of sacred flesh defied the dualisms of both Platonic metaphysics and Cartesian rationalism which split the human being into body and soul and cast matter as an impediment to spiritual ascension. With Teilhard’s host, as with Jacob’s ladder, there is no way up that is not also a way down. Word and flesh beat with the same heart, the systole and diastole of matter.

On his first trip to China in the 1920s, to conduct anthropological and archeological field work, Teilhard started making notes for what would become his path-breaking *Mass on the World*. As he discovered and documented various ancient fossils and bones, he saw parallels between the development of the human body and the divine body. The Eucharist was increasingly revealed as an exemplary emblem of this evolving theo-genesis, the prolongation of God’s love through creation. “Each communion,” he wrote, “each consecration is a notch further in our incorporation into Christ” (King 2005: 11). As the Word becomes flesh in humanity, humans become God through the same process of mutual embodiment, echoing the patristic teaching that God became man so that man could become God. This understanding likewise provides a powerful rebuttal of docetism and other Gnostic attempts to deny the full carnality of Christ.<sup>9</sup> The cosmos itself is deemed a sacred body.

In 1924 Teilhard wrote a personal, passionate essay entitled, *Mon Univers*, where he articulated one of his most powerful accounts of the “extensions of the Eucharistic Presence.” Given its importance for my thesis, I cite at some length:

We must say that the initial Body of Christ, his *primary body*, is confined to the species of bread and wine. Can Christ, however, remain contained in this primary Body? Clearly, he cannot. Since he is above all omega, that is, the universal “form” of the world, he can obtain his organic balance and plenitude only by mystically assimilating all that surrounds him. The Host is like a blazing hearth from which flames spread their radiance. Just as the spark that falls into the heather is soon surrounded by a wide circle of fire,

so, in the courses of centuries ... the sacramental host of bread is continually being encircled more closely by another, infinitely larger Host, which is nothing but the universe itself—the universe gradually being absorbed by the universal element. Thus when the Phrase “*Hoc est Corpus meum*” is being pronounced, “*hoc*” means “*primario*” the bread; but “*secundario*,” in a second phase occurring in nature, the matter of the sacrament is the world, through which there spreads, so to complete itself, the superhuman presence of the universal Christ. (King 2005: 16–17)

Teilhard leaves the reader in no doubt as to which “host” has ultimate priority, from both an historical and eschatological perspective. He insists:

The world is the final and the real Host into which Christ gradually descends, until his time is fulfilled. Since all time a single word and a single act have been filling the universality of things: “*Hoc est Corpus meum*.” Nothing is at work in creation except in order to assist, from near at hand or from afar, in the consecration of the universe. (King 2005: 17)<sup>10</sup>

When word reached Teilhard in 1926 of the 28th International Eucharistic Congress to be held in Chicago, he wondered if there would be one voice in all the thousands of theologians, priests, and scholars present who would dare explain the “true extensions of the Eucharist and its animating place in human work,” and he prayed to be given just ten minutes in the giant Chicago stadium to shout aloud what it means to “sympathize” (King 2005: 17)! A rhetorical prayer, perhaps, but not a sentimental one. For Teilhard, such *sympathy* was no devotional piety; it was a radically transformative pathos extending from fellow humans—acting and suffering—to all living, organic, sentient beings in the universe. Though Teilhard was no partisan of Buddhism (he remained somewhat critical of its acosmic tendencies), his capacious understanding of Christian *caritas* sometimes seems coextensive with Buddhist *karuna*.

It was during a visit to China in the same year—1926—that Teilhard began to practice and write about what he called a “Mass upon the altar of the world.” The purpose of such a Mass was to divinize each new day in a “sacrament of life animated by God” (King 2005: 20). The original Eucharistic offering and gift was, he insists here, that of Jesus of Nazareth, but extending and expanding outward from that is an evolving “sacrament of the World” (the title for a major work he planned but never completed). He explains, “as our humanity assimilates the material world and as the Host assimilates our humanity, the Eucharistic transformation goes beyond and completes the transubstantiation of the bread on the altar” (King 2005: 21). From 1926 on Teilhard worked ceaselessly on what came to be called the “Mass on the World.” But it was on New Year’s Day 1932 that he first wrote explicitly of celebrating this Mass with non-Christians on an expedition to the Gobi desert. He was the only Christian, but every member of the scientific trip attended. His sermon on that day contained the following prayer of universal sacred presence, embracing not only those present but also absent friends and

fellows. Again we witness the expanding circles of incorporation: “What we ask of that universal presence which envelops us all, is first to reunite us, as in a shared living center with those whom we love, those who are so far away from us here, and themselves beginning this same new year ... I offer to [God] this Mass, the highest form of Christian prayer” (King 2005: 23). Teilhard does not offer details here of consecrating and distributing hosts, but it is clear from the context, and from his ongoing thinking about cosmic Eucharistics, that the Host is the real presence that includes all those attending the desert Mass and those remembered or imagined during its celebration.

Teilhard did not see Eucharistic communions as discrete isolated performances but as successive “contacts” and “assimilations” to the power of the Incarnate Word—a whole developmental theo-genesis ultimately coextensive with the duration of a life. “All the communions of our life are,” he explains, “only successive instants or episodes of one single communion—in one and the same process of Christification” (King 2005: 28): a process he describes elsewhere as the “innumerable prolongation of [God’s] incarnate being” (King 2005: 138). Well into the 1950s—during further work expeditions and travels to Africa and America—Teilhard recorded several new versions of his “Mass.” And in the weeks leading up to his death in 1955, he entered a final account of his belief that “the words of the Consecration appl[y] not only to the sacrificial bread and wine but, mark you, to the whole Mass of joys and sufferings produced by the Convergence of the World as it progresses” (King 2005: 32). On April 7, Holy Thursday, Teilhard cited three verses of Paul that ended with the prayer “that God may be all in all” (I Cor. 15). At Easter Sunday dinner, celebrated with his close friends Rhoda de Terra and her daughter in their New York apartment, Teilhard finally passed away. His Paschal passing may be interpreted as a true fulfillment of his prayer, expressed in *The Divine Milieu*—“Teach me to treat my death as an act of communion” (King 2005: 33). His life in the Eucharist included death itself.

Teilhard’s view of the Eucharist informed several of his other theological views. First, it vindicated his childhood conviction that God exists already in rocks: the certitude that it is through tasting, touching, seeing, and sensing matter that the divine enters our world, and only secondly through knowing. Hence Teilhard’s alertness to the material findings of the sciences, especially anthropology, archeology, and the forensic research which discovers the universe in a grain of sand or curve of bone.<sup>11</sup> Teilhard fully endorsed Tertullian’s view that Christ must be present in the full carnal particularity of “shaped bones and cross-veined hands.” For if we can *believe* without seeing and sensing, we cannot *adore*. Teilhard was with Thomas and Mary Magdalene: he wanted to touch the body of God. He believed that matter would achieve its “definitive salvation” in the words of the Mass: “This is my Body.” Christ had claimed the cosmos as his corpus, and it is for humans to eucharistically respond, one way or another. Even if for Teilhard there was only one Christ, there were many ways to Christ—for Christ was the one of many ways (King 2005: 181). His own Church’s “Roman theologies” had, he felt, sometimes reduced the Christ of universal and multiple “adoration” to an

increasingly restrictive code, “too small to be adored” (King 2005: 133); they had placed doctrinal belief over seeing, touching, tasting—the deeply corporeal idioms of the Eucharist itself. Christ, after all, spent his last hours sharing food, washing feet and undergoing passion—and the first hours after he arose, he fed his disciples with fish on Lake Galilee and with bread in the inn at Emmaus!

The problem with contemporary Christian society was that it separated the world of belief and the world of work, the extraordinary world of faith, and the ordinary world of sensible experience. Teilhard believed the Eucharist was the crossing of these worlds. And he firmly believed that his everyday work on fossils and bones was part of the work of God. “Adoration’s real name,” he once claimed, “is research” (King 2005: 133)! Indeed he claimed that, in his own case, without scientific research and experiment there would be no possibility of “real mystical life” (King 2005: 134). It was in this light that he understood the appeal of Marxism and vitalism as a recall to the things themselves, the working of the Word through the material world of acting and suffering flesh; here too Christ needed to be rediscovered and revered. This is what the cosmic Christ of St Paul was originally about: discovering the transcendent in the immanent and the immanent in the transcendent. He highlighted a paradox central to the transformative power of the Eucharist: the conversion of that which appears absurd and incoherent into something “adorable” (King 2005: 134). Eucharistic adoration and sharing, he continued to profess, involve all the complex, conflicting fibers of the “unifying universe” (King 2005: 134–5). The world serves as the altar of matter becoming “Christifiable” (King 2005: 135). But this cannot occur without us, each one of us, becoming its poets, mystics, servants, researchers, and priests. The goal for each Christian was to be present eucharistically, where “Christ may inform the very growth, through man, of the universe in movement” (King 2005: 136). Or as he put it later in life, “the communion with time,” understood as the communication with the *becoming of things*, is the supreme form of adoration. In the wake of Eucharistic communion, both sensing and believing become one. And we may say, with Thomas after touching the wound of Christ: “My lord and my God” (King 2005: 137).

Equally radical was Teilhard’s reinterpretation of the priesthood. All of humanity—“believer and unbeliever alike”—is, he held, possessed of a single desire and hunger: the longing for a great communion. And those who work as scientists, scholars, and in other activities that serve the growing unification of humanity, may thus be viewed as priests of a kind, for “every work of discovery is in the service of Christ, which thus hastens the growth of his mystical body, shares in his universal priesthood” (King 2005: 103–4). Considering things in light of the sacred work of communion, Teilhard, toward the end of his career, went so far as to claim that “everything becomes the business for consecration—the business of the priesthood” (King 2005: 104). He did not hesitate to declare that lay people may also be “true priests” who can offer his spiritual Mass on the World. Or more exactly, all Christians may be spoken of as “lay quasi-priests” in keeping with I Peter 2:5 which talks of believers forming a “holy priesthood.” When God is seen present everywhere, continually embodied in the flesh of the world, all of life becomes a communion (King 2005: 104). Flesh is matter animated by the Word,

and Christ is the soul of the cosmos. Everything that happens is adorable in so far as it is part of God's love. Or, more emphatically, the universe may be conceived as an "immense host made flesh by the touch of the Word" (King 2005: 108). Accordingly, genuine prayer enables us to contemplate—and touch—the world not as a "veil but as flesh." Even the red earth of China appeared to Teilhard like the "wounded flesh" of Christ. The entire world, he insisted, becomes the "flesh of Christ" for those who believe, and this belief is incarnational. Anticipating the claims of fellow French thinkers, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gabriel Marcel, Teilhard argued that we do not see the spirit of anyone or anything except through their flesh (voices, gestures, movements, hesitations, glances). When we recognize Christ as the spirit within people and things, matter becomes animated as "flesh."

In short, for Teilhard flesh is the "divine milieu" of the world, a carnal Eucharist indeed. We are all involved in the "mystery of the flesh of God," as he puts it amorously at the end of his *Mass*: "I can preach only the mystery of your Flesh, your soul shining forth through all that surrounds me. ... Like the Flesh, [the universe] attracts by the charm which floats in the mystery of its curves and folds and in the depths of its eyes" (King 2005: 108). Teilhard inscribes himself here in a long tradition of religious poetics from the Shulammites' *Song of Songs* to the theo-erotic musings of John of the Cross, Teresa of Avilla, and the Beguines, right down to the mystical poetics of George Herbert or fellow Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins—not to mention the "cosmotheoandric" tradition running from Saint Francis to Raimon Panikkar. "Sun and moon bless the Lord:" that is what the sun and moon, in adoration, are doing (King 2005: 121).

And yet Teilhard was not naïve. He was keenly aware of the dangers of "indifferentiation." He warned against the "destructive fusion of which pantheism dreams," preferring instead a unity that differentiates. "Within us without being us" (*in nobis sine nobis*), was his catchcry that reflected transcendence within immanence without ever abandoning transcendence. Life for Teilhard was a divine milieu, increasingly differentiating even as it simultaneously transmuted—in joy and pain—toward unification. There is no denying darkness, death, or depression (from which Teilhard himself greatly suffered at key periods in his life). Wrestling with both *thanatos* and *eros*, one struggles toward communion. "To bring Christ by virtue of a specific organic connection, to the heart of realities that are esteemed the most dangerous, the most unspiritual, the most pagan—in that you have my Gospel and my mission" (King 2005: 123). For Teilhard, nothing human was alien to the Eucharist's transfiguring power. Flesh, the focus of the divine milieu and signal of transubstantiation, is what animates life as singular life, in each particular instance, and resists the temptation of indefiniteness. Even the tension of remaining within a specific, historically and hierarchically determined Church—one which limited, confined, and sometimes even censored him—was for Teilhard part of the work of differentiation and dialogue. If everything is declared materially one in premature fusion, there is no room for sacred *eros*, love, desire, hunger. There is only the boredom of sameness. Genuine Eucharistic communion is anything but that. "Unity differentiates" is Teilhard's final word.

### 3 *Lonely roads*

Abhisktananda and Teilhard could only go so far. These Christian pioneers of an open Eucharist were prophets, not gods. Their brave searching for ways to amplify the Eucharist as a gift for all hungering beings—and who does not hunger?—was not without its hazards, obstacles, and omissions. When Abhi and Teilhard were reprimanded for their experiments and writings, they acquiesced and remained silent. They did not leave the Church or resign the priesthood, as certain others did, out of protest or indignation. They did not publicly defy the Vatican authorities. Indeed their obedience, while consistent, might even appear to some as compromising or complicit (though hindsight is easy after Vatican II). The Eucharistic masses and liturgies which they carried out with friends and colleagues—for Abhi, fellow travelers on the path of Christian-Hindu dialogue like Sara Grant, Murray Rogers, and Bettina Baumer; for Teilhard, mainly fellow researchers in China and Africa—were not performed as public acts of ecclesiastical revolution: they rather took the form of quiet quotidian rites made in the name of love and hospitality. And that hospitality had its limits and conditions.

In Teilhard's case, for example, one does not find formal interreligious invitations to concelebrate communion in a reciprocal way. Non-Catholics were invited to become guests, rather than hosts, at the Mass on the World; and he rarely if ever spoke of what he as a Catholic priest learned from the Taoists or Buddhists of Asia which might have altered his own Christian understanding of the Eucharist. Indeed Teilhard was, as noted, quite critical of what he saw as the nonincarnational character of much Asian spirituality. Nor did Teilhard or Abhi, to my knowledge, ever contemplate inviting women (fifty percent of the human race) to concelebrate at the Eucharistic altar, although they had deep spiritual friendships with women (Lucile Swan and Rhoda de Terra in the case of Teilhard; the Baumers, mother and daughter, Sara Grant, Sister Vandana, and Shirley du Boulay in the case of Abhi). The question of women's ordination did not seem to preoccupy them as it does so many in the Catholic Church today. Nor, at a more theoretical level, did they reflect critically on questions of the incommensurability of religious "language games," on how the hermeneutic diversity of faiths and the attendant sense of Eucharistic hospitality, requires that each "host" respects the strangeness of each stranger, the otherness of each guest—in order to avoid the temptation of totalizing inclusivism.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, there are even moments when Abhi and Teilhard seem to embrace a sense of Catholic supersessionism: though for the most part they prefigure the more open Vatican II acknowledgments of the legitimacy of non-Catholic and non-Christian faiths (see council documents like *Nostra Aetate*, albeit as anticipations of the "full truth" which the Church alone possesses).

Teilhard and Abhi were more fieldworkers than theologians; they were practicing rather than preaching, experimenting and improvising in far flung lands rather than strategizing, and networking in Vatican congregations. And while their voices certainly influenced some of the most visionary reformers of Vatican II—Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Hans Küng among others—they themselves did not,

alas, live to see the new awakening (*Aggiormomento/ressourcement*). They traveled a lonely road, with the Eucharist as companion, guide, and sustenance. They paved paths for others to follow.

#### 4 *Extending Eucharistic circles*

Just as Jesus engaged with Samaritans and Paul with Gentiles, it was among strangers that both Abhishiktananda and Teilhard de Chardin worked to extend the Eucharist to those beyond the fold. In order to develop their idea of extending circles of Eucharistic communion, it may be timely to reconsider a number of basic issues. By way of conclusion, I offer the following four points.

First, let us consider the doctrinal relationship between baptism and Eucharist, where the former is seen as prerequisite for the latter. Christ, after all, did not ask for baptismal certificates when converting water to wine at Cana or communing over bread and water with Phoenician and Samaritan women. At the Last Supper he did not ask for professions of faith, but shared food and washed feet; and when he finally offered his body on the Cross, it was to *all* people—Jews and Gentiles, Romans and Samaritans. If one wishes to preserve the link between baptism and Eucharist, might it not be as simultaneous rather than successive sacraments? See, for instance, the precedent of young catechumens cited by Saint Timothy of Alexandria in his fourth-century canons.<sup>13</sup> Here the notion of baptism of desire was as important as baptism by water—the Eucharist was given to those who genuinely desired to commune.

Second, we might do well to reexamine the connotations of blood sacrifice. Here we rejoin thinkers like René Girard, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Ricoeur, who call for the demythologizing of the fetish of the crucified Savior as filial expiatory victim, with its ancillary cults of periodic bloodletting and ritual purification. To avoid misconstruing the Eucharist as a rite of scapegoating or payment of ransoms and debts—rightly denounced by Nietzsche—we ought to observe its original meaning as thanksgiving for the Gift of new life. This means the conversion of old rites of violent blood sacrifice into new rites of hospitality through the celebratory sharing of bread and wine. When the Eucharist becomes a feast of love rather than an expiation of guilt, Christ's offer of new life is replicated with each new offering of consecrated food with neighbors and strangers, allowing carnal healing rather than purgative reparation. In the life of Jesus of Nazareth, this nonexpiatory narrative reached its apogee in the breaking of bread at Emmaus and the cooking of fish for the disciples at Galilee. Both Eucharistic events reprise the narrative of Abraham and Sarah's meal with the three divine strangers at Mamre.<sup>14</sup>

Third, it might be wise to conceive the Eucharist less as changeless dogma than as a subtle and transforming "art." And in this regard perhaps it is no accident that some of the most imaginative experiments in interreligious communion have been conducted by nondiocesan religious like Jesuits, Benedictines, Franciscans, and Sacred Heart missionaries—pioneering spirits inspired by a special charisma of creative adventure and empathy. There is a long and venerable tradition

of voices from the mystical and monastic margins inspiring the ecclesiastical center, keeping it open and attuned to ever-new acoustics of the Spirit. The great scholar of Christian-Buddhist dialogue, Fr Joseph O'Leary, formulates the notion of Eucharistic "art," reminding us that "from the start the Church has been creatively interpreting the Eucharist" (O'Leary 2008a: 171).<sup>15</sup> In this spirit, Vatican II sought "not to impose 'rigid uniformity' in the liturgy but to 'respect and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37)" (O'Leary 2008b: 95). And this meant that "the art of our own times from every race and country shall also be given free scope in the Church" (SC 123). Like all works of art, the universality of the Eucharist is, O'Leary argues, embedded in particular times and places, rooted in the specificities of distinct historical cultures. So if we are invited to see the Eucharist as Christ's gift to the world, we cannot receive this art-work without "re-imagining" it anew. Christ's "instituting" the Eucharist should be interpreted accordingly as "the opening up of a creative space of celebration and community, as the initiation of a living tradition" (O'Leary 2008a: 172). The work of inculturation has to play a vibrant role in this ongoing rethinking of the Eucharist, from the most local liturgical experimentations to such artistic innovations as Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* of 1971 (performed in the Vatican in 1973 and 1983) and Stravinsky's *Mass* of 1948. And one might add the long history of artistic representations of the Last Supper and Emmaus, from Leonardo and Rembrandt to Andy Warhol and Sheila Gallagher. As O'Leary concludes:

Like every work of art, the Eucharist lives only by dying to former modes of its existence. It is doubly fitting that the Eucharist, as a meal of sacrifice and self-abandonment, itself undergoes death and resurrection. ... If the great modern works of art are among the "signs of the times" that the Gospel must engage ... the Eucharist itself as a work of art must be refashioned as a sign for the times, becoming an historical happening of truth. (O'Leary 2008a: 173-4)

Fourth, we might be well advised to amplify the *hermeneutics* of the Eucharist in tune with the prophetic breakthroughs of figures like Abhishiktananda and Teilhard. The Eucharist, as I hope our testimonies show, has multiple layers of meaning. Mono-eucharistics should increasingly give way to poly-eucharistics, understood as centrifugal expansions in ever-widening circles from the consecrated host on the altar to the multiple carnal hosts of the world. For, as Gerard Manley Hopkins reminds us, "Christ plays in ten thousand places/ lovely in eyes, lovely in limbs not his/ to the Father, through the features of men's faces" ("When Kingfishers Catch Fire"), I suggest that we might begin with the following extending circles, moving from the most circumscribed to the most open:

- 1) *Canonical Eucharist*. In the strictest Catholic sense, this refers to the consecration and distribution of Holy Communion in a liturgical Mass, celebrated by an ordained male priest and exclusively available to those baptized in the Catholic faith in a condition of absolution and "full communion

with the Church.” The latter includes a doctrinal belief in the “real presence” of God in transubstantiated bread and wine. Since Vatican II there are certain “exceptions” permitted regarding reception of the consecrated host—for example, some cases of inter-Christian marriage and the last rites to non-Catholic Christians without pastors. Several recent theological discussions engage the question of whether receiving the Eucharist presupposes Catholic baptism and confession of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church (as currently defined by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) or whether it is open to non-Catholics who “desire to be in communion with the Church.” These genuine conversations about the importance of Church order regarding the sacraments—baptism before Eucharist, ordination before consecration—offer real grounds for hope.

- 2) *Interreligious Eucharist*. This involves a special Eucharistic sharing with non-Catholic Christians—and, more controversially, with Jews and other non-Christians. One thinks of the special meetings at Assisi or Taizé or other interconfessional ceremonies conducted in eschatological anticipation of Communion between all Christian Churches, and by ultimate extension, all non-Christian religions. The Catholic Church has not yet officially espoused such moves, but Pope Benedict gave the consecrated host to the Protestant Frère Roger in Taizé, and there are hopes for further openings under the papacy of Francis. Such interconfessional Eucharistics might eventually allow for female concelebration, as more women become ordained in non-Catholic denominations.
- 3) *Fraternal Eucharist*. This third extension of the circle is based on the original Christian principle of “two or three gathered in my name” (Mt. 18:20). It involves informal groups of Christians gathering to celebrate the Last Supper/Emmaus sharing of bread and wine among “brothers and sisters in Christ.” This may include readings of scripture and a variety of prayers and reflections. But it is not confined to the sacramental liturgy of any one church. Here the interreligious sharing with non-Christian religious seekers (willing to participate in spiritual communion with Christians) is easier to accommodate and encourage. This third category of poly-eucharistics could be said to take its cue from Francis and Claire of Assisi who celebrated Christ’s choice of bread as the most common alimentary material (not silver, gold, caviar, or filet mignon). And perhaps, as noted, Pope Francis is gesturing in such a direction when he recalls that the Eucharist is for “the hungry” rather than as a reward for those who follow rules.<sup>16</sup> The story of the prodigal father and son is clearly relevant in this regard, as is the dedication of a fraternal meal to the Giver of Gifts (in commemoration of Christ’s inclusive sharing with all guests at table—the empty place for Elijah and hospitality to the stranger). The most common prayer here is the standard “grace before meals,” with its personal and poetic variations. No one is excluded—of whatever faith—who wishes to share in the blessing of food in simple thanksgiving (Greek *eucharistia*). Many of a humanist or open-atheist persuasion can feel

welcome in such ceremonies of gratitude—moments which acknowledge, as in the Eastern practice of *pūja*, a special “sacred” quality in the sharing of food with strangers.

- 4) *Carnal Eucharist*. This is the widest and most embracing circle, referring to the translation of Word into Flesh in quotidian acts of incarnate love; it reflects an open-heart Eucharistics. Here the sacred becomes embodied in everyday forms of touch and taste. Incarnation goes all the way down, from head to foot, from agape to eros. Such Poly-eucharistics can be seen as polymorphism, where nothing and nobody is in principle excluded from the sacramentalizing of the profane. It echoes from the Shulammitte’s cry to Molly Bloom’s Yes. Even the simplest carnal acts of “sensing” may serve as sacraments of communion.<sup>17</sup> At this omega point of extension, there is no end to the Eucharist.

### Notes

- 1 See Abhishiktananda 1998. In what follows I will be emphasizing the deep etymological link between “Eucharist” and the act of “thanking.”
- 2 See report by David Sharrock, “Archbishop fuels row over Irish Communion,” *The Telegraph*, London, February 20, 2001.
- 3 Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux OSB) (1910–73) is one of the great twentieth-century pioneers in interreligious dialogue. Having moved to India in 1948 in search of a more radical form of spiritual life, he adopted sannyasa in accordance with Indian tradition and became an inspiring exponent of Hindu-Christian dialogue. Together with his mentor, Fr Jules Monchanin, he founded an ashram at Shantivanam in Tamil Nadu, where he was later followed by Dom Bede Griffiths and others. Multiple contacts with prominent Hindu saints such as Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Gnanananda Giri led him to deep advaitic mystical experience. After some years he went to live the life of a hermit in Arunachala and later the Himalayas. His lifestyle, books, and diaries are now the subject of considerable interest, and in recognition of his outstanding contribution, symposia were held around the world in the centenary year of his birth in 2010. The first, at Saccidananda Ashram (Shantivanam) in Tamil Nadu was particularly valuable, as it provided information which was not hitherto accessible about the circumstances of Abhishiktananda’s life and the current situation of interreligious dialogue in India. For an account of the research findings of these symposia see Dupuche 2001. Another very useful critical source is Shirley du Boulay’s excellent biography of Abhishiktananda (du Boulay 2005).
- 4 Abhishiktananda 1998.
- 5 In a 2012 correspondence, Du Boulay informed me that Abhi became less and less preoccupied by the particular doctrinal restrictions on the Eucharist in his later days, in spite of what seems to have been a continuing, and often fertile, tension between his deep Catholic vocation as a Benedictine monk and his passionate commitment to encountering Christ in other faiths. Several other contemporaries and friends of Abhi have made similar observations. Bettina Baeumer told me she felt sure Abhi shared the Eucharist with Hindus, and Joseph Prabhu suggested he

probably engaged in interfaith Eucharists alongside Murray Rogers and Raimon Panikkar. I still, curiously, have found nothing in Abhi's own writing which explicitly confirm this; but several entries from his *Spiritual Diary 1948–1973: Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, cited above, hint in this direction. It is still, to use Abhi's own terms, an "open space," over which the Spirit "hovers and beckons." What is sure is that Abhishiktananda, for all his devotion to his Church, realized that his experience of interreligious sharing represented a real challenge to the traditional Christian theology of single church salvation.

- 6 See also my account of this interfaith Easter ritual in Kearney and Rizo-Patron 2010: 20–4.
- 7 Abhishiktananda 1998. All subsequent diary citations below are from this source.
- 8 King's volume includes the full text of Teilhard's *Mass on the World* and a related "Prayer Service Based on *The Mass of the World*" (pp. 145–67). I am deeply indebted to King's very insightful and exhaustive research work on Teilhard's texts, letters, and diaries for the citations of Teilhard which follow.
- 9 Joseph O'Leary notes that in its reaction against Docetism, the early Church insisted on the reality of Christ's flesh and blood and on the physical reality of the resurrected body, and of the bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In his famous work, *Against Heresies* (V, 2, 2), Saint Irenaeus argued against those who wished to deny the carnality of Christ and, by implication, the salvation of human flesh: "But vain in every respect are they who despise the entire dispensation of God, and disallow the salvation of the flesh, and treat with contempt its regeneration, maintaining that it is not capable of incorruption. But if this indeed does not attain salvation, then neither did the Lord redeem us with His blood, nor is the cup of the Eucharist the communion of His blood, nor the bread which we break the communion of His body (1 Cor. 10:16). For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever else makes up the substance of man, such as the Word of God was actually made. By His own blood he redeemed us. ... He has acknowledged the cup (which is a part of the creation) as His own blood, from which He bedews our blood; and the bread (also a part of the creation) He has established as His own body, from which He gives increase to our bodies."
- 10 One still finds residual traces and hints in Teilhard of theodicy and, more specifically, of a Christocentric theology of fulfillment and sacrifice, especially in relation to the celebration of the Mass during times of war and tragic suffering. See here Joseph O'Leary's critical commentary on this complex link between the Eucharist and ritual blood sacrifice. "We do not know what aspects of the Eucharist go back to Jesus himself; all the New Testament accounts of its institution, as well as the eucharistic allusions in the stories of the multiplication of loaves and fishes, depend on the ritual as practised by Christians. If, as the majority of scholars hold, the Last Supper was not in fact a paschal meal, its amalgamation with the Pasch was a natural and enriching early Christian development. There is a pleasing modesty in the idea that Jesus's last meal was not a Pasch, and that his sharing of his body and blood avoided an immediate identification with sacrificial rituals. Within the New Testament, Hellenistic elements enrich the original Jewish basis, notably the Hellenistic ethics of friendship in John 15" [pointed out by Thomas Söding, in Van Belle 2007: 364] (O'Leary 2008a: 169–70). O'Leary goes on to suggest how research into early forms of sacrificial religion, often based on mystery nature rites, already reveals a rich body of interpretations and practices which defy any attempt to establish some kind of "essentialism" regarding the Eucharistic

origins. Accordingly, O’Leary warns against more common cultural forms of the fetishistic cult of blood sacrifice. Though O’Leary does not cite de Chardin, many of these observations are relevant to his considerations on the sacrificial role of the Mass (see King 2005: 96–7, 106–7). See also my critical analysis of the role of the Christian mythology of blood sacrifice in relation to war and political violence in “Myth and Martyrdom” and “The Triumph of Failure” in Kearney 2009, as well as Kearney 1979.

- 11 See Teilhard de Chardin, “The Spiritual Power of Matter” (1919), cited in King 2005: 129.
- 12 See the challenging recent work of Catherine Cornille (2008), Marianne Moyaert (2014), and Paul Ricoeur himself (1998). It is helpful to recall here Ricoeur’s inspiring notion of “eucharistic hospitality” developed in line with his concepts of “interconfessional hospitality” and “linguistic hospitality,” according to the hermeneutic model of translation. Ricoeur’s basic point is that a good translation must always respect a certain irreducible difference and otherness in the guest language, which can never be fully subsumed into the host language. Translation as a model for interfaith dialogue means what the Greek term originally said—*dia-legein*, welcoming the difference between host and guest as well as creating bridges and mediations. Complete fusion between religions or persons—or members of the Trinity—would be the end of hospitality. See my introduction to Ricoeur 2004 and my conclusion to *Anatheism* entitled “Welcoming Strange Gods” (Kearney 2010: 166–81).
- 13 The text of St Timothy’s canon is as follows: “If a catechumen child or even an adult person comes forward and, without evil intention, receives of the divine Gifts during the Holy Sacrifice, he should be baptized at once, for he was called [to do so] by the Lord.” Timothy of Alexandria flourished in the reign of Emperor Valens, about A.D. 372. He wrote the canons in the form of questions and answers, which are confirmed indefinitely by canon I of the 7th Ecumenical Council, but definitely by canon II of the 6th Ecumenical Council; and by virtue of this confirmation they acquired what in a way amounts to ecumenical force. They are to be found in the second volume of the *Pandects*, and in volume I of the *Conciliar Records*, p. 352 (<http://faculty.cua.edu/Pennington/OhmeGreekCanonLaw.htm>). I am grateful to my friend and colleague, John Manoussakis, for these references. See his forthcoming volume on ecumenical dialogue, *For the Unity of All: Contributions to the Theological Dialogue Between East and West* (Cascade Books, 2015).
- 14 A symbolic refiguring of this scene is powerfully captured in Andrei Rublev icon of the *Perichoresis*: the trinity of persons feasting around the Eucharistic chalice. See my reading of Rublev’s “perichoresis” as a hermeneutic refiguring of the Abrahamic Eucharist (Abraham and Sarah feasting with the three divine strangers) as a Trinitarian Eucharist (the three divine persons around the chalice of bread and wine) in *Anatheism* (Kearney 2010: 24ff) and also in “Eros, Diacritical Hermeneutics and the Maybe” (Kearney 2011). It is important, I suggest, to embrace a hospitable hermeneutic capable of reinterpreting and refiguring the Eucharistic event in terms of multiple scenes of feasting and sharing, bringing together, for example, the primal scenes of Abraham and the strangers in Genesis and the Jewish Passover/Seder with the Christian scenes of not only the Cross and Last Supper (where service and sharing precede sacrifice) but also Cana, the loaves and fishes, and Christ’s post-paschal Eucharistic hosting of the disciple-guests at Emmanus and on the shore of Galilee.

- 15 O'Leary goes on to make a very cogent case for a pluralist hermeneutics of the Eucharist, which I would endorse.
- 16 See James Carroll, "Who am I to Judge?," *The New Yorker*, December 2013. O'Leary anticipates Pope Francis' 2013 overture with a useful gloss on the connotations of Matthew 18:20 for a fraternal Eucharist open to creative and recreative "supplements" (O'Leary 2008a: 172). The openness to the possibility of Christic supplementarity in each instance of Eucharistic sharing may constitute a "semantic surplus" (Ricoeur) inviting endless hermeneutic artistry and acoustics. Christ's ways exceed the limits of any single ecclesiastical doctrine, which is why the Eucharist remains a sacred "mystery" and why the sacerdotal work of the priest needs to be complemented by the creative work of the poet. See here Sheila Gallagher's (2013) innovative experiments in Eucharistic art, Sheila Gallagher's *Ravishing Far Near* (New York: Dodge Gallery, 2013), with a catalog introduction by Richard Kearney.
- 17 See Maurice Merleau-Ponty on this idea of Eucharistic sensation: "Just as the sacrament not only symbolizes, in sensible species, an operation of Grace, but *is* also the real presence of God, which it causes to occupy a fragment of space and communicates to those who eat of the consecrated bread, provided that they are inwardly prepared, in the same way the sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world suggested to us from some point in space, and seized and acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form of communion" (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 246). See my commentary on this notion in *Anatheism* (Kearney 2010: 89–94); and also the cogent argument made by Joseph O'Leary for a Eucharistics of love and witness which obviates both a sacrificial fetishism of body and blood, on the one hand, and an essentialist metaphysics of substance on the other (O'Leary, 2008a).