

## Book Reviews

***The Dharma of Jesus: Interdisciplinary Essays in Memory of George Soares-Prabhu, SJ, Francis X. D'Sa, ed.*** pp. 482 + x, Price: Paperback Rs. 215 (\$ 15); Bound Rs. 230 (\$17); ***Published by:*** Institute for the Study of Religion, C/o De Nobili College, Pune 411 014 & Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, P.B. 70, Anand, Gujarat 388 001

George Soares-Prabhu, undoubtedly the most influential biblical scholar of India during the past quarter of a century, was an impassioned spokesman of contextual theologies. For him to do theology meant to contextualize one's faith. The context of the Indian theologian, according to him, was the 'Third-World situation of unimaginable poverty, the Asian situation of pluriform and increasingly competitive religiosity, and the specifically Indian situation of social discrimination based on hereditary caste.' He also believed that genuine theologizing must also be inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural. *The Dharma of Jesus* is a fitting tribute by friends and colleagues to the versatile personality of George Soares-Prabhu, whose dharma it was to discover the message of Jesus in the Indian context. The scholarly and inter-disciplinary essays in this volume are a pointer to his persistent attempt to employ the most diverse disciplines to aid his interpretation. Part one of the book contains mainly examples of biblical exegesis by friends and colleagues of George Soares-Prabhu, and part two deals with some of the themes that were dear to him as a theologian.

In his introductory article: "George M. Soares-Prabhu: A Theologian for our Times", Keith D'Souza has succeeded in highlighting the main strands of George Soares-Prabhu's thought. He considers him a liberationist exegete and biblical theologian in India and for India. Secondly, the article points out that for George, a liberationist reading of the bible is essentially a social reading. Another important contribution of George Soares-Prabhu, according to Keith, is his understanding of the concept of mission. George Soares-Prabhu has given us a much needed hermeneutic of biblical texts on mission, thus liberating it from its theological and historical burdens. Mission is Christian discipleship rather than missionary enterprise. Secondly, mission is neither ecclesiocentric nor christocentric but theocentric.

The liberationist reading of the Bible is exemplified by Samuel Rayan in his tribute to George Soares-Prabhu: "With us – with whom? – is God? Good News of God's Presence and Solidarity with the Oppressed." Written in his poetic style, this essay is a remarkable piece of exegesis and it should serve as a model for the social reading of the Bible. According to Rayan, Matthew's gospel presents Jesus' good news of God's presence and solidarity with us as his presence with the oppressed of every age in their life and death. Rayan's is a genuinely personal and committed reading of the Bible with great exegetical and theological acumen. Francis Pereira offers us another piece of exegesis, from the gospel of Luke, in his essay titled: "Jesus and the Good News of the Kingdom to the Poor (Lk 4:18ff, 43)." With his meticulous analysis he tells us who the poor in the gospel of Luke are. They are not merely the materially poor but those to whom Jesus preached the good news, the people who for the sake of the Kingdom of God do not place their trust or hope in any merely human or worldly resources as such, but trust and hope in God alone. The same theme of the poor is discussed from a different perspective by Yvon Ambroise

in his article: "The Empathy of God with the Poor." He analyses how we apply stereotypes to the poor without recognizing their inherent ability to transform themselves. This knowledge, according to him, is the essence of empowerment.

Another piece of exegesis is given by Fr. Scaria Kuthirakattel in his article: "Christ the Self-Emptying High Priest: The Meaning and Function of Heb 5:1-10." Here an attempt is made to establish similarities between the epistle to the Hebrews and the writings of George Soares-Prabhu. Scaria is of the opinion that just as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews was faced with a problem, the writings of George Soares-Prabhu, too, are charged with a profound multi-dimensional Christian concern: What does it mean to be a Christian in India? How should the Christian tradition be confronted with the contemporary Indian situation? From the writings of George Soares-Prabhu the author shows us how he answers these questions and the method he uses to answer them.

The article by Antony Da Silva: "Neither do I Condemn you: A Psychological Study of the Gospel Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery", and the one by Paul V. Parathazham: "Communal Stereotypes and Religiosity: An Empirical Study", are particularly relevant contributions because George Soares-Prabhu was one of the first to realize the importance of the social and anthropological coordinates of theology and the use of the methodology of the social sciences in the theologizing process. Walter Fernandes in his article: "Theologizing in Karnataka: Understanding the Background", offers us an excellent case study on the importance of analysing the social context as an essential pre-requisite for theologizing.

Coming to some of the important themes that emerge from George Soares-Prabhu's writings and how some of the contributions relate to them, we have first the critique of monarchy in Israel by Rui De Menezes in his essay: "Gone with the Whirlwind! Hoshea's Critique of the Monarchy." It is written as a tribute to George Soares-Prabhu who wrote repeatedly on the concept of authority as propounded by Jesus. The call to be prophets, another favourite theme of his, is taken up by Kurien Kunnumpuram who reflects on the prophetic function of the priest in India today in his article: "Priests as Prophets of the Lord" with some noteworthy practical conclusions regarding recruitment, formation and ministry of priests in India today. Another vital concern of George-Soarers Prabhu is addressed by Errol D'Lima in his essay: "The Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian", a reflection on a document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from the year 1990 regarding the vocation of the theologian. George Soares-Prabhu condemned the imposition of the dominant western culture upon others under the guise of internationalism. This essay emphasizes the legitimate freedom for theological discussion and rejects the idea that the theologian is a willing or subservient ally of the magisterium. It says that stifling theological freedom can be perilous for the church.

George Soares-Prabhu in many of his writings emphasized the social dimension of spirituality. Individual spirituality is good in so far as it leads to a social commitment and social transformation. This theme is taken up by the excellent essay of Rudolf Heredia: "The Need of a New Hermeneutic for the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola." He says that spirituality is the living out of the mission of faith. It calls for the transcending of the understanding of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as mere private exercises by a liberationist perspective and a new hermeneutic. It is imperative today because our

mission today, derived from a liberationist theological understanding, demands a social commitment. Such a mission needs an equally committed and conscious spirituality which the Exercises can provide.

Anand Amaladass' article: "Kavya as Theology: Aesthetic Experience as Quest for the Ultimate" is a fitting tribute to George Soares Prabhu, the aesthete and artist. Aesthetics has to do with the symbolic expression of reality from which theology could profit enormously. Anand Amaladass presents an Indian understanding of aesthetics as the symbolic expression of the experience of the mystery of being in the world, and asserts that it is a vehicle of theology. Art, according to him, is formative, liberative and transformative. Particularly enlightening is the section on humour and theology. One is reminded of Umberto Eco's bestseller *The Name of the Rose* and the dispute in a medieval monastery over whether Jesus ever laughed. The blind man Jorge sacrifices the life of several monks and finally the whole monastery so that a book of Aristotle on comedy doesn't come to light. "Laughter", he says, "is weakness, corruption, the foolishness of our flesh." Perhaps he betrays much of Christianity's attitude toward humour. George Gispert-Sauch's essay: "*Purusartha* and *Krathvartha*: Freedom and Structure in Ancient India" is a valuable addition to George Soares-Prabhu's own insight into this central facet of Indian culture on which he has reflected from the New Testament perspective. It attempts to give the original context which gave rise to the category of *Purusartha*. Raymond Panikkar's contribution: "The Power of Words" is his recognition of George Soares-Prabhu's appropriation of Indian culture in reading the Bible. Panikkar says that a truly cross-cultural theology often implies a radical mutation. He sees George Soares-Prabhu as one of those who have initiated this process by his use of indic words in the reading of Christian scripture. This he considers a revolutionary act.

Dharma was one of the favourite indic words of George Soares-Prabhu. Francis D'Sa, colleague and friend of George Soares-Prabhu, gives us an interpretation of it in his important essay: "Dharma of Jesus." He analyses the different aspects of the worlds of Hindu dharma and Christian dharma. Underlying these two worlds are two world-views, two myths, Samsara and Salvation History. In one, the cosmos is the locus of revelation and in the other, the historical Jesus. One is cosmocentric, the other anthropocentric. Values of the Christian dharma, freedom, fellowship, and justice will be perceived and understood by the other tradition differently. Religions and their world-views suffer from this inherent limitation. There is at the same time in the contemporary world, a gradual subordination of religion to a more overriding concern, namely, what it means to be human in the world, and a viewpoint that transcends both the cosmic and the anthropocentric perspectives. He calls it the secular perspective, the secular myth, and the cosmotheandric view point. It is in this context that one must articulate the "mythemes" contained in the myths of Samsara and Salvation History. Theology needs a different language. Expressions like the dharma of Jesus are but a beginning in this direction.

At the end of the book, there is a list of publications of George Soares-Prabhu. It will prove useful to all those who want to read more about the theology of George Soares-Prabhu. Unfortunately, one misses a feminine contributor and a feminist theological point of view, and secondly, the ecological concern which George Soares Prabhu increasingly shared towards the end of his life. A social reading of

the bible necessarily calls for these important elements. Not all the essays in the volume are of the same quality. In a collection where many perspectives and viewpoints are represented, this cannot be expected. Barring a few minor errors and omissions, this beautifully laid out book is a fitting tribute and a loving memorial to George Soares-Prabhu whose memory is ever fresh and ever challenging.

*Isaac Padinjarekuttu*

***The Church in India: In Search of a New Identity.*** Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ, Errol D' Lima SJ, Jacob Parappally MSFS, eds., Bangalore, NBCLC, 1997. pp. 408.

The papers collected in this volume were originally written for the 19th Annual Meeting of the *Indian Theological Association* held in Bangalore in May 1996. They have some sort of unity in so far as they are related to the theme of the Meeting: *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity*. These papers reflect three great concerns of Indian ecclesiology today: The Church's *Christian* identity, its *ecclesial* identity and its *Indian* identity.

Some papers deal with the *Christian* identity of the Church in India and show that it is rooted in Scripture and Tradition. A.R. Ceresko points out how Israel's search for identity in different historical situations can be a model for the Church in its search for a new identity. J. Pathrapankal discusses the understanding of the Church in the New Testament and its relevance for us in India today. In his paper, J. Kavunkal examines "the presumed identity and self-perception of the Church behind its missionary outreach down through the centuries, as there is a correlation between the model of the Church we hold and the way we approach mission" (p. 84). It is D. Valiath's contention that in the documents of Vatican II there is "a definite shift from essentialistic to a relational understanding of Christian identity" (p. 109).

Other papers are concerned about the Church's *ecclesial* identity. They deal with such topics as the autonomy of the Indian Church (K.Kunnumpuram), its prophetic mission (P. Mekkunel), the place and role of women in the Church (S. Balthazar), the sacramentality of the Church (G. van Leeuwen and F.X. D'Sa), the ecumenical dimension of the Indian Church and the Indian Church's communion with the universal Church (T. Kuriacose). In their own way, these papers shed light on different aspects of the *ecclesial* life of the Indian Church.

Yet other papers deal with the Church's *Indian* identity. Inculturation, inter-religious dialogue and commitment to justice and liberation are their main concerns. Thus Puthanangady invites the Church in India to redefine her identity in the multi-cultural context of this country. J. Kuttianimattathil asks the Church to journey together with other religious groups. P. Arockiadoss examines if the Church in India can become a people's movement. T.K. John describes the various images of the Christian, the people of our country have.

Included in the book are: the thought-provoking keynote address of Bishop Bosco Penha titled: "*Challenges Facing the Indian Church as She Enters the Third Millennium*," in which he argues that the *parish* is "the arena in which the challenges facing the

Indian Church are to be met as we enter the third millennium”(p.11); and the Final Statement of the 19th Annual Meeting of Indian Theological Association, which gives us a glimpse of the kind of thinking that emerged from the discussions at that meeting.

All in all, this volume is a rich mine of ecclesiological insights. A few lapses in editorial work and proof-reading slightly mar the text of the book, which has an excellent get-up. I have no hesitation in recommending it to all those who have the future of the Indian Church at heart.

*Kuruvilla Pandikattu, SJ*

***Interrelations and Interpretation: Philosophical reflections on science, religion and hermeneutics. Festschrift in honour of Richard De Smet, S.J. and Jean de Marneffe, S.J.,*** Job Kozhamthadam, S.J., ed., New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1997, pp. xx + 305, Rs. 300.00.

It is a pleasant task to review a work of joy and appreciation. It is a tribute in a bouquet of Essays. Assuredly, the Dean of Philosophy, Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, has done an excellent job.

The stock of this bouquet is made up of three elements: a succinct introduction of the Essays by the Editor; the late Richard De Smet paints a portrait of Jean de Marneffe in intellectual strokes; in contrast, Jean de Marneffe highlights the intellectual Richard as a friend of many and sundry: truth, Christ, students, poor and colleagues - in that order.

The Eleven Essays make a volume of rich variety. Their market value is clearly determined not by the fine international standard of binding and presentation, but, evidently, their inter-disciplinary nature. Integral reflection on science, religion and hermeneutics is the quest of the post-modern age. Rightly then *Interrelations and Interpretation* seem to be the strong strings that bind human quest to ultimate wholeness and meaning. From science to religion, to philosophy, to theological anthropology, to *Vedānta*, to Nyāya, to Lonergan are, indeed, a rich but scattered fare of interpretations are offered in this volume.

The inter-disciplinary nature of the attempts at interpretation serves to classify the independent essays as emanating from the existentialist concept of Time, the concerns of Science and Philosophy, Panikkarian perspective on Science, Philosophy and Theology, an attempt at christianizing Phenomenology, the Indian perspective of *Vedānta* and Nyāya

In “Lived Time” V.C.Thomas works on the existentialist concept that human experience of time is in terms of the unity of the retention of the past, the expectation of the future, and that both intersect in the present. Since self is prominent in existentialism, lived time is necessarily ego-centric. The quest is to know if it can be shared time. The essay could gain in insight if the phenomenon of the relational nature of human time and existence were analyzed.

Science itself is a difficult enterprise without concepts. Einstein’s contribution as highlighted by S. Azzopardi is that religion and science must examine their conceptual language with intellectual transparency, if they seek to be partners in dialogue. G. Karuvelil

maintains that, generally, the main tool used in the trade of philosophers is reason. He suggests that experience and language are two other resources in the modern philosophy of religion. He examines epistemic circularity and autonomous religious games as two sides of the same coin and contends that they undermine the role of reason in religion and lead to unacceptable forms of relativism. The earlier purpose and goal of epistemology may have been to “settle disputed questions”. Perhaps, that is a doubtful possibility in a world of diversity. Epistemology may seek to be content to keep open the channels of communication, to enter into dialogue amidst diversity. If J. Kozhamthadam’s conclusion, after arguing well the points of the Einstein-Bohr debate, is true, then the root of the inconclusiveness of that debate is the disagreement with respect to their philosophical commitment and understanding of the nature and goal of science. It is a clear case of antagonism between philosophies which spills over into antagonism between science and religion.

The Panikkarian perspective evident in the three essays of A. Pamplany, J. Parapally and F.X.D’sa tries to project the way antagonism leads to disharmony in the entire realm of relationships. They project a holistic vision of science, philosophy, and theology in dialogue. The starting point of the “Eco-Vision of Reality” is stated as “the drama of existence began as a cosmos of harmony and solidarity” (p.53). One wonders where it leaves all the recent theories about chaos to cosmos. The essay does analyze successfully the fragmentation and distortion in the vision of reality. J. Parapally explores the integral anthropology in Panikkar’s Cosmotheandric insight. Its integrity is realized in the radical relativity of all beings, that is, their interdependence. This conclusion from a theological viewpoint poses a challenge to philosophical anthropology. In “Re-Searching the Divine” with the Panikkar paradigm, F.X. D’sa searches the ontological foundation for authenticity as a search for the “whole” real. He interprets that the cosmic, the human, and the depth-dimension correspond to science, philosophy, and theology. It is evident that agreement and dialogue are often possible at the ontological level. The problems of fragmentation, independence, inauthenticity, antagonism crop up at the ontic level of human interactions in the world. The essays are valuable attempts at interpreting the ideal without prejudicing the real.

The interpretation of Husserl’s Thought of transcendental phenomenology in a sectarian way is a worthy attempt. However, it seems to violate the quest of the Father of Phenomenology for a philosophy as a “rigorous science” from an ethico-religious point of view of life regulated by pure rational norms.

In the Vedanta view one becomes what one understands. Understanding is one’s becoming non-dual. It is the foundational concept in S. Anand’s hermeneutics which starts from the Brahma-Sutra and is elucidated by the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Such an interpretation is undertaken to highlight the parameters of dialogue among peoples of different religious persuasions. The Indian perspective is further enhanced by J. Vattanky’s quest to create a theory of interpretation based on the Nyaya contributions to the philosophy of *Śabda* as a means of valid verbal knowledge. Within this theory he focusses on the signifiatory function of the denotative (*śakti*) or implication (*lakṣana*). These functions are in the form of relations that exist between words and their meanings.

In Lonergan's *Insight*, understanding and interpretation is beset by two problems: the conflict of interpretations, and the relativity of interpretations to audiences. I.V. Coelho has limited himself to the former. Lonergan's approach is that correct interpretation depends on the attainment of a universal viewpoint which can be gained by adequate knowledge of the self and not merely of ontic traditions.

The value of the *Festschrift* for the scholarly reader is enhanced by a select Bibliography of the writings of Richard De Smet, SJ and Jean de Marneffe, SJ, and an Index at the end.

*Rosario Rocha, SJ*

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