

Fundamentalism: Biblical Perspectives

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Abstract: Tracing the roots and trends of fundamentalism and its tinges in the Bible, the author asks if the Catholic Church is an agent and perpetrator of fundamentalism. The author notes that in course of the New Testament era biases and prejudices become part of the New Testament. This is particularly prominent in Matthew and John. In the final part of the essay some pertinent, practical insights are offered.

Keywords: fundamentalism in the Bible, fundamentalism in the Church, biblical interpretation, foundational experience, Abba experience.

This essay on Fundamentalism from Biblical Perspectives is developed in three parts. First we try to understand the meaning and different nuances of fundamentalism in so far as the Bible is concerned. Secondly, we ask: Is there fundamentalism of a theological and/or religious nature in the Bible? Finally, what are the implications and imperatives of biblical fundamentalism?

I Tracing the Roots and Trends

In the first part of the article an earnest attempt is made to answer the following questions. (A) What is meant by the term, fundamentalism? What are its synonyms and antonyms? (B) Do we have tinges and traces of fundamentalism in the Bible? (C) Was the Catholic Church, especially its hierarchy, an agent and perpetrator of fundamentalism in its understanding of the Bible and in its application of punitive measures against scientists and biblical scholars? (D) What is meant by fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible in the official teaching of the Catholic Church (1993)?

A) Terminological Clarification

The abstract noun, fundamentalism, ultimately derived from the root *fundo -are* (Latin) meaning (1) to lay the foundation of, to found; (2) to make firm, to strengthen.¹ The second meaning is obviously more applicable in the context of our discussion than the first.

‘Fundamentalism’ is in fact used in religious parlance in a technical and more nuanced sense. It may be defined as “the strict maintenance of traditional orthodox religious beliefs or doctrines; especially belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and literal acceptance of the creeds as fundamentals of Protestant Christianity.”² More elaborately, it is a “conservative movement in American Protestantism arising out of the millenarian movement of the 19th century and emphasizing as fundamental to Christianity the literal interpretation and absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures, the imminent and physical second coming of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Birth, Resurrection, and Atonement.”³ Thus, as a matter of fact, the roots of fundamentalism are found in the history of the American millenarian movement.

In the 20th century a new dimension is added: it underscores the conservative and orthodox religious convictions and views which vehemently oppose modernist tendencies in American religious and secular life.⁴ Conservative views on the role of women, on the family and on questions related to sexuality are typical of them. They also claim that “the signs of the times indicate that within a few years the dramatic events surrounding the return of Christ will bring the present era to a violent end.”⁵ Since 1979 fundamentalists have emerged as a strong force to be reckoned with in American politics.⁶ They are on the whole very sympathetic to the State of Israel, “whose existence is viewed as the fulfillment of prophecy.”⁷ Some of the Presidential candidates of USA in the recent past have played the fundamentalist card to win votes.

‘Fundamentalism’ is, in fact, a sub-species of evangelism,⁸ and its adherents “consider it a chief Christian duty to combat uncompromisingly ‘modernist’ theology and certain secularizing cultural trends. Organized militancy is the feature that most clearly distinguishes fundamentalists from other evangelicals.”⁹ “Soul winning and

church growth”¹⁰ is their first and foremost concern. They have also clearly drawn “strict lines of personal separation from worldliness. Not only do they forbid drinking, smoking, card playing, theater attendance, and dancing, as do many evangelicals, but they often also have made strict rules against fashion trends: slacks for women, long hair, beards or mustaches for men, flared pants, and wire-rimmed glasses.”¹¹

Fundamentalism is closely linked with Pentecostal¹² and charismatic Christianity which “centers on the emotional, non-rational, mystical, and supernatural: miracles, signs, wonders, and ‘the gifts of the Spirit’ (*charismata*), especially ‘speaking in tongues’ (*glossalia*), faith healing, and casting out of ‘demons’ (exorcism). Supreme importance is attached to the subjective religious experience of being filled with or possessed by the Holy Spirit.”¹³

Fundamentalists just as avowed charismatics are firmly convinced of and strongly advocate the apocalyptic beliefs, thought-patterns and worldviews with a clear emphasis on dualism.¹⁴ Both champion literal interpretation of the Bible and exhibit strong aggressive tendencies against people of other faiths.

Two main antonyms of fundamentalism are ‘liberalism’ and ‘modernism’. The term liberalism was employed in the nineteenth century to designate “the holding of liberal opinions in politics or theology.”¹⁵ Gradually “this viewpoint changed with the broader adoption by theologians of opinions more or less critical of received dogma or traditional interpretation of Scripture.”¹⁶ The second antonym, ‘modernism’ in general stands for a movement towards modifying traditional beliefs and doctrines in accordance with modern ideas, especially in the Roman Catholic Church in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁷ In the stricter sense, however, it indicates a type of ‘progressive’ theological opinion to be found in the Roman Catholic Church during the pontificates of Leo XIII and Pius X, and many would now consider the usage of the word best limited to this.¹⁸

Summing up: This brief terminological study indicates that fundamentalism and its antonyms liberalism and modernism are, in the strict sense, limited primarily to Christianity during the last two centuries. However, as it found, though in a broader, wider sense, also in

other religions? Or, in other words, is fundamentalism (of course, in the wider sense) a common phenomenon in religions as a whole? Secondly, can one trace both liberalism and fundamentalism in the Bible itself, though not in the strict but in the broader sense?

B) Tinges of Fundamentalism in the Bible

We begin with the first question: Are liberalism and fundamentalism a common phenomenon in religions as such? It is commonly held by experts in sociology of religion that in the emergence of religions there are two phases: the unusual religious experience (spontaneous, creative) of extraordinary people (= the founders of religions) and the translation and transformation of their experiences and insights into institutional structures. This transition from stage one to stage two Max Weber calls the routinization of charisma.¹⁹ In this process ambiguities and conflicts are inevitable. Thomas F. O'Dea has classified these ambiguities and conflicts in terms of five dilemmas, namely, the dilemma of mixed motivation; the symbolic dilemma: objectification versus alienation; the dilemma of administrative order: elaboration versus effectiveness; the dilemma of delimitation: concrete definition versus substitution of letter for spirit; and the dilemma of power: conversion versus coercion.²⁰ It is evident from these five-fold dilemmas that in the process of the routinization of charisma, forces and structures of institutionalization tend to constrain, delimit, destroy and eliminate the originary charismatic experience and its transforming impulses.²¹

Now we focus on the second question: Are there ambiguities and conflicts between charisma and institutionalization in the Bible? The Bible basically contains two originary, peak experiences of God and of humans. (1) Yahweh initiated the process of liberating Israel from a fundamentalism of complex nature, namely, economic-political-military. In this process the Israelites experienced Yahweh as their Lord and Liberator in the event of the Exodus, and they in turn were summoned to form a community of sisters and brothers in intimacy and mutual sharing in contrast with the neighbouring exploitative, oppressive States. The rest of the OT is in fact the elaboration, innovation and maintenance of these liberative impulses initiated by Yahweh on the one hand and its delimitation,

coercion and suppression on the other. In the course of the development of the Jewish religion one notices the gradual growth of an anti-Gentile bias, particularly in deutero-Isaiah. (2) Faced with a fundamentalism of religious, socio-economic and political nature Jesus undergoes a profound personal experience of God as unconditional love (= *Abba*) and humans as his sisters and brothers. Confronted with opposition from and rejection by the establishment of his time in accepting and respecting the impulses of this deep experience of God, Jesus gives birth to a contrast community whose ultimate goal is accepting God as *Abba* and humans as sisters and brothers. The NT primarily narrates this story and its implications, ramifications, delimitations and attempts at alienation. In the formative stage of the NT one encounters anti-Jewish bias as well, notably in Matthew and John.

As is clear from the preceding paragraph both these experiences (of the OT as well as the NT) and their routinization have very similar features: (a) the context and the antecedent conditions of these profound experiences are rooted in a multi-faceted fundamentalism; (b) these deep experiences have two dimensions, namely, relation with God (= vertical dimension) and relation with humans (= horizontal dimension); (c) the tendency to delimit, subdue the liberative impulses is indeed fundamentalism in the broader sense; and (d) both in the OT as well as in the NT bias and prejudices develop against other religious traditions and their peoples which certainly manifest an aggressive character and denote fundamentalist features.[Both these peak, liberating experiences and their significance, implications and imperatives will be treated rather extensively in the second and third part of this essay].

C) The Catholic Church:

An Agent and Perpetrator of Fundamentalism?

Has the Catholic Church stood for and/or manifested fundamentalist features and tendencies in the course of history? Here no attempt is made to offer an in-depth and systematic survey but only a few salient and biblically significant aspects are mentioned.

1) General Observations

a) A perusal of the NT as a whole indicates that although there is a tendency to routinize the originary, creative, charismatic experience of Jesus (for instance by establishing the three-tier ministries of bishop-priest-deacon in the Pastorals) the originary experience of Jesus is not unduly restricted or subdued by the whole of the NT, but allowed to grow, take root and flower.

b) The same perspectives and tendencies, notably committed faith and self-giving brotherly/sisterly love and human concern, were characteristic of the early Church until the Constantinian era. However, a reversal occurs with Constantine who promulgated Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire; he also granted bishops honours, privileges and powers equal to the status of Roman Senators;²² and, in addition, “they were permitted to set up courts of arbitration, even in civil matters, and their judgment was definitive (i.e., against which no appeal).”²³ It is interesting to note that most of the episcopal vestments were regalia worn by the Roman princes.²⁴ Finally, most dangerous “was the acceptance of an ecclesiastical structure, akin to that of the State, by which more a discontinuity than continuity with Jesus’ prophetic, charismatic movement was being actualized.”²⁵

c) This reversal affected the innermost being of the Church adversely: (i) As the Church became an agent, collaborator and instrument of the Roman empire, the institutional dimension was unduly highlighted in such a way that the experiential, mystical dimension steadily eroded. This process of institutionalization of the Church attains its zenith in Vatican I (1870) with the solemn definition of the primacy and the infallibility of the Pope. (ii) Jesus’ ministry, in contrast, had an unequivocal thrust: compassionate and wholehearted identification with the oppressed on the one hand and decisive and never-compromising confrontation of the oppressive establishment on the other.²⁶ The high-powered institutionalization of the Church obviously paid lip-service to this basic thrust of Jesus’ mission.

d) As a result administrative efficiency, substituting the letter for the spirit, recourse to coercion rather than conversion — all char-

acteristic features of secular administration — frequently became the *modus operandi* of the Catholic Church as well. This *modus operandi* seems to have been the underlying principle in the Church's administrative measures in dealing with some of the scientists and biblical scholars. We shall consider two typical examples:

2) Punitive Measures against Some Scientitists and Biblical Scholars

a) Galileo Galilei (15.02.1564-08.01.1642), mathematician, astronomer and physicist, espoused the Copernican theory that the planets revolve around the Sun. This conflicted with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church because in the eyes of the ecclesiastical authorities *the Copernican theory contradicted the Scriptures*. Aristotelian professors with vested interests with the wholehearted cooperation of the Dominican preachers managed to fulminate against the “impiety” of Galileo and diabolically, secretly, engineered to denounce him to the Inquisition for his “blasphemous utterances,” which they said, he had freely invented.

Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, the chief theologian of the Church, was in no mood to appreciate the importance of Galileo's scientific views, but “clung to the time-honoured belief that mathematical hypotheses have nothing to do with physical reality. He only saw the danger of a scandal, which might undermine Catholicity in its fight with Protestantism.”²⁷ So he took the firm step of having Copernicanism declared “false and erroneous and the book of Copernicus suspended by the congregation of the Index.”²⁸

Galileo thirsting for knowledge and hungering for truth sought permission from the Pope to elaborate on both Ptolemaic and Copernican systems and the Pope granted the permission in 1624 “as long as he discussed them noncommittally and came to the conclusion dictated to him in advance by the pontiff — that is, that man cannot presume to know how the world is really made because God could have brought about the same effects in ways unimagined by him, and he must not restrict God's omnipotence.”²⁹

Galileo's publication of the Copernican views, indeed a classic in Italian literature as well, was evaluated most dangerous by the Jesuits who held that it could have “worse consequences on the es-

tablished teaching of the Church than Luther and Calvin put together.”³⁰ The Pope ordered a prosecution and on June 21, 1633, the ecclesiastical authorities held him guilty of having “held and taught” the Copernican doctrine and was ordered to recant it. Galileo recited a formula in which he “abjured, cursed and detested” his past errors.³¹ He was mercilessly condemned to the dungeon of the Inquisition.

Alas, it was only in 1992 that the official Church formally acknowledged its error in condemning Galileo. Although 359 years later, Pope John Paul II had the ethical integrity and spiritual strength to acknowledge the error.

b) Richard Simon (13.05.1638-11.04.1712), a French biblical critic, whose clear vision and accurate formulation of biblical problems and especially his insistence on the historico-critical method pioneered modern biblical study. He also faced a situation very similar to that of Galileo.

Richard Simon’s *Critical History of the Old Testament* (1678) burst like a bomb into a world which had come to accept the Bible as God’s sacred, inerrant, practically dictated word. This together with his equally ‘critical’ histories of the New Testament text (1689), of its versions (1690), and of the commentaries of it (1693), all leading up to his annotated ‘literal’ translation of the New Testament itself (1702), makes him the ‘direct founder of the historical-critical study of the Bible’, and the ‘founder of the science of New Testament introduction’.

But he paid dearly for this honour. Immense learning (he was the leading Hebraist of his day), incredible industry, and even a partisan loyalty to Roman Catholic theology (for his critical study of the Bible was undertaken to undermine Protestant faith in *sola scriptura*) could not save him from expulsion from the Oratorians, nor his books from being placed on the Index. The rotund and pious obscurantism of Boussuet (the architect of his condemnation) triumphed, as such obscurantism usually does in the short run; and the Roman Catholic Church retired from the field of serious biblical scholarship for the next three hundred years.³²

3) Catholic Church: Champion of Orthodoxy and Tradition

Because of the traumatic shock produced by the Reformation and the heady excitement caused by the Renaissance the Catholic

Church was undergoing multifaceted crises and was obsessed with intensive preoccupation from the 16th to mid-20th century. In her earnest attempt to protect and safeguard her faithful she heavily relied on rigid authoritarian ecclesiastical tradition and employed strict juridical, legal measures; in contrast, in her attitude to enemies, especially Protestants, she was not only defensive but also obsessively aggressive.³³ In such an ethos and mental frame she miserably failed on many counts: instead of being sensitive to the signs of the times she became an inward looking, conservative, legalistic body; instead of listening to and understanding what biblical scholars, scientists and philosophers had to say she frequently began to dictate to them; instead of being an agent and catalyst of innovation and transformation she became an agent and source of oppression; and, above all, instead of being a forward-looking community ushering in the mission and vision of Jesus³⁴ she became a backward-looking, tradition-bound institution.³⁵

It is in such a context that the Catholic Church closed its doors to the critical approach to and methods of understanding and interpreting the Bible while the Protestant churches freed from an unenlightened ecclesiastical control, rooted in their *sola scriptura* doctrinal tenet and fired with evangelical zeal judiciously employed various critical methods and produced a scholarly biblical literature. It was only in 1943 that Pope Pius XII in the Encyclical Letter *Divino Afflante Spiritu* allowed a cautious use of critical methods in the study of the OT. It is instructive to note that it was neither on the initiative of the hierarchy nor on the recommendation of a biblical body or institute that the Pope issued this encyclical but in response to a crying request from a committed Italian priest with genuine pastoral concern.³⁶ Again, it is on the initiative of the Biblical Commission that *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* (1964) endorsed the judicious use of critical methods for the NT.³⁷ The latest document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993), is also the result of the collective effort of the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

Summing up this section: we began by posing the question whether the Catholic Church is an agent and perpetrator of fundamentalism (of course understood in the broader sense)? It is left to the discerning ability and ingenuity of each reader to elicit an appropriate, objective answer.

D) The Fundamentalist Interpretation of the Bible

The document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993), briefly discusses and critically evaluates 'Fundamentalist Interpretation' of the Bible. We have briefly touched upon it in section A under the title, 'Terminological Clarification'. Therefore we shall not repeat those aspects that were already treated in A.

1) The Basic Principle: "Bible, being the Word of God, inspired and free from error, should be read and interpreted literally in all its details. But by 'literal interpretation' it understands a naively literalist interpretation."³⁸ Therefore, no scientific method currently used in interpreting the Bible whether historico-critical, literary, socio-scientific, or hermeneutical, would be acceptable to them. Moreover, they uphold such an understanding of the Word of God and of inspiration and inerrancy that the Bible is so to say dictated by God. As a consequence, there is no room for human contribution at any stage in the formation of the Bible.

2) Its Origin and Main Doctrinal Tenets: Fundamentalism arose as a reaction to liberal Protestantism. "The actual term 'fundamentalist' is connected directly with the American Biblical Congress held at Niagara, New York, in 1895. At this meeting, conservative Protestant exegetes defined 'five points of fundamentalism'," ³⁹ as mentioned above in A. It demands of its adherents blind and unshakeable acceptance of these doctrines "as the only source of teaching for Christian life and salvation",⁴⁰ with no room whatever for critical questions, doubts or ambivalence. In other words, it "actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide."⁴¹

3) Its View on Revelation and Church: "Refusing to take into account the historical character of biblical revelation, it makes itself incapable of accepting the full truth of the Incarnation itself. As regards relationships with God, fundamentalism seeks to escape any closeness of the divine and the human."⁴² Because of its attachment to the principle, *sola scriptura*, it does not recognize any relation of the Scripture with the Church whether with regard to the origin, formation or interpretative role. It advocates some sort of a private interpretation and manifests an anti-Church bias. It does not accord

due importance to the creeds, the doctrines and liturgical practices which have become part of the Church's tradition.⁴³

4) Pastoral Consequences: (a) By accepting as really true the outdated cosmology found in the Bible it blocks dialogue with the present enlightened, post-Einsteinian world; and by non-critical reading of certain texts it breeds and promotes biases and prejudices — for instance, racism. (b) It fosters a literal reading of the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life and induces an attitude among the adherents that the Bible provides answers to every question and solution to every problem.⁴⁴

II Theological Considerations

Is there an interplay of liberative impulses and fundamentalist traits in the Bible? The formative stages of the Hebrew Bible are spread over many centuries (from c. 1200 B.C.E. to 90 C.E.).⁴⁵ “The printed copies of the Hebrew Bible used by readers today, either in the original language or in a modern translation, are the end product of a complex literary process reaching over more than three thousand years.”⁴⁶ Given these complex and intricate stages in the formation of the OT, one may rightly pose the question: When one group of OT books is compared with another group, does one come across ‘theological fundamentalism’, namely, supplementing the original liberative theological perspectives with those that emphasize fundamentalist features? Further, does the Hebrew Bible clearly exhibit bias and prejudices against other religious traditions and their peoples? Secondly, is there an interplay of liberative impulses and ‘theological fundamentalism’ in the NT? Does the NT manifest religious fundamentalism against other religious traditions and their peoples?

A) A Glance at the Old Testament

The centre of the Jewish religion and the core of the Jewish faith are one and the same, namely, Israel's experience of Yahweh as the Lord and Liberator and themselves as sisters-brothers to one another. This basic experience is cemented and ratified in and through the covenant. It is from this experience-based and formally ratified covenantal relation that Israel looks back to the history of their fa-

thers and mothers (Gen 12-50) and to the origin of the human race and of the cosmos (Gen 1-11). Again, it is from this very experience and relation that Israel looks forward to the events that follow and the history that is shaped. Any serious deviation from this basic, constitutive experience and ratified covenantal relation one would rightly consider ‘theological fundamentalism’ and/or ‘religious fundamentalism’, depending on the context and content. In this essay we focus on the core of Jewish faith (exodus and covenant) and its relation to the events that follow in course of the subsequent centuries.

1) The Exodus and the Covenant

“Israel did not begin as a book-oriented people, nor was its religion a book-based religion until toward the end of the biblical period.”⁴⁷ Its origin and religious convictions are in fact rooted in a multi-dimensional religious experience and it is precisely this experience that has shaped and continues to shape and sustain their faith. The written text is only a coded, literary expression of the experience. The experience is indeed real and communitarian too; and it is based on a historical event although some of the details of this event are subject to different historical assessment,⁴⁸ theological interpretation and political application too.⁴⁹

In situating Exodus within the context of the Pentateuch one notices two striking, significant literary differences. First, in the ancestor traditions the predominant sources were J and E whereas in Exodus through Numbers it is P: in fact a fifteen fold increase of P; and, second, with regard to the literary type: the great majority of the ancestor traditions were sagas whereas in Exodus through Numbers we find mostly laws, regulations and poems.⁵⁰ Moreover, one notices a radical shift in the theological axis too: for the first time, God enters into the lives of his people in a very tangible and passionately committed way — he painfully hears the existential groaning and heart-piercing cry of his people and he makes a firm decision to put an end to their unjust suffering (Ex 2:23-25; 3:7-9). In carrying out this design he has a deeper purpose: for the first time he reveals himself as their Lord, and they are his people. This is most beautifully (and artistically too) brought out by the Priestly author in

Ex 6:2-8 offering a theological synthesis of Yahweh's intervention for Israel.⁵¹ In this text the Lordship of Yahweh and the brotherhood/sisterhood of Israelites stand out most prominently.

In executing the liberation of Israel Yahweh identifies himself with Israel in such a way that their cause becomes his cause, their suffering his suffering and their victorious liberation his victorious liberation. In no other section of the OT do we find such a deep sense of oneness between God and his people as in the saving event of the exodus.

In sum, the Exodus has a religious thesis: "There is *one* God, he has trained *one* people and given this people *one* country; this God is Yahweh, this people is Israel and this country is the Holy Land."⁵²

The theology of the covenant, in fact, spells out the implications and imperatives of the theology of one God, one people and one country. As to the exact pattern on which the covenant of Ex 19-31 is modelled remains an unresolved issue.⁵³ From the socio-historical perspective covenant is a way of symbolizing the ground and origin of the proper ordering of Israel's communal life. It was also a religio-political reality in the sense of a political affirmation of Israel's self-determination and a religious identification of a harmonious co-existence of various tribes under one religious banner.

Finally, and most importantly too, it is this twin, interrelated event of exodus-covenant that forms the cornerstone of Israel's socio-religious identity; it is celebrated most solemnly in the feast of the Passover; it blossoms in her faith and life, and its infringement is censured in the rest of the OT, especially in the prophetic literature and the Psalms.

2) Obstacles to the Theology of Exodus and Covenant

In course of time the liberative impulses ushered in by the theology of the exodus and the covenant undergoes delimitation. The code of the covenant authorizes the existence of a large number of sanctuaries (Ex 20:24) whereas Deuteronomy imposes the law that there shall be only one place of worship (Deut 12:2-12). This cen-

tralization in its turn imposes modification on the ancient rules governing sacrifices, tithes and festivals.

Furthermore, once Israel had settled down in Palestine Philistine expansion threatened its very existence; as a result a monarchy became a necessity. "Saul (c. 1030) first appears as one of the judges, but his recognition by all the tribes invests him with a wider and lasting authority: monarchy has begun."⁵⁴ With David, Saul's successor, the external forces are brought to their boundaries; but with his son Solomon began "an age of conservatism, organization and (most significantly) of exploitation. This last aggravated the existing hostility between north and south, and when Solomon died, in 931, the kingdom split into two: to the political secession of the northern tribes was added religious schism."⁵⁵ Thus the theology of one people, one country is thrown into the limbo.

3) Prophetic Attempt to Reinstate the Exodus-Covenant Theology

With the divided kingdom the internal frictions and confrontations of socio-political and religious nature were on the increase and foreign aggressions and occupations (Assyria, Babylon) depleted and washed away the main theological thrust of exodus-covenant.⁵⁶ In this context to reinvigorate Yahweh's original design and to challenge the institutional authority (= kings and priests) Yahweh calls Prophets, charismatic leaders, for a threefold dharma: a political dharma, a dharma of justice and a dharma of conflict.⁵⁷

4) The Subversion in Chronicles

With the edict of Cyrus in 538 B.C.E. under the influence of the scribe Ezra, the representative for Jewish affairs at the Persian court and Nehemiah, the cupbearer to Artaxerxes, the reorganization of the restored Israel began. According to the reforms introduced by Ezra and Nehemiah there were two walls of separation: the wall built around the city of Jerusalem and the 'theological wall' of religious legislation by which hatred and bitterness between the Samaritans and the returned Jews were instilled and fostered. The Temple was rebuilt and the solemn worship in it began with pomp and zeal.

The Chronicles were composed around 300 B.C.E. with a carefully planned selective process. Although the Chronicles narrate more or less the same events as in 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings, by addition, subtraction and selection it created a 'blind and limping' theology. In fact, there is hardly any trace of the exodus-covenant theology in these two books. In contrast the ideal community is the restored community gathered around the Temple and obedient to the Law — a realization of the ideal God-governed society. Indeed a subversion of the exodus-covenant theology!

5) Religious Fundamentalism on the March

The early Jewish faith in one God and the injunction not to worship other gods presuppose their existence. It is during the Babylonian exile that the monotheistic faith emerges as the faith of the whole Jewish community. It is most accentuated in deutero-Isaiah; and among various texts Is 44:9-20 is the most poignant and stinging. It contains a threefold attack: makers of idols are engaged in useless activities, idols themselves are fashioned from wood or metal and the worshippers gain nothing by such worship.

G.M. Soares-Prabhu rightly points out that the Isaian text presupposes a mistaken understanding of idolatry for it is not the idol that is worshipped but the deity whose presence is mediated in and through the idol. Secondly, the text of Isaiah presupposes a nationalist monotheism for if there is only one God he/she should not be the God of the Jews alone but of all humans. Finally, it projects the biblical worldviews and anthropology on to a religion that has different worldviews and anthropology.⁵⁸ In fact, monotheism "is the projection of the human individuality into the cosmic sphere, the shaping of 'god' to the image of man."⁵⁹

Summing up our findings we can say that the exodus-covenant theology and that of the Prophets enhance liberative impulses whereas the books of Chronicles manifest features of 'theological fundamentalism' and deutero-Isaiah in certain texts champion the cause of 'religious fundamentalism'.

B) A Glimpse at the New Testament

In this section we very briefly deal with the liberative impulses in the NT and certain signs of 'theological' and 'religious' fundamentalism.

1) Jesus' Foundational Experience and Its Expression

Just as in the situation of Exodus Jesus too experienced a multi-faceted fundamentalism: the rigorous legalism of the religious establishment, socio-economic oppression by the rich and powerful, and political exploitation by the Romans.⁶⁰ It is in such a context that Jesus made a fundamental option to follow the summons of John the Baptist and underwent his baptism. But this event occasions a theophany in which he experienced God as *Abba* (= unconditional love). The experience of love causes a transformation in such a way that he feels absolute internal freedom and the ability to resist any external pressures.⁶¹

It was this foundational experience of God that enabled Jesus to identify himself with the oppressed ones on the one hand and challenge the oppressive forces (whatever be the nature of the oppression) on the other. This gives birth to a contrast community or the Jesus' movement. Thus he is able to free himself from family bonds and ties, from the mammon of riches, and from the craze for position and power. He lives a life of an itinerant charismatic preacher with nowhere to lay his head but enjoying maximum freedom. He also challenges the religious authorities for their inhuman purity laws and rigorism, the rich for their strong attachment to wealth and exploitative tendencies, and the political power in an indirect manner.

It is this twofold liberative experiences that Jesus bequathed to the apostles who after being encountered by the risen Jesus and commissioned by him were able to embark on the same track just as Jesus did. This is what the Church was mandated to carry on as well.

2) Obstacles on the Way

As the Church spreads liberating impulses are replaced by suffocating tendencies. For instance, sexist and class biases appear in the household codes of the deuterio-Pauline Letters (Col 3:18-4:1;

Eph 5:21-6:9) and of the First Letter of Peter (1 Peter 2:13-3:12), which urge the submission of wives to their husbands, of children to their parents and of slaves to their masters — thereby endorsing the class- and male-biased household regulations of contemporary upper class Hellenistic society and legitimizing them.

3) Emergence of Religious Fundamentalism

In the Gospels of Matthew and John one does find anti-Jewish biases which do not go back to Jesus but stem from the redactional activity of the evangelists. John was written around 90 C.E. when after the Assembly at Jamnia Jews had definitively declared that anyone who confesses faith in Jesus would be expelled from the synagogue. It is such a polemical context that occasioned the bitter confrontation between the Jews and Jesus as narrated in Jn 8:39-59. Likewise, the depiction of the Pharisees as theologically blind whereas the blind man healed by Jesus as one who has theological insights (9:1-41) is another biased scene. Finally, the trial of Jesus before Pilate (18:28-19:16a) in which Pilate wholeheartedly wants to free Jesus while the Jews adamantly clamours for his condemnation is more an expression of anti-Jewish bias than historical fact.

The Gospel according to Matthew (written around 80-85) tries to defend that Jesus is the new Moses and the Church is the new Israel — a theologically polemical view. The antitheses in Mt 5:21-48 and the subtle attack on Jewish piety in 6:1-18 are the biased views of the evangelist. The anti-Jewish bias climaxes in Mt 23 where the refrain (“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...”) occurs seven times (symbolic number!) seals and cements Matthew’s anti-Jewish bias — it is indeed religious fundamentalism.

In sum, one does notice that in course of the NT era biases and prejudices become part of the NT. This is particularly prominent in Matthew and John.

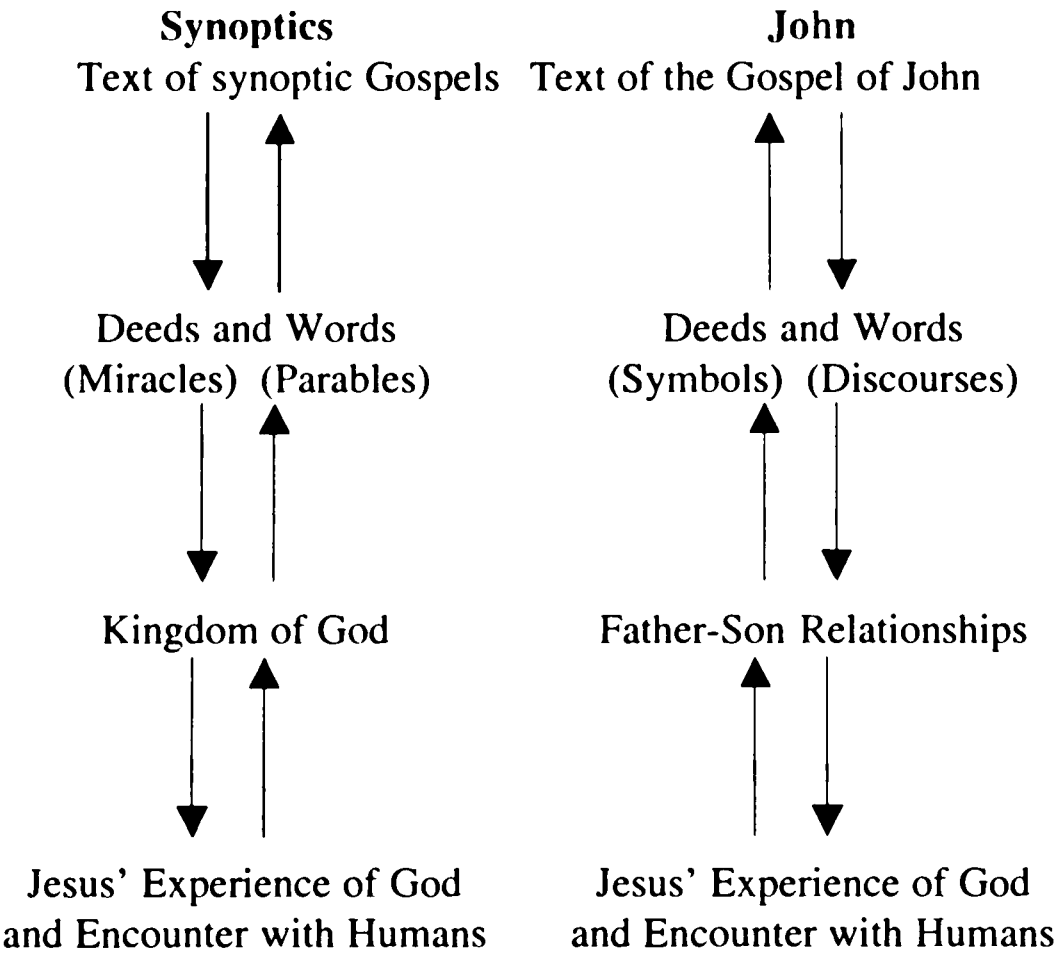
III Implications and Impulses

In the final and concluding part of the essay some pertinent, practical insights are suggested. They are from different perspectives and can help us to become aware of and then eliminate theological and religious fundamentalism.

1) The Bible uses primarily metaphorical language with rich symbols and images. One should become sensitive to this feature of the Bible and try to understand what is communicated rather than read into it what one has in mind, whether consciously or subconsciously. Secondly, Bible uses words (not terms) which are evocative rather than offer precise definitions.

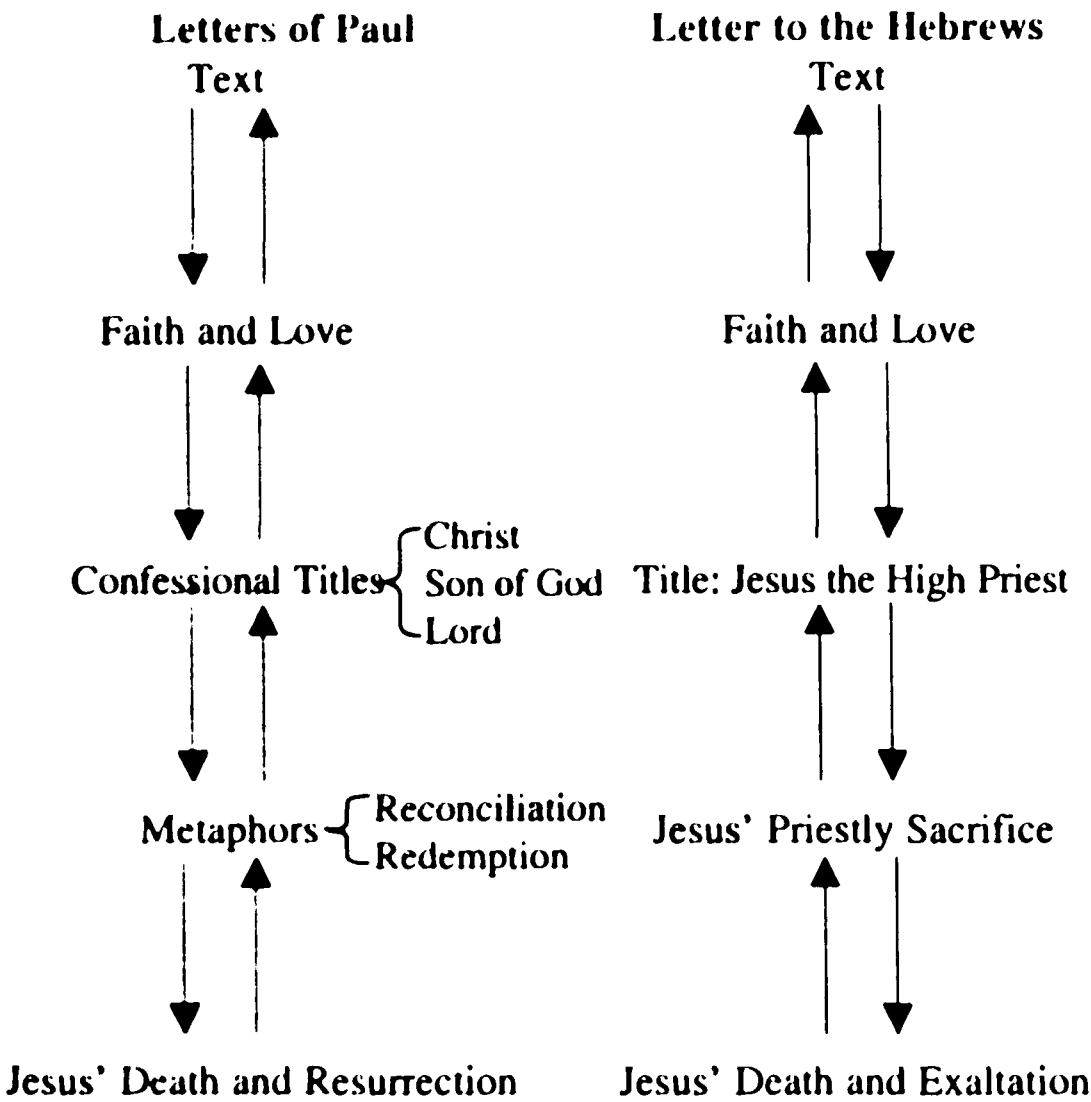
2) The literary types that are used in the Bible should be respected. One has to understand (not merely know) various literary genres employed and enter into the thought-patterns of those centuries.

Figure 1

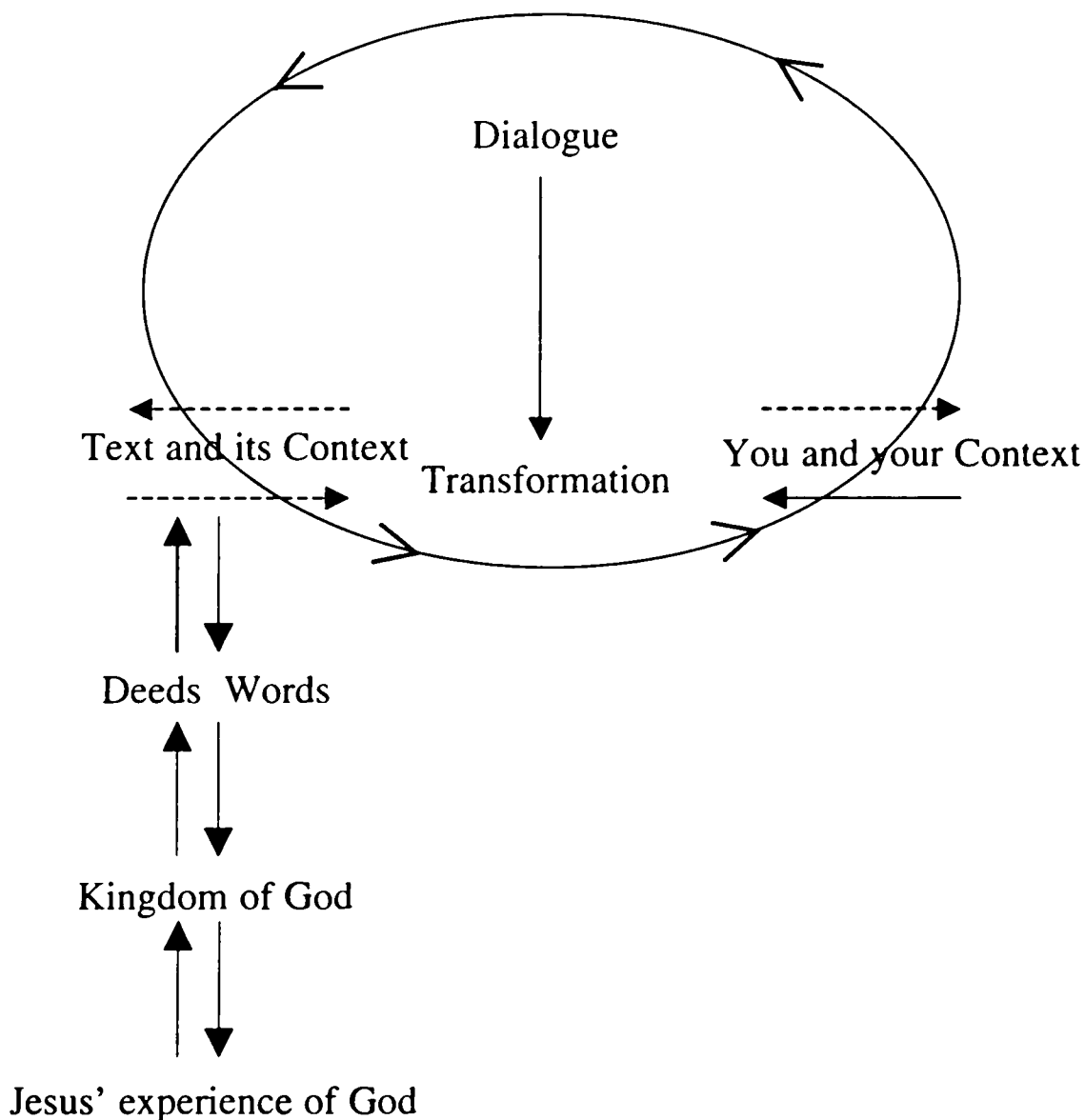


3) Above all, one should try to move from the text to the experience that is the underlying reality. The two Figures show how from experience in the final stage the coded text emerges; and we in turn should try to reach the originary experience from the coded text.

Figure 2



4) Finally, one should understand not only the meaning of the text but also its significance by means of an open hermeneutical encounter with the text and its context and you and your context. This is shown in the diagramme below.



Notes

1. Cf. D.P. Simpson, *Cassel's Latin Dictionary*, London/New York: Macmillan, 1977, 259.
2. L. Brown(ed.), *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 1042.
3. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 5, 1997, 51.
4. Cf. Ibid.
5. G.M. Marsden, "Evangelical and Fundamental Christianity", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. M. Eliade), vol. 5, London/New York: Macmillan, 1987, 196. Some fundamentalist Jews in Israel (I recall but unable to trace the source now) strongly resisted the construction of new, modern buildings on the land where a Jewish cemetery had existed long ago, arguing that such constructions would impede the resurrection of the dead on the last day!
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 190: "Evangelism usually refers to a largely Protestant movement that emphasizes (1) the Bible as authoritative and reliable; (2) eternal salvation as possible only by regeneration (being "born again"), involving personal trust in Christ and in his atoning work; and (3) a spiritually transformed life marked by moral conduct, personal devotion such as Bible reading and prayer, and zeal for evangelism and mission."
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 194.
11. Ibid., 196.
12. Name is derived from the account of the day of Pentecost as described in Acts 1-2.
13. R.M. Anderson, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. M. Eliade), vol. 11, London/New York: Macmillan, 1987, 229. See also J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, London: SCM, 1993, 309-340.
14. Cf. E. Lohse, *The New Testament Environment* (trans. J.E. Steely), London: SCM, 1976, 55-73.
15. B.M.G. Reardpm, "Christian Modernism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. M. Eliade), vol. 10, London/New York: Macmillan, 1987, 7.
16. Ibid. Brown, *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1576: 'Liberal' is presently used "only of education, culture, etc., usually with an admixture of unprejudiced, open-minded; especially free from bigotry or unreasonable prejudice in favour of traditional opinions or established

institutions, open to the reception of new ideas.”

17. Cf. Brown, *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, 1804.
18. Cf. Reardon, “Christian Modernism”, 8.
19. Cf. M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, New York: Free Press, 1964, 365-373.
20. Cf. T.F. O’Dea, *Sociology and the Study of Religion: Theory, Research, Interpretation*, New York: Basic Books, 1970, 240-255.
21. As the topic of our study is not fundamentalism in the context of religions as such but more specific, that is, fundamentalism from the biblical perspective, we shall limit ourselves to these bare essentials.
22. For a succinct critical assessment of these two historical perspectives, see my, “The Radicality of Jesus’ Priesthood”, *Bible Bhashyam* 25 (1999), 229-240 and for an elaborate exposition see H. JEDIN, *History of the Church* (Abridged Edition), vol. 1, New York: Cross Road, 1993, 79-83, 99-106, 113-123, 146-188, 197-204.
23. “The Radicality of Jesus’ Priesthood”, 239.
24. As for the rest of the episcopal vestments and the Jewish background see J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (trans. (F.H. and C.H. Cave), London: SCM, 1969, 148-149; E. Schuerer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (trans. G. Vermes *et al.*), vol. II, Ediburgh: T & T Clark, 1979, 238-308.
25. Ibid.
26. Cf. G.M. Soares-Prabhu, *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action* (Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series 4), Pune: JDV, 2003, 85-104.
27. *The New Encyclopedia Britanica*, vol. 19, London: Encyclopedia Britanica, 1997, 639.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. *The New Encyclopedia Britanica*, vol. 5, London: Encyclopedia Britanica, 1997, 86. The Latin text reads: “Corde sincero et fide non ficta, abjuro maledico et detestor supradictos errores et hereses” vol. 9, 1957 ediction, 238. While reciting the Latin formula Galileo seems to have whispered: “But nevertheless it [the earth] does move”!
32. G.M. Soares-Prabhu, *A Biblical Theology for India* (Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series 3), Pune: JDV, 1999, 3-4.
33. For instance, compare the language, tone and content of the Council of Trent with those of Vatican II.

34. For a creative, succinct exposition on Jesus' mission and vision see Soares-Prabhu, *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action*, 3-12 and his *Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective* (Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series 5), Pune: JDV, 2001, 223-251.
35. I do not intend to present a pessimistic profile of the institutional, hierarchical Church but calling a spade a spade. There are of course shining rainbows even amidst dark clouds and frightening thunders. The convocation of the second Vatican Council by John XXIII to open the windows of Vatican to let fresh air come in, the uncompromising and value-based affirmation of John Paul II stating that the war against Iraq is unjust for anyone with well-formed conscience, etc. do make us aware that the Holy Spirit does work in the hierarchy in a special way.
36. Cf. J. Dupius(ed.), *The Christian Faith*, Bangalore: TPI, 1996, 106.
37. *Sancta Mater Ecclesia*, for instance, accepts and approves three stages in the formation of the Gospels in 1964. It was commonly accepted view among the Protestant churches immediately after World War I (form criticism; the works of K.L. Schmidt; M. Dibelius; and R. Bultmann) and soon after World War II (redaction criticism; the works of W. Marxsen; H. Conzelmann; and G. Bornkamm, G. Barth and M.J. Held). As a matter of fact, the Catholic Church was forced to accept the findings of the Protestant biblical scholars after such a time-lag!
38. *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1994, 69-70.
39. Ibid., 70.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 72.
42. Ibid., 70-71.
43. Cf. *ibid.*; 72.
44. Cf. 72.
45. Cf. N. K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985, 104-105.
46. Ibid., 92.
47. Ibid., 93.
48. Cf. *ibid.*, 190-201.
49. For a summary view, see A. Fierro, "Exodus Event and Interpretation in Political Theologies" *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (ed. N.K. Gottwald), Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983, 473-481.
50. Cf. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 180-181.
51. See my, "Social Justice in the Old Testament", *Bible Bhashyam* 4 (1978),

174-175 where the chiastic structure of Ex 6:2-8 is worked out and the theological significance is brought to light.

52. *The New Jerusalem Bible*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985, 11.
53. For different opinions see Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 205-210.
54. *The New Jerusalem Bible*, 280-281.
55. *Ibid.*, 281-282.
56. See the chronology of the Prophets, kings and related events in G.M. Soares-Prabhu, *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action* (Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series 4), Pune: JDV, 2003, 107-109.
57. For details cf. *ibid.*, 110-119.
58. Cf. Soares-Prabhu, *A Biblical Theology for India*, 272-296.
59. *Ibid.*, 290.
60. For a brief and insightful survey cf. Soares-Prabhu, *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action*, 89-92.
61. Cf. *ibid.*, 3-10.

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