

## The *Dharma* of Jesus: *Karma* of Pastors?

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**Abstract:** The focus of this article is the Sermon on the Mount that is at the heart of the Dharma of Jesus, but given a cosmotheandric interpretation by Francis D'Sa where the cosmos, God and human beings are seen as three constitutive dimensions of reality that are inseparable from one another. Adopting this view, the author goes on to explore its implications in terms of Freedom, Fellowship and Justice, and concludes with some reflections on how these would affect one's pastoral care.

**Key words:** Sermon on the Mount, Freedom, Fellowship, Justice, Pastor

### Introduction

The phrase *Dharma of Jesus* immediately brings to mind the great person of George Soares-Prabhu who was indeed instrumental in studying and speaking about this concept especially from the biblical point of view and from the perspective of the Christian cultural world. After the death of Fr. George Soares-Prabhu, in an edited book entitled *The Dharma of Jesus, Interdisciplinary Essays in Memory of George Soares-Prabhu*, the editor Francis X. D'Sa has made a study on Soares-Prabhu's interpretation of the message of Jesus from within the world of *Dharma*.

With this background of Soares-Prabhu's interpretation of the message of Jesus and Francis X. D'Sa's cosmotheandric interpretation of the *Dharma* of Jesus, I attempt, in this essay, to study the message of Jesus as interpreted by George Soares-Prabhu from within the world of *Dharma* and draw out implications for our pastoral ministry.

## 1. The Word Dharma

Traditionally, *Dharma* has been identified with *varnashrama Dharma*, the code describing the obligations of the four ideal castes of society (*Varnas*) and the four stages (student, householder, hermit, and wandering ascetic) which should ideally define the life of every individual in each of the three upper classes. Hence, though the word *Dharma* had a comprehensive character, it was limited to two principal ideas, namely the organization of social life through well defined and well regulated classes (*varnas*) and the organization of an individual's life within those classes into definite stages (*ashramas*).<sup>1</sup>

However from the time of the Bhagwad Gita at least, this narrow understanding of *Dharma* has been leavened by the notion of *Svadharm*a or natural law. As the Bhagwad Gita puts it, "Better one's own *Dharma* (*Svadharm*a) however unglamorous, than the *Dharma* of another (*Paradharm*a), however well done."<sup>2</sup> Francis X. D'Sa suggests that *Dharma* can be an outcome not of internal values which domesticate, but of the liberating exigencies of human freedom. This, according to D'Sa, is true of the original *Dharma* of the Gita.<sup>3</sup>

The word *Dharma* is derived from the root *dhr*, which means to uphold, to support, to nourish. *Dharma* has to do with holding, upholding, holding together, supporting, maintaining, sustaining. The Mahabharata, therefore, derives the word *Dharma* from the word *dharana*, that is holding together. *Dharma* is that which holds the peoples together.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The World of Dharma

The world of *Dharma* is an interconnected, interrelated and therefore interdependent whole wherein whatever exists, exists as interconnected, interrelated and interdependent. Correspondingly, whatever is not interrelated, interconnected and

interdependent does not exist. To exist is always to be part of, to participate in. In the world of *Dharma*, where everything hangs together with everything else, reality is a web of relations wherein every being is what it is because of its unique relationship to the whole.<sup>5</sup>

According to one of the mythic themes of Hinduism, the world is considered to be a cosmic body, the body of *Purusha* (that is *ishwara*, Lord, *Paramatma*). The world is animated by the *Purusha*.<sup>6</sup> We are part of a living cosmos. Accordingly the world-view of *Dharma* has to be understood in the background of a living cosmos where the interconnection and interdependence in the tiniest as well as mightiest aspects of the universe is not mechanical but organic. The parts are what they are because they participate in the *Purusha* and it is the *Purusha* that determines the Karma of the parts.<sup>7</sup>

But when the part remains ignorant of its relationship to the whole and thinks it is independent, it develops a false sense of identity (*Ahamkara*) which in effect is the declaration of independence from the whole. For example, a jaundiced person who perceives everything as yellow and the other, seeing 'double' when one puts pressure with a finger on one of the eyes. The *Dharma* world-view states that such is indeed the case with us and our world. We all are affected by the jaundice of the *Ahamkara*; we all perceive the world in a jaundiced manner and so are unable to see it as it really is. *Ahamkara* consists of two forces namely; *Raga-Dvesha*, that is passion (=attraction) and hatred (=repulsion). Our behavior is determined by them much before reason comes to the scene. Thus we need to allow the previously mentioned 'reasoning' to come into operation rather than allowing *ahamkara* i.e. *raga-dvesha* (attraction-repulsion) to determine our activity. In the Hindu tradition, we could safely say that our true self is synonymous with being really and fully

free. The relation of the whole accepting the part as a part of itself and of the part knowingly entering into the whole, this is indeed the final fulfillment of the Part which is neither separate from nor identical with but is non-dually (a-dvaita) related to the whole.<sup>8</sup>

### **3. The Dharma of Jesus**

The *Dharma* of Jesus, that is, the complex of religious insight and ethical concern (of experience, worldview and value) which determines the lifestyle that Jesus proclaimed and practiced, has been conveniently formulated for us in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7). These three chapters of the gospel of Matthew are widely accepted in the non-Christian India as the essence of Christianity. In a sense they are since they present in a brief and striking way a pattern of existence appropriate to a follower of Jesus, because it is in fact a replica of the kind of life which Jesus himself lived. The Sermon on the Mount gives us the authentic *Dharma* of Jesus - the pattern of existence he lived by and proclaimed.<sup>9</sup>

#### **3.1. The Sermon on the Mount**

The Sermon on the Mount was never really preached by Jesus as such. It is an edited collection of the sayings of Jesus made by the early Christian community and then greatly expanded by Matthew. The Sermon on the Mount as we have it now is thus an editorial composition of Matthew.<sup>10</sup> It is, according to Soares-Prabhu, Matthew's presentation of the *Dharma* of Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

##### **3.1.1. Context of the Sermon on the Mount**

The sermon on the mount appears as the first of the five great discourses (Mt. 5-7,; 10; 13; 18; 24-25). Each of these discourses concludes with a stereotyped formula: "and it happened that when Jesus had finished" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Their role in

the gospel is indicated in the grand finale with which the Gospel triumphantly ends (28:16-20). The solemn and powerful proclamation of the Risen Lord, in this concluding Christophany, gives us the key to Matthew's theology. Here we are told that Christian existence, as Matthew understands it, means *discipleship* of the Risen Lord.<sup>12</sup>

The Sermon on the Mount is placed by Matthew immediately after his programmatic summary of the Galilean preaching (Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand). Following the proclamation of the kingdom of God, the Sermon spells out concretely what the "repentance" demanded by the kingdom means in practice. The Sermon on the Mount is to be understood, then, as a description of human person's response to the kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

### **3.1.2. Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount**

The Sermon on the Mount as Matthew gives it, is addressed not to a select few but to the crowds at large and so, is not proposed as a counsel of perfection. It is proposed as a way of life which Jesus clearly expects his disciples (all of them) to follow (7: 21-27).

If the sermon on the mount is understood as a new law of Jesus making the old law of Moses obsolete, if Jesus is seen as the new Moses giving a new law to the Christians, it would mean that the new *Dharma* is a new tradition of elders a new set of external laws a new *kula Dharma* of the Christian community. All NT writings carry an awareness that Jesus has brought a new religious consciousness (and with it a new *Dharma*) which runs counter to the legalism of the Pharisees.

Jesus states that he has come not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill it. He adds prophets to the law signifying that just as the prophets came to fulfill the will of God, so too the

law comes to fulfillment in Jesus in a higher way. The law came from Moses, grace and truth came from Jesus (Jn 1:17). The new *Dharma* replaces the old one and fulfills it. How does this new *Dharma* of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount fulfill the *Dharma* of OT. can be shown by means of three sutras (aphorisms). Together they give us the thrust of the Sermon on the Mount.

### **3.1.3. Sutra 1: Sermon on the Mount is not Law but Love**

The Sermon on the Mount has six antithesis in which Jesus proposes that we go beyond the law of Moses. It is a shift from the external practice of the law to internalizing the its spirit. He simplifies the law to just one precept: be perfect as the heavenly father is perfect. Perfection here means not flawlessness or without imperfection but being wholehearted or undivided in one's love. Being wholehearted and undivided in loving God and neighbor are inseparable in NT for God is undivided in loving us. The Sermon on the Mount therefore is not to be read as a collection of precepts, but as an invitation to, and an illustration of the basic Christian attitude of Obedience (Love of God) and radical concern (Love of neighbor) for in Mt. 22:40 Jesus says that on these two depends all the law and prophets.<sup>14</sup>

### **3.1.4. Sutra 2: Sermon on the Mount is not Law but Gospel**

The Sermon on the Mount is preceded by the proclamation of the kingdom by Jesus. The proclamation calls for repentance. Repent....for the kingdom of God is at hand. (Mt. 4:17). This repentance or metanoia is the total turning of the person to God who has experienced his love through Jesus. John says that we love because he first loved us (1Jn 4:19).

The Sermon on the Mount therefore is a description of the natural lifestyle of a Christian who is gripped by the proclamation and has experienced the unconditional love of God through Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.1.5. Sutra 3: Sermon on the Mount is a Goal-Directed Norm

The Christian *sva-dharma* is goal-directed. Christian existence is not a static condition acquired once and for all, but a “way” along which we must walk following Christ. In this sense we are all becoming Christians. The Sermon on the Mount obliges us to move in a particular direction. The law of Christ is concerned not so much with the nature of the action but the quality of the act and the direction in which it is moving.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.2. The *Dharma* of the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount proposes a distinctive *Dharma*: A *Dharma* of grace and growth, of freedom and concern. The Sermon on the Mount does not lay down a static code of conduct but spells out a pattern of eschatological existence towards which we are to walk in grace. We are to urge ourselves on by a power from within, welling up from an experience of God’s unconditional love and producing fruits of love and not just of good works.

The Sermon on the Mount is grounded on an experience of God’s unconditional love which was Jesus’ foundational experience of God as *Abba*. Jesus communicates his *Abba* experience through his deeds towards the marginalized the ‘de-communitized’, through fellowship with outcasts, etc and tries to evoke this experience in his disciples.<sup>17</sup>

Jesus links these two commandments in the OT in a very creative way (Ex. 6:4 and Lev. 19:18) to bring out a new *Dharma* which equates loving God and loving one’s neighbor. These two unrelated OT texts come together in Jesus’ *Dharma* as an indissoluble unit. Thus, the *Dharma* of the Sermon on the Mount

which is an authentic expression of the *Dharma* of Jesus shows three features

### 3.2.1. A *Dharma* of Freedom

The first Christians experienced the *Dharma* of Jesus as the *Dharma* of freedom because it liberated them from the oppressive burden of the law. The understanding of the law which Jesus proposes is more radical and liberating than that of the Pharisees.

Jesus radicalizes the law. Its demands now reach the innermost intentions of the heart. The question now is not what is the legally right thing to do but what is the most loving thing to do and this requires not just negative avoidance of evil (thou shall not...) but a positive whole-hearted and undivided love of God himself.

Thus the “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2, 1 Cor 9:26) of which Paul speaks is the “Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom8:2). This law of Christ is not a code of law but a new interior principle of love which in the *Dharma* of Jesus takes the place of law. “Christian law codes are only expressions of this spirit of love and are always subordinate to the spirit they express.”<sup>18</sup>

The quality of Christian life is not measured by multiplicity of its observances but to the extent of its conformity to the mind which was in Christ Jesus (Phil2:5). Christian *Dharma* is ultimately not so much a matter of obeying laws as following Christ.

Why, then, do we have laws?

Ideally, law as an external code of conduct should be completely replaced by the spirit, the interior principle of loving action, and those who usher in the eschatological age, Jesus is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified.



Law belongs to the yet un-Christianized areas of our life for the law was not made for the just but for the unjust (1 Tim 1:9). If all were just and completely Christian there would be no need for laws. Law intervenes only to counter existing disorder. To the extent that this disorder disappears and the unchristian areas of our life eliminated by the flooding of the spirit of Love, our dependence on law will diminish.

### 3.2.2. A *Dharma* of Sonship

The Pharisees viewed God as a just judge who punished those who infringed the law and justified those who kept the law. Jesus on the other hand viewed God as *Abba*, a loving father who loved unconditionally. The just judge cannot love the person he puts on trial. Everything is done on merit and there is no question of forgiveness, graciousness or unconditional acceptance. In this *Dharma*, law takes precedence over love. Law is the mediator between God and man. In such a *Dharma*, man's attitude will obviously be one of formal external obedience. This *Dharma* has no place for the enthusiasm of love. All that this *Dharma* can do is to encourage avoidance of sin (Conceived not as betrayal of love but infringement of law) and performance of good works as prescribed by the law.

The *Dharma* of Jesus is of a different kind. Grounded on an experience of God as *Abba* a loving father who forgives recklessly and justifies the ungodly (Rom 4:5) "the *Dharma* of Jesus proposes as the primary attribute of God not his justice but his love. God's attitude to man is not then conditional approval (I will love you if you are good) but unconditional love." Law is not the mediator between God and man but Jesus who reveals God's unconditional love of man and man's radical obedience to God. Such obedience is not sin-centered, not preoccupied with avoiding sin but God centered, that is, being perfect as the

heavenly father is perfect. To be perfect in this manner is to be undivided, whole hearted and unconditional in our love for others. Such a person is a son/daughter to God who lives out this relationship with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control - fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22 ff). These are the unmistakable marks of those following the *Dharma* of Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.2.3. A *Dharma* of Concern

To experience God as father is to experience fellow human beings as brother and sisters. Hence the *Dharma* of Jesus is the *Dharma* of concern (agape). When Jesus combines Ex 6:4 with Lev. 19:18 he may have been interpreting the first text by means of the second. He means to say that to Love God with all your heart and soul means to loves ones neighbor as oneself. Thus the double commandment of love propounded by Jesus (Mt. 22: 34-40) urges us not so much to love God and neighbor as to love God by loving neighbor. The NT gives a steady stress of clean and powerful directives to love neighbor (Mt. 19:19; Rom 13: 8; Gal 5:14; Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 2:17, 4:8 ; Jas 2:8; Jn 13:34, 15:12; 1Jn 2:7ff, 3:23, 4:21; 2 Jn 5.

So this loving God by loving neighbor becomes the new schema of the community of Jesus. Concern for neighbor is thus central to the *Dharma* of Jesus. To love according to the *Dharma* of Jesus means not only to forgive enemies (Mt 5:23) to accept persons non judgmentally (Rom 14:1-4), to be patient, kind, magnanimous and tolerant (1 Cor 13:3-7), it means also and indeed primarily to sit at table with outcastes and untouchables (Mk 2:15-17), to give food to the hungry and clothing to those who have nothing to wear (Mt. 25: 36). The first letter of John puts it: "if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him, how does the Love of God

abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or in speech but in deed and truth.” (1Jn 3:17ff)

The *Dharma* of Jesus also has a very strong materialist orientation when it looks forward to building up a universal fraternal community of sharing and love. (Acts 2:44ff, 4:32-34) It is such a *Dharma* of concern of the community where no one is in need.<sup>20</sup>

### **3.3. The *Dharma* of Jesus: A Cosmotheandric Interpretation**

When God’s offer of love meets with trusting acceptance from the humans, it makes them free inasmuch as it liberates each individual from the inadequacies and obstacles that shackle them. It also fosters fellowship because it empowers free individuals to exercise concern for each other in genuine community; it leads to justice because it impels the community to adopt the just societal structures which alone make freedom and fellowship possible.

Freedom, fellowship and justice are thus the parameters of the kingdoms thrust towards the total liberation of man. Together they spell out the significance of the kingdom and tell us what the kingdom in practice means today.<sup>21</sup>

Freedom, Fellowship and Justice which symbolize the *Dharma* of Jesus have to be interpreted neither anthropocentrically nor cosmocentrically but cosmotheandrically. In a cosmotheandric vision the three dimensions constitutive of reality - Cosmos, Theos and Aner are integrated. These three indispensable but mobile centers of reality are not separate; whenever one is present the other two are also there. None can exist without the other two.<sup>22</sup> In this vision, reality is neither fully autonomous (that is totally independent) nor fully heteronomous (that is fully dependent), it is ontonomous. Ontonomy is the unique

blend of autonomy and heteronomy and refers to the fact that the complex of relationships of which reality is comprised is such that every being is uniquely related to every other being.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.3.1. Freedom**

The root cause of our fears and insecurities is lack of love. These fears and insecurities caused by the lack of love give rise to compulsions and pressures. We seek to fill this gaping void by grasping compulsively at possessions, positions and power. To be truly free is to be free from these insecurities. The supreme example of such freedom is Jesus.

Freedom has to be understood not merely as freedom from internal and external compulsions but as freedom from spiritual blindness. It is a freedom that is ontonomously holistic. It consists in letting each thing be what it is meant to be and thus contributing to its own growth and the growth of the whole network of relationships. Thus a thing is free only when it can grow fully and at the same time also allows everything to grow fully. Fullness of growth is possible where freedom is ontonomous: the growth of one is such that it promotes the growth of all and vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

### **3.3.2. Fellowship**

Freedom is the door that opens up fellowship. To enter the home of fellowship one has to enter through the door of freedom. The freedom that Jesus brings leads to fellowship and concern for everyone in need. By interpreting the love commandment Soares-Prabhu argues that “To love God with all ones heart means to love one’s neighbor as oneself. We love God by loving neighbor. For Soares-Prabhu, agape is radical concern for neighbor which is the same as fellowship.

Fellowship is built on freedom. Where there is no ontonomous freedom, fellowship cannot emerge, much less

survive. Freedom is the space where the home of fellowship is built and because it follows from freedom, fellowship is also ontonomous. Fellowship is the activated openness of being. In the home of fellowship no being is guest and all are family; fellowship is not restricted to the like-minded or to those vibrating on the same wave-length. Ontonomous fellowship does not discriminate but it does differentiate between different modes of being and adjusts itself accordingly.<sup>25</sup> Ontonomous fellowship is not to be identified with 'good feelings' towards others but one has to recognize in it that the reality is ontonomous.

### 3.3.3. Justice

Fellowship and justice according to Soares-Prabhu go together. Jesus did not just try to convert individuals but attacked unjust structures also.<sup>26</sup> Thus Freedom, Fellowship and Justice are expressions of a new liberating relationship with God and human beings. For Soares-Prabhu these three constitute the *Dharma* of Jesus which is the core of the proclamation of the kingdom. Genuine freedom and authentic fellowship give no quarter to any kind of distortion in our knowing and loving. This being so, the ontonomous order which expresses itself through freedom and fellowship can fully come into its own only with the birth of Justice. Justice is the third member of the ontonomous trinity, it is the thematic realization of the ontonomous order.<sup>27</sup>

Justice is neither an emotional nor a romantic attitude. It springs from a commitment to the ontonomous order. It is not so much a juridical as an ontonomous concept implying the fulfillment of freedom and fellowship. Thus where freedom and fellowship flourish, justice will be the fruit. It is a culmination of freedom and fellowship in that without justice neither of them can reach its fullness.

## 4. Implications for Pastoral Ministry

As Francis D'Sa puts it, "The karma of the Father is the *Dharma* of Jesus." That is, Jesus' *Dharma* is a reflection of the Father's work. The substance of Jesus' proclamation is God's kingly karma. What the Father does, the son does too (Jn5:19). With this in mind we could now try to draw up the *Dharma* of a pastor for today.

### 4.1. Beginning at the Periphery

Jesus did not see his mission as one of bringing all people to the baptism of repentance in the Jordan. He decided that something else had to be done especially to the poor, the sinners and the sick. Therefore, the people to whom Jesus reached out were the poor, the blind, the lame, the crippled, the lepers, the hungry. In other words he reached out to those of the lower class, the oppressed and those who remained at the periphery of the social circle.<sup>28</sup>

The pastor should be a person who begins his ministry, like Jesus, at the periphery of society and bring them and make them part of the larger community of Jesus, providing them with self-respect, dignity and a rightful place in the community. This going to the periphery would mean that the pastor is fired with the same mission as that of Jesus, the mission to proclaim the kingdom of God.

### 4.2. A Builder of Communities

Taking a cue from the first Christian communities (Acts 2: 42-45; 4: 32-37) the basic *Dharma* of the pastor is to be builder of communities based on the principles of Freedom, Fellowship and Justice. The community he builds is not a community which is unrelated to one another which gathers together once a week just for worship but a community which is

together once a week just for worship but a community which is founded on the Love of God rather than on Laws and its structures. The *Dharma* of the pastor is to build a community in which each individual is loved as someone special, an inseparable part of the whole network of relationships that makes the community. He facilitates the growth of the individuals as strong members of the body of Christ.

#### **4.3. A Free Person who makes others Free**

Spirit is characterized by freedom. Trying to quench this spirit (1 Thes 5:19) is to do away with love which is the fruit of the spirit.<sup>29</sup> Love as responsibility for one another and for the community must be the beginning and the end, the motive and the final outcome, of all struggles for freedom.<sup>30</sup> A pastor is called to be free from internal compulsions and external pressures by putting on the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5). This will distinguish his ministry from that of a well organized NGO which does good work; he is a liberator after the manner of Christ. He is to be an embodiment of justice, who does not prefer one group over the other but works for a community that is collaborative, coordinated and dialogical. He is called to promote just structures in his community without leaving out the poor and the neglected, but like Jesus, reaching out to the least, the lost and the last.

#### **Conclusion**

The message of Jesus originates in the Father. The centre of all that Jesus stands for is not Jesus himself but the Father. True, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life but he is the way to, the truth about and the life from the Father. The way is not the goal, the truth is not identical with that which discloses the truth and the life is not the source from which it emerges.<sup>31</sup> All pastoral activity is a reflection of the love of the father shown by the supreme

pastor: Jesus. Rooted in the *Abha* experience of Jesus and the Resurrection experience of the apostles, the followers of Jesus are to go and build contrast communities based on the principles of freedom, fellowship and justice.

#### Notes:

1. Cf. G. M. SOARES-PRABHU, "The Dharma of Jesus: An Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount", in F. X. D' Sa (Ed.), *The Dharma of Jesus*, New York, Orbis Books Publications, 2003, 175 - 176.
2. *The Bhagwadgita* XVIII, 47
3. Cf. FRANCIS X. D'SA, "Dharma as Delight in Cosmic Welfare: A Study of *Dharma* in the Gita," *Bible Bhashyam*, 6, 1980, pp. 335-357.
4. Cf. F. X. D' SA, "*Dharma of Jesus?*" in Francis X. D' Sa (Ed.), *The Dharma of Jesus, Interdisciplinary Essays in Memory of George Soares-Prabhu, S.J.*, Anand, Gujrat Sahitya Prakash Publications, 1997, 418- 419.
5. Ibid., 419.
6. Ibid., 420.
7. Ibid., 420.
8. Ibid., 425- 426.
9. Cf. G. M. SOARES-PRABHU, "The Dharma of Jesus: A Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount", 177.
10. Ibid., 177 - 178.
11. Ibid., 177.
12. Ibid., 178.
13. Ibid., 178.
14. Ibid., 182-183.



15. Ibid., 183.
16. Ibid., 183.
17. Ibid., 184.
18. Ibid., 185.
19. Ibid., 186-187.
20. Ibid., 188-189.
21. Ibid., 64.
22. Cf. F. X. D'SA. "*Dharma of Jesus?*", 442.
23. Cf. F. X. D'SA. "*Dharma of Jesus?*", 451
24. Cf. F. X. D'SA. "*Dharma of Jesus?*", 451.
25. Cf. F. X. D'SA. "*Dharma of Jesus?*", 453.
26. Cf. G. M. SOARES-PRABHU, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society," in F. X. D'Sa (Ed.), *The Dharma of Jesus*, New York, Orbis Books Publications, 2003, 66.
27. Cf. D'SA. F. X., "*Dharma of Jesus?*", 455.
28. Cf. A. NOLAN, *Jesus Before Christianity*, Mumbai, St. Paul's Publications, 2010, 43-44.
29. Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *Essential Writings*, Ed. James B Nickoloff, B New York, Orbis Books Publications, 1996, 159.
30. Cf. S. KAPPEN, *Jesus and Freedom*, New York, Orbis Books Publications, 1977, 78.
31. Cf. F. X. D'SA, "*Dharma of Jesus?*", 418- 419.

## **Enriching Science with the Dharma of Jesus: A Philosophy of Science Perspective**

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**Abstract:** Beginning with an exploration of the multi-faceted contemporary meaning of *dharma*, the author argues that the dharma of Jesus can enrich our understanding of science. This is done from two perspectives: reasonableness and surrender. Interpreting two parables of Jesus as examples of reasonableness rather than rationality, science is also shown to have moved from the former to the latter. Similarly, drawing upon Jesus' own ultimate surrender to the Father, it is argued that science too needs to surrender to the Supreme Wisdom of Nature (God).

**Keywords:** dharma; reasonableness, limits of science, surrender, wisdom of nature.

### **Introduction**

Among the many factors that make up the 'Dharma of Jesus', an important one is the emphasis of Jesus on values, his initiative to go beyond the demands of mere rationality so as to reach the level of reasonableness and above all his courage and readiness to surrender to the Supreme Wisdom of his Heavenly Father. This, in my opinion, can enrich science. In fact, developments and researches of science in the recent decades seem to suggest that science also needs to give greater importance to values, to transcend the demands of rationality to reach reasonableness and to surrender to the Wisdom of Nature (God), as it more and more realizes its limits and limitations. In this paper first I clarify the notion of Dharma in general and proceed to explain my understanding of the Dharma of Jesus. Then I explicate how the features of reasonableness and readiness to

surrender that stand out in and through the words, deeds and being of Jesus and how they can be incorporated into the realm of science in order to enrich it. Finally the concluding remarks are made at the end.

## Dharma

Dharma in general means the principles that guide one's thoughts, words and actions. The root meaning of the term *Dharma* is, among many others, to *uphold* or *sustain*. So Dharma can also mean those rules and regulations, laws and prescriptions, both human-made and nature-given (or divine) that *operate to sustain or uplift humanity and nature*. They prescribe duties of humans towards others and nature; they pronounce the principles of justice, religiosity, harmony, religious rituals and practical life-style. All these are set down to increase the quality of life for humans and nature. The complexity and the absolute importance of Dharma is brought out in the Mahabharata; when Yudhistira asks Bhishma to explain the intricacies and the relevance of Dharma, Bhishma replies thus: *It is most difficult to define Dharma. Dharma has been explained to be that which helps the upliftment of living beings. Therefore, that which ensures the welfare of living beings is surely Dharma. The learned rishis have declared that that which sustains is Dharma*<sup>1</sup> So, Dharma is a sort of umbrella concept that includes the well-being of every individual and society. It paves the way for the believers to attain moksha.

Dharma also means Cosmic Order. The ancient Vedic concept of *Ritam* (or Cosmic Order) is given as the Dharma of the Cosmos. It is the order in the universe sustained by the natural laws, both at the macro and the micro levels; therefore, the laws regarding the position and the movement of the stars and the planets, and the laws about nature and the functions of the atomic

and subatomic particles are very much part of this Cosmic Order. Everything and everyone is given a certain nature and duty perform according to this Order and that is its/his/her Dharma: “It could be said that it is the Dharma of the Wind to blow, the Dharma of the Sun to heat up the world, the Dharma of the Ice to freeze and melt, the Dharma of Fire to burn. It is the Dharma of the Plants to give out oxygen, and the Dharma of the Animals to give out carbon dioxide”.

Dharma can also mean Social Order. As such, it includes all the duties and commitments of human beings as members of the human society. It is the duty of everyone in society to maintain society and to ensure the holistic welfare of everyone.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Dharma can be divided into many subsections depending on to whom it is applicable and the type of duty that is demanded of them; it shapes their daily lives with the proper instructions of how to live and so on. Thus there is the dharma of an individual, of the family, of society, and of mankind. Then there is *varna dharma*, based on one’s caste/profession, *ashrama dharma*, based on the stage of life,<sup>3</sup> and so on. In Buddhism, Dharma (*dhamma* in Pali) refers to the words of the Buddha, the practice of his teaching, and the attainment of enlightenment.

### **Dharma of Jesus**

George Soares-Prabhu coined and popularized the concept of ‘the Dharma of Jesus’. According to him, it basically consists of manifesting and living out the fullness of life and love, as presented in the Sermon on the Mount; inculcating a new God-consciousness and a new way of practicing religion based on that new consciousness; realizing the right understanding of freedom and to live it out in order to ensure a healthy relationship with oneself, God, others and nature and finally, in making strenuous efforts to establish a just and egalitarian society, based