

JPJRS 18/2 ISSN 0972-33315, July 2015: 77-96

The Role of Prophetic Theologizing in Jesus' Dharma

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4282229

Stable URL: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4282229>

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Abstract: Having experienced freedom from bondage and constituted as Yahweh's own possession, Israel was expected to function as a contrast community that is free from exploitation and oppression, unlike other city States. But when this basic thrust was lost after a mere 250 years, Yahweh called the prophets to carry his mission forward. Their work consisted of two interconnected themes: denunciation of idolatry and a passionate appeal for social justice.

Jesus' prophetic theologizing has a new basis: Jesus' experience of God as *Abba*, Loving Parent. This foundational experience is expressed in terms of the reign of God. Jesus spelt out various aspects of the reign of God through his symbolic deeds followed by clarification of their significance. This prophetic theologizing continues even in our own times – notably by Christian leaders who have a vision in their mission.

Keywords: Prophetic theologizing; Jesus' *dharma*; foundational experience; Jesus' prophetic theologizing; Christian leaders.

Introduction

The readers of *The Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ* (Volumes I-IV) will undoubtedly agree that Soares-Prabhu was a creative, insightful exegete and a committed, radical theologian. Those who were closely associated with him will also know him as a prophet. He was a prophet not primarily because he has authored four articles on prophetism (Volume II, 61-67; Volume III, 105-125, 126-135; Volume IV, 14-23) but because his life and ministry had a prophetic horizon.

In this paper I intend to explore his prophetic challenges and insights from a broader perspective. This is done in four

parts. After a few preliminary remarks (I), it deals with the main features of prophetic theologizing in the Old Testament (II). Then the attention is focused in Jesus' prophetic theologizing (III), and, finally, prophetic theologizing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (IV). It is concluded with relevant reflections.

I. Preliminary Remarks

My first remark is that the Bible, in spite of its diversity, is one. It is originally written in three different languages (most of the OT in Hebrew, a small section in Aramaic, and the rest in Greek. The whole of the NT is written in Greek). The Bible has also undergone seven cultural influences (beginning with Canaanite and ending with Roman). In spite of such diversity, the Bible is ONE. Why? It is so because its content is God-experience presented in the form of a story.

The biblical story begins with the creation of the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1) and it ends with the vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1). This story unfolds itself in three cycles: the cycle of creation (from chaos to creation to sin), the cycle of Israel (from sin to Israel and Exile), and the cycle of Jesus (from Exile to Jesus to a new heaven and a new earth). In each cycle God takes initiative: God organizes a pre-existent chaos into cosmos and ushers in order in successive stages; he ensures the emergence of a new people in Exodus; and, the definitive intervention in and through Jesus, leading humankind to salvation (cf. Soares-Prabhu, "Expanding the Horizon", 4-12).

Of the three, it is the second and third cycles that are significant for this paper. By virtue of the liberation of the people of Israel from bondage, they accepted Yahweh as their Lord and God, and they were constituted as Yahweh's own people (cf. Ex 6:5-8). Having experienced bondage in Egypt as well as liberation

from bondage by Yahweh, they were to function as a contrast community, namely, unlike other city States they should not be exploitative and oppressive. This was fundamental to Israel's understanding of itself as Yahweh's cherished possession. However this basic thrust lasted only about 250 years until kingship was introduced. The reign of Solomon was the decisive turning-point. By constructing the Temple, Yahweh – a free and liberating God – becomes a legitimating deity of Solomon. Cutting across the old tribal boundaries he created administrative districts for efficient administration and for effective system of taxation. He enforced forced labour to construct gigantic buildings, conscripted personnel for a standing army. Thus Israel became the master of bonded labour and the tyrannical agent of oppression. At this critical stage of the story Yahweh called prophets to fulfil his mission. The prophets had two basic, inter-connected themes in focus: denunciation of idolatry and a passionate appeal for social justice. Thus the OT prophets advocated authentic relation with Yahweh and genuine, inter-personal relation among fellow Israelites, notably in socio-economic matters.

My second remark is that prophetic theologizing is not 100% uniform in the Bible. The root meaning of the noun prophet (Greek *prophētēs*) indicates this: the Greek noun *prophētēs* has two corresponding nouns in Hebrew: *nābī'* (meaning one who is called) and *hōzeh* (meaning one who sees vision). Why two Hebrew words for the single Greek noun *prophētēs*? Answering this question requires multi-dimensional considerations of differing geography, social context, linguistic usage, and different historical and cultural settings.

Geographically, there are striking contrasts between the northern and southern parts of Palestine: difference in elevation, climate, rainfall and divergence in the quality of soil. The

combination of relief, climate, rainfall and soil factors favoured the northern part for farming. Moreover, its proximity to Tyre and Sidon, both port cities, and to Damascus, the capital of Syria was conducive for marketing their agricultural products easily. Thus northern part was obviously more prosperous. In contrast, the southern part was rather isolated: sea in the west and the south, and desert in the east. It had very few agricultural products.

Further, the social and linguistic contexts were also different. Historically, both north and south conducted themselves as independent societies: for example, just before the collapse of the Israelite State, Damascus and Israel were allied against Judah and this alliance forced Judah to seek help from the Neo-Assyrian empire. Culturally, two cultic symbols were used: for Judah the imperial cults of the Jerusalem Temple but in north the bulls of Jeroboam functioned as archaic symbols to legitimate its cults.

Due to such differences, *hōzeh* was prevalent in Judah, which functioned as the herald justifying the Judahite theopolitic based on the Davidic covenant. In the mode of divine-human communication vision predominates. In contrast, *nābî'* was prevalent in Israel and *nābî'* functioned as a spokesperson of the Mosaic-Sinaitic traditions. In the mode of divine-human communications word predominates (cf. Petersen, 70-75).

Despite the dissimilarities noted above, there is fundamental unity in the prophetic theologizing of both Israel and Judah. To begin with, the Bible does not primarily use scientific or philosophical language but metaphorical, symbolic language. Both the audition model of Israel and the vision model of Judah are set in the form of divine-human communication. Moreover, both are rooted in the covenantal relationship: Davidic covenant in south and Sinaitic covenant in north. Both models of prophetic theologizing required people's approval (at least of the majority) and the needs of the prophets were met by people. So they had

strong basis in society. Moreover, their vocation, though personal and private, was for the betterment of people – namely, authentic relation with God and incessant appeal to be a contrast community. Furthermore, both *nâbî'* and *hôzeh* functioned as prophets whose central concerns were theology and morality in contrast with *rô'eh*, a peripheral prophet. The prophets centered on theology and morality played a key role in the life of Jewish people. The prophets were thus integral part of the Jewish society.

A third remark: the vocation and the ministry of prophets indicate some sort of divine compulsion. Does it not curtail, infringe their personal freedom? Their freedom should not be understood in the sense of the post-enlightenment era (cf. Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, 50-59) because the prophetic vocation and ministry were rooted in the covenantal relationship. So their freedom is to be understood in the sense of fulfilling their vocation as designed by Yahweh. Their freedom and Yahweh's design merge into a harmonious union for the betterment and enhancement of Yahweh's people.

Fourth, Prophetesses (Hebrew *nebi'ah*) played a central role in Israelites' early history. Prophetess Miriam composed a song to celebrate Israel's crossing of the sea (Ex 15:20-21). Prophetess Deborah judged Israel and helped the people to battle (Judg 4:4-10). In a later period Prophetess Huldah was an important religious leader to whom king Josiah sent messengers to enquire of God (2 Kings 22:14-20). In the NT, prophetess Anna recognizes Jesus' Messiahship (Lk 2:36-38).

Fifth, prophetic theologizing is important for the NT. From a historical viewpoint, Jesus is the prophet par excellence. In the early Church prophets were important charismatic persons who were ranked next to apostles (cf. 1 Cor 12:28-29; 14:29; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). In course of time the three-tier hierarchy (bishops-priests-deacons) probably minimized the role of prophets.

Sixth, a prophet is a poet. A perusal through the prophetic literature in any of the internationally accepted English translations (NJB, NIV, NRSV) would show that prophets' language is primarily poetic and the narrative in prose is on the whole the contribution of the editors, redactors. Poetry affects the heart rather than the head – evoking feelings and reactions which lead to change of attitudes and enhance values. Thus, prophetic theologizing in poetry effects transformation of people and betterment of society. The poetry of the prophets is characterized by rhythm and parallelism.

II. Main Features of Prophetic Theologizing in the OT

One could have recourse to two methods in understanding the main features of prophetic theologizing in the OT: (1) diachronic method and (2) synchronic method. Diachronic method views prophetic theologizing from three interlinked perspectives. First, historical approach to survey persons and events according to the chronological sequence as found in Bright (*History*, 225-273). Second, each prophetic book is investigated exegetically as does Eissfeldt (*The Old Testament*, 301-442). Finally, each prophetic book is explored theologically, specifying new elements in theologically significant turning-points as in Von Rad (*Old Testament Theology*, II, 129-300). A combination of these three perspectives constitutes the diachronic method.

The synchronic method views prophetic theologizing at a glance in order to understand its various aspects in an interconnected manner. Focusing mainly on monotheism, morality and future salvation, it views the present with a flashback as well as with a flashforward. This method is followed in this paper. In four steps, it looks at the present on the basis of the foundational experience (1), challenging the present in view of the future (2), examines how it challenges the leaders (3) and the priests (4).

(1) The Present on the Basis of the Foundational Experience: A careful reading of Is 1:2-17 highlights this theme in a nutshell. Yahweh painfully laments that his very children have become rebellious. An ox knows its owner and a donkey its master's manger (1:2-3). But his chosen ones, his cherished possession, have abandoned Yahweh and despised him. As a body, they are sick from head to foot (1:5-6). Their endless sacrifices of various kinds, their manifold cereal offerings, and their ceaseless prayers are detestable and futile because their hands are covered with innocent blood (1:11-15). They should wash and clean themselves: cease to do evil and learn to do good by practising justice – particularly by defending the oppressed, taking care of the orphans and pleading the cause of the widows (1:16-17). Thus authentic relation with God is inextricably linked with social justice.

This theme is elaborated by various prophets in different contexts. Prophets condemn hypocritical worship (Hos 8:1-14); the religious practice of fasting without genuine social concern is meaningless (Is 58:1-12); and, Jerusalem, the city of God has become the city of murderers (Is 1:21). Finally, through the imagery of unfaithful wife, Israel's unfaithfulness is vividly depicted (Hos 1:2-3:5); and the parabolic narration of the vineyard that produced bad fruits symbolizes injustice and bloodshed (Is 5:1-7).

Furthermore, those who do not conduct themselves according to the values of the contrast community are strongly censured: those who indulge in domestic luxury (Amos 3:15); improper real-estate practitioners (Mic 2:1-5); and, women who adorn themselves with expensive ornaments without concern for the poor (Is 3:16-17; Amos 4:1-3). Finally wealth is deceptive, treacherous (Hab 2:5-6).

In sum, prophets' warning and censure are based on the foundational experience (Ex 6:5-8). The primary purpose of warning and censure is not condemnation but personal conversion and societal transformation.

(2) The Present in View of Future: one of the oft-repeated themes in the prophetic literature is idolatry. Of various texts Is 44:6-23 is considered most radical in this regard. Yahweh is the only God and there is no other (44:6-8) and the uniqueness of Yahweh is again reaffirmed by means of a taunt song which states that idols are nothing (44:9-20). Then the worshipers of idols are exhorted to return to Yahweh (44:21-22) and their return is celebrated in a hymn of jubilation (44:23).

Jer 2:1-37; 3:1-5, 12-13; 3:19-4:4 constitute a continuous poem. First the infidelities of Israel, beginning with Exodus, are narrated in an emotive, experiential, symbolic language (2:1-37). This is followed by a call to conversion in an affectionate, persuasive tone in two stages: 3:1-5, 12-13 and 3:19-4:4. Joel 1: 13-20 exhorts the people of Israel to repentance and prayer; put on sackcloth and lament (1:13), order a fast (1:14) because an invasion of locusts has devastated the country (1:15-20)

In brief, these three texts strongly exhort the audience to turn away from sinful ways and follow the path of fidelity, loyalty which will usher in joy and wellbeing.

(3) Challenges to Leaders: Leaders are supposed to ensure a dynamic, vibrant relation between Yahweh and his people. When they slacken prophets challenge them with conviction and single-mindedness. Unworthy leaders are compared to sleeping dogs (Is 56:10). Isaiah condemns legislators who enact unjust decrees to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed by making widows their prey and robbing the orphans

(Is 10:1). In the same way he censures insolent counselors (Is 28:14). The indictment against false prophets (Ezek 13:1-16) and false prophetesses (Ezek 13:17-23) is severe indeed.

(4) Challenges to Priests: Priest is a mediator between humans and God. He/She presents people's aspirations, needs and problems to God and then imparts God's blessings upon them. There are two important texts concerning priests: one bringing charges against them (Hos 4:4-9) and the other condemning them (Mal 2:1-9).

The charges against priests are the following. They should have instructed people about the Law but they did not (4:6). As their number increased, they preferred Baals instead of Yahweh (4:7). Priests obtained substantial portion of what is offered at sin sacrifices (cf. Lev 6:19-22) and at expiatory sacrifices (cf. Lev 7:7). In this way people's sins was to their advantage (4:8). Therefore Yahweh will punish them.

The admonition to priests in Mal 2: 1-9 is based on the covenant between Yahweh and Levi from whom priesthood originated. It was a covenant of life and peace which Levi honoured and respected (2:5). He walked the way of truth and justice and prevented many from stumbling (2:6). Priests as messengers of the Lord should have authentic knowledge of the Law (2:7). But they failed in this and their deceptive teaching caused many to stumble (2:8). Therefore Yahweh has despised and humiliated them (2:9). This was done so that his covenant with Levi would be continued (2:4).

To sum up this second part of the paper: prophetic theologizing is based on the foundational experience of the Exodus and looks towards the future. Those who do not adhere to the values of the contrast community are strongly reprimanded. The leaders of the people – priests in particular – are challenged and admonished. Now we focus on Jesus' prophetic theologizing.

III. Jesus' Prophetic Theologizing

Jesus' prophetic theologizing has a new foundational basis. He experienced God not as Law-giver and Judge but as *Abba*, Loving Parent. Because God is *Abba*, all humans are his children; they become the sisters and brothers of Jesus. This perspective makes division and separation based on racial purity, despised trade, etc., obsolete (Jeremias, 275-283, 303-312). This was seen in the previous paper, "Experience and Context: The Basis of Jesus' *Dharma*". Here we shall deal with Jesus' prophetic theologizing in terms of his prophetic, symbolic deeds followed by his clarification about the significance of those deeds. For this purpose we shall briefly focus on a pericope from each of the Gospels.

1) Luke 4:16-30: This pericope consists of Jesus' prophetic deed (4:16-20a) followed by the explanation of its significance (4:20b-30). The setting is a synagogue service on the Sabbath at Nazareth (4:16). Jesus unrolls the scroll of Isaiah, chooses Is 61:1-2 and reads it aloud. Unrolling the scroll probably has a symbolic meaning, namely, unveiling the true meaning of the text (cf. Lk 24:32). After reading Is 61:1-2 he rolls up the scroll and sits down (4:20a). Sitting down implies authority.

Luke does not narrate the details of the homily at all. Instead he highlights the reaction of the audience ("The eyes of everyone were fastened on him" - 4:20a) and his enigmatic affirmation ("Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" - 4:21). What does this puzzling declaration mean? The adverb 'today' (*sēmeron*) has a specific soteriological nuance (cf. 2:11; 19:9; 23:43). The significance of 'today' in 4:21 lies in the fact that Is 61:1-2 provides the basic paradigm for his universal mission to the oppressed. The audience were amazed at Jesus' words (4:22a).

The question of the audience (“Is not this Joseph’s son?” – 4:22b) implies that they lack faith in him as the fulfilment of God’s promises and then he refers to the theme of rejected prophets (4:23-27). In this context Jesus affirms God’s preferential option for the non-chosen, needy people by alluding to Elijah (1 Kings 17:1, 8-16; 18:1) and Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-14). This corroborates the universalism proclaimed in 4:18-19. God’s offer of salvation in the prophet Jesus is open to all – particularly the oppressed. Jesus thus continues his journey to God which no one can stop (4:28-30).

2) John 13:1-17: The setting of this pericope is important. Jesus celebrates the Passover commemorating the liberative event of Exodus with his disciples. This setting is found at the beginning of the passion narrative in the synoptic Gospels as well (cf. Mk 14:1a, 12-21 and par.). But in the synoptic Gospels, it functions as a prelude to the key event, namely, the Lord’s Supper (Mk 14:22-26 and par.). But John does not narrate the Lord’s Supper in this context. Instead, he narrates the symbolic act of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet and teaching them about the significance of this event. What is relevant for this paper is mainly 13:1, 3b-5, 12-17. The introduction has a Johannine focus: it is not a celebration of the Passover in the Jewish sense but it is the arrival of *the hour* which is an essential part of his coming from the Father and returning to Him. For John, *the hour* connotes Jesus’ passion, death and glorification. Verse Jn 13:1d highlights the depth of his love for his disciples.

The symbolic deed is narrated in 13:3b-5. It is prefaced by means of a key Johannine theme: Jesus comes from God and returns to Him (13:3b). The event commences with an act of movement (Jesus gets up from the table) followed by an act of

preparation in two steps: he removes the outer garment or robe (*himation*) but not *chitôn* (inner garment) and wraps a towel round his waist. The act proper consists of Jesus pouring water into a basin, washes his disciples' feet and wipes their feet with the towel he was wearing. Then he puts on the robe, reclines at the table and explains the significance of the event. He asks his disciples: "Do you understand what I have done for you?" (13:12). "You called me, 'Teacher' and 'Lord', you are right in this" (13:13). "If I your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (13:14). "I have given you an example (*hypodeigma*) that you should do as I have done for you" (13:15). "Amen, Amen, I say to you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger greater than the one who sent him" (13:16).

The significance of this event and the main thrust of the teaching should be seen against the background of the Greco-Roman culture wherein the word servant (*doulos*) did not connote honour and respect. Secondly, the Greek word *hypodeigma* is often translated 'example', – such a rendering is weak. It means a compelling example that must be followed.

3) Mt 21:12-17: A biblical, symbolic prelude precedes Mt 21:12-17. Jesus' arrival riding on a donkey (21:5) is a citation from Zech 9:9. The crowds who went ahead of him and those followed him shouted: "Hosanna to the Son of David ..." (21:9b). It is a quotation from Ps 118:26. As Jesus entered Jerusalem people asked: "Who is this?" (21: 10b). The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (21:11).

The content of the prelude is deepened in 21:12-17. This pericope consists of an event (21:12) and exchanges between Jesus and the chief priests and the scribes which throw light on the significance of the event (21:13-17).

Jesus entered into the Temple and drove out those who were selling and buying (21:12a). What did they sell and buy? From history it is clear that they were selling and buying victims for sacrifice. He also overturned the table of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves (21:12b). Those who come from foreign countries brought Greco-Roman currencies along with them. According to the Jewish prescription these currencies were polluted and so they had to be exchanged into Jewish currencies. In the process of the exchange of currency and of selling and buying sacrificial victims, the authorities of the Temple made profit. Jesus disapproved of this by saying, “My house will be called a house of prayer” (21:13a). This is a citation from Is 56:7. “But you are making it a den of robbers” (21:13b) which is again a quotation but from Jeremiah (7:11).

The Matthean addition in 21:14 (“The blind and the lame came to him at the Temple and he healed them”) is important. People with defective limbs were prohibited from entering the Temple. But Jesus not only allowed them to enter the Temple but also healed them. This event has Messianic overtones (cf. Is 35:5-6; Mt 11:5). Seeing what Jesus did children were shouting in the Temple saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David”. The chief priests and the scribes were indignant because their theological conviction would not tolerate Jesus’ action and the children’s shout. Jesus in reply said, “From the lips of children and of infants you have ordained praise” (21:16 = Ps 8:2).

The prelude to the event culminates in the saying that Jesus is the prophet (21:11). The exchanges in 21:13-16 (especially Jesus healing the blind and the lame) enable the children to realize that Jesus is the Messiah. In contrast, the chief priests and the scribes reject it outright. The contrast between the unschooled children and the theological experts is striking.

4) Mk 2:15-17: A careful reading of Mk 2:15-17 reveals that Jesus had called Levi, a tax collector to be his disciple (2:14). Levi arranges a fellowship meal in his house for Jesus and his disciples. He had also invited his friends from the same profession (2:15). The scribes, the experts of the Law, challenge Jesus' fellowship meal with tax collectors (2:16). Jesus unequivocally affirms that his mission is precisely to call the rejected, marginalized humans into God's family (2:17).

Mk 2:15-17 thus consists of Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors (2:15) and the confrontation between him and the scribes. He uncompromisingly defends his act. Based on the criterion of multiple attestation Jesus' table fellowship is historical. In fact, Jesus' table fellowship in Mk 2:15-17 was not an isolated event but a common practice of Jesus. This action of Jesus is so radical that no prophet would have dared to do it (cf. Vermes, 224). It is one of the decisive factors that led Jesus to violent death (cf. Perrin, 102-105).

This confrontation is rooted in the understanding of the religiosity and holiness by Jews in one way and Jesus and his followers in a totally different manner. This perspective is treated in the paper, "Experience and Context: the Basis of Jesus' *Dharma*"

Summing up the third phase of this paper, we have chosen a prophetic, symbolic event from each of the Gospels. In these symbolic events Jesus himself spells out the significance of these events. Thus in Jesus' prophetic theologizing his deeds and words are inextricably connected.

IV. Prophetic Theologizing in the 20th and 21st Centuries

It was made clear in the second phase of the paper that prophetic theologizing in the OT has a strong basis in the community. In the third phase it was established that Jesus too engaged himself in

prophetic theologizing in a unique way. Now we ask: Does prophetic theologizing occur in our own time – 20th and 21st centuries? The answer to this question is sought in the fourth phase of the paper and it is based on my personal experiences or from reliable sources.

1) Challenges to Institutional/Social Structure: Have a close look at the picture of Pope Francis on the front page of *JDV Handbook and Calendar*, 2014-2015. Personally experience the genuineness of Pope's action on his face and the stunning reaction of the young Muslim lady seated there. Then look at the cover page of the *Handbook* and read and personalize the write-up: "Rediscovering the maternal womb of mercy" for "understanding, forgiveness and love". Pope Francis says the following about the need to review marriage: "As we begin the Synod on the Family, let us ask the Lord to show us the way forward.... The wounds have to be treated with mercy. The Church is a mother, not a customs office, coldly checking who is within the rules". (*The Times of India*, Pune, Monday, 06/10/2014, p. 14). Similar views regarding gays, abortion, etc.

Bishop George V. Saupin s.j. of Daltonganj was known for his simple life-style. Wearing simple clothing of an average villager of the place he would move around on a bicycle. For a week long missiological seminar at Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1979 he carried his essential belongings in a shoulder-bag made of cotton. According to me, his simplicity was the peak-point of the seminar.

2) Sacrificing own Life: A.T. Thomas s.j. as a student of JDV, had stated in public forum that the campus houses do not pay just wages for the workers. After his ordination he went to Hazaribagh where he organized the oppressed villagers against the rich farmers and money-lenders. The oppressors killed him by attacking with bows and arrows.

Fr. Arul Doss of Balasore diocese was on a village visit in 1999. While celebrating the Eucharist in the village he was attacked. He ran for his life. But he was chased, attacked with bow and arrow and was killed. The spot where he was murdered has become a pilgrim centre now.

3) Challenges to Academic, Intellectual Theologizing: Peter D'Mello s.j., qualified in law, told the JDV authorities that he can conduct Pastoral Course for the students effectively and in a relevant manner. After his theological formation and ordination he was assigned to a mission in Thalassery on the border between Maharastra and Gujarat. He organized the oppressed people of that area and formed a labour union. The oppressors dubbed him as a missionary in disguise. The Church leaders held that forming a labour union is not within the permissible limit of the Church. He was forced to leave the Society of Jesus and priesthood.

Piazza della Pilotta is a small square in Rome touching three prestigious institutions: Biblical Institute, Gregorian University, and Institute of Spirituality. An educated lady used to shout in *Piazza della Pilotta*, saying: *studiate, studiate e diventate piu ignoranti!* (You go on studying and become more and more ignorant!). Horacio Simian-Yofre s.j, a professor of Prophets at the Biblical Institute told me in an informal conversation that what she says is indeed a prophecy!

4) Mission with a Vision: Fr. Engelbert Zeitler SVD (1919-1999) and George M. Soares-Prabhu s.j. (1929-1995) were Christian leaders who had a vision in their mission. I was closely associated with both for many years: Fr. Zeitler was my superior and provincial and Soares-Prabhu was my close friend and colleague.

Fr. Zeitler had the foresight to establish minor seminaries in the southern States in early 60s and ensured financial viability at the initial stages. Then he directed his vision to national level: All India Seminar (May 14-15, 1969) CBCI and CRI. His name may not be found in the print media. But his heart and generous financial support were behind these national ventures.

Seeing that many priests were leaving priesthood after Vatican II in Europe and USA and that vocations were diminishing, he established National Vocation Service Centre (NVSC) at Pune. It has developed and continues to serve the Church in India and the third world. In 1976 he established Ishvani Kendra (Missiological Institute) for research and planning for the mission of the Church.

Fr. Soares-Prabhu was an exceptionally gifted exegete and a challenging theologian. His exegesis is based on reading the Bible with both eyes (Christian and Indian) but one vision. The essays on poverty and caste system in India are challenging and life-enhancing. He challenges Christians who are prejudiced against the Hindu practice of idol worship. In fact, Hindus worship the deity whose presence is mediated through the idol. He has laid the foundation for a theology of religions in India. The four volumes of his *Collected Writings* bear witness to his exegetical and theological contribution to India.

Of the 65 essays he has authored in the four volumes the most significant and extensively investigated is on poverty in India/Asia. His death was a symbolic enactment of this favourite theme. His death did not occur on a bed in a famous hospital; he was not attended to by competent doctors and cared for by committed nurses; and, it was not preceded by the administration of the sacraments (except the sacrament of encountering the sacred in the secular). His death occurred while trying to cross the road on a bicycle, the conveyance of the poor in India. He died on a

dusty road where thousands of poor Indians die each year. He poured out his blood there and it remained clotted for many days, a feature common for the poor in India. The first to see his dead body was a stranger, another feature of the life of the poor. Those who were privileged to resonate with the heart of Soared-Prabhu would certainly consider that his death was indeed a prophetic fulfilment of his cherished theme. His death was indeed identification with the poor in India. It was also radical following of Jesus even unto death.

Both Fr. Zeitler and Fr. Soares-Prabhu were good friends and they collaborated wholeheartedly for the Church in India. Both were called to the Lord on the same date and in the same month (July 22nd) to be with Him.

The four models of prophetic theologizing I have narrated above are confined to my experience. Sr. Rani Maria and many others are prophets too. The readers can complement my views with their experiences and insights.

Concluding Reflections

- 1) Prophets were God's spokespersons for the betterment of the life and religiosity of Jewish people. They intervene in times of crisis preceding or following major turning-points of the nation's history: the threat of Assyria, the ruin of the Northern Kingdom, the ruin of the Southern Kingdom, the departure for Exile, the end of Exile and the Return.
- 2) Prophets had an immediate experience of God. They were convinced that they were communicating God's will and that they were instruments in guiding his chosen people.
- 3) Prophetic challenges to Christian leadership is the need of the hour. But how to implement the challenges? Who will take the lead?

4) As followers of Jesus, Christian leaders should strive after combining prophetic deeds with their challenging words. Otherwise, their words would lack credibility.

5) One wonders whether our theological formation is primarily oriented towards academic, intellectual excellence rather than experiential and spiritual growth and transformation of our students. The people of our mother land—notably our Hindu brethren – would undoubtedly expect the latter. Where does JDV stand in its theological formation?

Notes:

1. Amaladass, Anand, *Indian Exegesis: Hindu Buddhist Hermeneutis*, Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publication, 2003.
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Dharma of Jesus - A Feminist Perspective

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Abstract: Beginning with the polyvalent meaning of the word *dharma*, the author connects it to the Trinitarian relations on the one hand and the statistically demonstrable dehumanization of women on the other. She make her case for siding with women on the basis Jesus' own approach and the teachings of the Church. She advocates the capability approach as appropriate for empowering women in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Trinitarian roots of dharma; women's marginalization; Jesus and women; women in the Church, capability approach.

Introduction

The inexorableness of addressing theological themes from a perspective, especially from the perspective of those on the underside of history is increasingly evident. This is because the category of the disadvantaged is generally human-made: the underprivileged emerge due to the fact of having been divested of their dignity and shoved into an abject state. The section comprises a large number and the globalized world causes its swift engorgement. Theological reflection on such issues is hoped to generate optimism towards restoring the divested dignity and attaining life in its fullness.

Dignity is understood as not an acquired quality of human being which could be won and lost. Rather, dignity is innate, i.e., human beings are born with dignity. It also means that one is not discriminated against or humiliated on the grounds of wealth, caste, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, or sex. Dignity is further linked to the concept of autonomy, defined in terms of the freedom an individual seeks from multiple structures of domination.

Given the reality of discrimination in our world at various levels and spheres, this paper delves into the theological category of the '*Dharma* of Jesus', linking it to the reality of sexual inequality. In line with the significance of the *Rg-Vedic* concept of *dharma*, we investigate Jesus' way of life or his *dharma* in the context of women's marginalization and even exclusion. We conclude with some proposals to reclaim the dignity of women as the children of God, as God's own image and likeness.

1. *Dharma* – Significance

The concept '*dharma*' has been one of the most powerful and influential terms in the Indian thought and society for several millennia, dating from the Vedic times. It is a basic principle around which different religious, social, and political institutions are developed; precisely because of this the concept has been perceived and employed diversely in history of the Indian and the Hindu society. In accordance with our theme, we adhere to and employ the etymological, ethical, and religious sense of the word.

Etymologically, the term *Dharma* derives from the Sanskrit *dhr* meaning 'to uphold', 'to support', 'to carry', 'to sustain', and 'to protect'.¹ The sense supplied by the term '*dhr*' can be understood as providing the ethical significance of the concept of *dharma*. Various sources support this claim. They define *dharma* as ordinance, usage, duty, responsibility, right justice, moral obligation, righteousness, virtue, good works, and function.² W. K. Mahony puts it succinctly by stating that the characteristic essence of *dharma* is 'correctness' both in a descriptive (the way things are) and in a prescriptive (the way things should be) sense³. This can be taken as a reference to ones' 'being' and 'doing'. As such, *dharma* as a principle upholds and sustains an individual/community/universe in its wholeness, i.e., in cosmic and transcendental dimensions.