

JPJRS 18/2 ISSN 0972-33315, July 2015: 37-56

‘Dharma of Jesus’ for Indian Christian Theology Today

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4282203

Stable URL: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4282203>

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Abstract: This essay focuses on the implications of Soares-Prabhu’s understanding of the dharma of Jesus for Indian Christian theologizing. Beginning with a brief introduction to the concept of dharma as understood by Soares-Prabhu, the foundational experience of Jesus (God as abba) is placed into the context of the three cycles of divine-human engagement in the Bible. This experience that led to the fearless mission of Jesus invites the Church of today to follow in his footsteps, to engage in liberative action on behalf of the poor and the outcasts, and also on behalf of an interconnected, holon universe. But embracing such ‘endangering spirituality’ becomes possible only when the agents of liberation work out a pedagogy to attain their own inner freedom.

Key words: Indian Christian theology; mission; liberation; abba experience; radical concern.

At the start of this article, allow me to pay my homage to two very courageous people of our time – Satyarthi and Malala (Nobel Prize Winners) who are really dharmic people, in their life of witness.

A second introductory note may be in place. It is about the scholarly discussions of the Muslim scholar Reza Aslan. He has established himself as a scholar on historical Jesus and has been quite persuasive in presenting a genuine portrait of Jesus of history distinguishing from Jesus of faith. He argues that three facts are undisputable in Jesus: i) that he was a Jew and preached within Judaism; everything around him was of Jewish context; ii) that he initiated a movement of the kingdom that was so different from other movements; iii) that he was crucified for sedition and he died as a condemned. All this happened in a turbulent period

of Judaism dominated by the Romans and controlled by the rich religious aristocracy.¹

I am sure Soares whose contributions on ‘*Dharma of Jesus*’ we are discussing, would have approved of these findings; If I were to redo my article, I would do it as a conversation between Aslam and Soares. May be such a study is in place in the context of the unrest in the world around us on religious issues.

Let me add another introductory note. The wisdom traditions of the universe subscribe to many traditions of *dharma*, biblical included. How do they fit in with other traditions such as science, philosophy and literature? Can they also be considered as forms of *dharma*? Or is *dharma* an exclusively religious notion? These questions require larger treatment and we shall not attempt it here.

The development of the paper progresses in three parts: first, without being exhaustive, I try to highlight what I consider the salient features of the dynamics of ‘*Dharma of Jesus*’ in Soares-Prabhu’s thinking. Based on them I will point out certain features of an Indian Christian theology emerging from his thinking. The concluding section will dwell on some critical remarks.

1. Dynamics of Dharma of Jesus.

In the fourth volume of the Collected Writings of George Soares Prabhu (CWG), we find a treatment of the term ‘*dharma*’. Quoting Kuppaswamy, he says that *Dharma* stands for religious observance, righteousness, justice, conformity in law, conformity to custom, obedience to the social order, sense of duty etc. This means that the term *dharma* has religious, moral, ethical and legal significance. Further on referring to Kane, he says that *dharma* refers to ordinance, usage, duty, right, justice, morality, virtue, religion, good works, and thus the term is all comprehensive and has legal and juridical significance, while Dandekar calls it

precepts that help material and spiritual sustenance and growth of individuals and society.²

Dharma is what I believe (e.g., I Hindu-Dharma, Christian-Dharma); it is also what I am supposed to do – my family or caste obligations (*kula-dharma*, or *jati-dharma*). Traditionally *dharma* has been identified with *varnashrma-dharma* referring to the four castes and the four stages of life. *Dharma* is the organization of social life through well-regulated social classes/castes and organization of one's life within those classes into various stages. In the Gita, there is insistence of *sva-dharma* which is often considered as specification of *varna dharma*. Soares seems to prefer a more radical understanding of *sva-dharma* as doing of action that inheres in one's own nature; i.e. individual finding his *sva-bhava* and developing accordingly. Ideally therefore *dharma* should spring from the inner depths of one's personal spontaneity. "In practice it is too often the result of interiorized values which function as an 'eternal law taken into the psyche' and so enable a dominant minority to control the community through 'hegemony' by means of a permanently organized consent."³ Internal values should in fact liberate exigencies of human freedom rather than domesticate it.

The real *sva-bhava* in the humans is being the child of God; one acts and behaves from that *sva-bhava* considering one's own identity and that of others as children of God. Accordingly, for George Soares, *dharma* of Jesus is the complex way that consists of religious insight and ethical concern (of experience, world-view and value) which determine the life-style that Jesus proclaimed and practiced, which has been concisely formulated for us in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). It represents a pattern of behavior appropriate to a follower of Jesus; Sermon on the Mount is the authentic *dharma* of Jesus – the pattern of existence he lived by and proclaimed.

Dharma of Jesus emerges from the core experience of Jesus as the beloved of his *abba*; it unfolds itself in three cycles of Yhwh, of Jesus and of the mission. It finally demands three fold *sva-dharma*: i) of freedom, ii) of sonship and of iii) radical concern. Let us elaborate on this unfolding.

2. The NT Core experience.

The core experience of Jesus, according to Soares, is recognizing himself and of being acknowledged as the beloved of his Father. This experience of God as the Father - *abba* - symbolized at the baptism, defined Jesus' self, vision and mission.⁴ *Abba* is goodness. This is the foundational and original moment. Jesus was so deeply rooted in the self of his Father, that he felt total belonging to his *abba*. He so identified with *Abba's* vision and mission that he entrusted himself for his reign and his realm. This provided him with total inner freedom; a freedom from all disordered attachments to people, power, position and things. He grew into the radicalism of this inner freedom progressively and intensely, as he fearlessly confronted the powers that contradicted his *Abba's* vision and mission and courageously befriended the needy and the outcast with the profound concern of his father. This fearless confrontation and the courageous identification marked his life and led him paschal way.

He was appalled to see the grip of Satan, the power of evil around. The little ones and the poor -- the *anawim* of Yhw— were crushed under the weight of discrimination by the religious and political powers, especially the religious burden of narrow legalism. They suffered from diseases and disorders of all kinds. The healing and nature miracles were powerful symbols of his intent in confronting the oppressive powers and in identifying with the outcasts. He became a friend of the poor, the crippled, the marginalized, and the sinners, and engaged in table fellowship

with them as a sign of his Abba's rule⁵ The disfigured, the diseased and the outcast received a new dignity and identity as children of God, to the displeasure of the religious and the political powers that controlled them.

3. Three Cycles in divine-human engagement

This core experience is expanded to include, review, and interpret the Biblical accounts in three cycles of Yhwh, of Jesus and the mission. Soares encases them into three cycles. He uses the term cycle, not stages, indicating that the divine pedagogy follows a cyclic pattern. What Yhwh accomplished with Israel remains true always, and is carried on in Jesus. What Jesus accomplished in himself and in his mission is true of God's ways with us always and is carried forward in mission. It is rather intriguing that Soares does not qualify the third phase as the cycle of the Spirit; instead he calls it cycle of mission. Does it show a rather weakened theology of Spirit in him? Is it because he wants to give greater role to ourselves in this cycle, invited to take the mission forward? It may be both.

3.1. *Cycle of Yhwh*

Soares sees the dynamics of the gospels as the continuation of the divine pedagogy right from the beginning of time: chaos is turned into order in and through creation, sin and slavery is transformed into liberation, and exile is responded with wholeness and harmony – this is the story of Israel. Each of these phases has a moment of liberation from chaos, sin and exile, and each has a moment of salvation/ wholeness – in creation, exodus and return. The low points in human journey are met with high points of divine response of forming and deepening covenant in an ever-widening movement of divine-human engagement.

God creates and recreates continuously. By liberating

them from slavery in Egypt, Yahweh desired to form them into a people, a contrast community, living in righteousness and compassion. Israel refuses to become a contrast community according to Yhwh's mind; it chooses to imitate neighbouring nations and worship their gods in order to become like them. Yhwh beckons them back through the prophets –criticizing them for domesticating YHWH, and for imitating other nations who rely on the might of their armies. Israel disowns the prophets and walks the way of 'pagans', letting the prophets die the death of a suffering servant. The pattern of the cycle of Yhwh continues in history with the two tendencies: to image Yhwh in one's own image, and to project 'nations' as models of power and success.

The biblical revelation is viewed in a linear movement from chaos to creation to sin; from sin to the re-constitution of the people of Israel to exile; then from exile to Jesus to the New Heavens.

3.2. *Cycle of Jesus*

Rooted in the core experience of being the beloved of his Abba, Jesus proclaims, inaugurates, enacts and accomplishes God's reign. He was absolutely sure that God's reign is not accomplished through coercive power, or through political machinations, or through magical works or by moral establishments. As a failed messiah, standing in the Jewish prophetic tradition, Jesus made it absolutely clear, according to Soares, that God's reign is the revelation of effective love.⁷ Emerging from the baptismal waters of Jordan and strengthened by the affirmation as the beloved of Yhwh (Mk 1: 9-15), Jesus announced the kingdom of God and elaborated on it in the Sermon on the Mount. It is the new pedagogy of the new people of God founded on the compassionate love of the Father, defying the logic of the old order.

Soares explains the Sermon on the Mount in three *sutras*: i) Sermon on the Mount is not law but love; ii) Sermon on the Mount is not Law but Gospel, ii) Sermon on the Mount is a goal with directive norm.⁸

The first *Sutra* implies that one needs to interiorize the shift from external observance to interior intention and simplification of multiple precepts into unity of the fundamental Christian attitude – namely obedience to the love of God and radical concern of love for neighbor.

The second *sutra* means that the love to which Sermon invites us, is not a virtue among other virtues, but the total attitude resulting from the exposure to the divine love as experienced in Jesus. It is the natural life-style of a Christian gripped by the proclamation of the kingdom and the unconditional acceptance of God in Jesus.

The third *Sutra* indicates that we are urged on with power from within, welling up from an experience of the unconditional love of God, to produce ‘fruits of love’, rather than getting busy with ‘works’ under the goad of greed and guilt.

Sermon on the Mount is grounded on the experience of God’s unconditional love. Jesus’ own life is determined by his foundational experience of God as *abba*, the experience associated with his Baptism (John 1.32). His life and ministry was a sustained attempt to evoke this experience in his disciples, and in the people around through word and deed, through parables and healings. Sermon on the Mount is not just a law but an attitude, a perspective of seeing the world and looking at the world from the experience of unconditional love.

This new commandment of love is radical and innovative in that Jesus combines the well-known text of Dt 6:5 (to love God with all your heart and mind) with less known text of Lev

19:18 (to love one's neighbor) and makes it incumbent upon believer to live it. The combining of the two texts was an original and radical insight of Jesus. According to Soares no one except Jesus would have dared to put this obscure text of Lev 19:18 on to a level with the *shema* in Dt 6:4-5 – the great confession of Israel's faith. Thus the love commandment brings together in a unique manner the love of God (Dt 6:5) and love of neighbor (Lev 19:18) – arguing persuasively that one rests upon the other. Soares never gets tired of repeating this innovative and provocative teaching of Jesus.

For Soares, "Effective love (*agape*), then, will respond to the needs of the exploited and oppressed neighbor by engaging in action for the removal of structures that are responsible for such exploitation and oppression. In an unjust society, *agape* inevitably becomes a struggle for justice: it strives to set free the oppressed' (Lk 4:18).⁹ Incidentally 'effective love' appears as the constant theme in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

3.3. *Cycle of Mission*

Mission is to enter into the process of the reign of God and further its movement towards an end-time community. *Gaudium et Spes* (Vat II) speaks of the Church as a new human family by becoming a symbol and servant of God's reign; hence the primary task of the church, according to Soares, is to lead humankind and cosmos into God's reign. Soares is very clear in stating simply and forcefully that mission is to 'make God's love present'; it should be an effective love. It will not have any semblance of 'conquest or sale'. Hence Soares warns us not to identify mission with church growth; it is to impoverish it or distort it; church as institution should not be primarily concerned about itself.¹⁰ Church as a community should be a living community making visible the primacy of God and primacy of God's reign; its horizon must be as big as the cosmos. The vision of the kingdom

implies ultimate freedom and liberation for all; this is how Father's heart and mind become real in terms of prophetic justice and equality for all.

Mission of Jesus implies shaping a **community of radical freedom** (from both internal compulsions towards greed and ambition, and from external constraints of a servile bondage to ritual and law), and a **community of radical universalism** (seeing all human beings as brothers and sisters because they are children of Abba and hence no discrimination at all).

This vision of the reign of God enabled Jesus to identify with the outcast and sinners and to confront the powers that are: the theological, religious and political establishments represented by the Pharisees, the Chief Priests and the Herods who burdened the poor and the lowly. This brought about conflict that led him to the death on the cross which is the ultimate revelation of the effective love of Father and the Son.

Soares argues from within the logic of the Matthean gospel, that 'Mission Command' in 28 (Mt) should be read in the light of Mt 5: 13-16. Mission includes life of witness, act of healing, and formation of community etc. It is an invitation to be and to do 'good'. It is a radical orientation; an invitation to live the discipleship as the light and salt of the earth. This is the essence of discipleship and it is the dharma – the be-attitude.¹¹ According to Soares this 'Be-attitude discipleship' marked the early Christian community.

So the early church which grows out of the community of Jesus as a tree grows out of its seed, has no special places of worship (no temple, no synagogue, no church); no special cult objects to give physical expression to the deity (no murti, no ark of the covenant, no tabernacle); no special liturgical language (worship and instruction are in the common language of the people

–Aramaic in Palestine, Popular Hellenistic Greek in the Hellenistic world); no sacred priesthood (for the ministers of the community are never called sacred persons (*hieris*) in the New Testament, where Jesus alone is the one mediator and the one priest).

Then he asks: “If such typical ‘religious’ elements have crept into the later church as part of its ‘inculturation’ into the ‘Hellenistic’ world, may it not be because the followers of Jesus have not always found it easy to live up to the radicalism of their Master?”¹²

4. Three Qualitative Features of the Mission Cycle (Dharma of Jesus)

4.1.A *Dharma of Freedom.*

Jesus developed his *dharma* in opposition to Jewish legalism; the early Christians experienced their ‘new sect’ as *dharma* of freedom, liberating them from the oppressive burden of the Law (Mt: 11:28-30; Lk 11:4-15). Jesus proposes a new understanding of law that is more radical and liberating than the formal legalism of the Pharisees as described in the NT (Mk 2:23-28; 7:9-13; Mt 23:23). Jesus radicalizes law in terms of effecting true love. We need law because we are not yet at the fullness of eschatological existence; yet we are freed from the constraints of law because we live in the light of the resurrection. (Gal 5:1) Christ has set us free.¹³

4.2. A *Dharma of Sonship*

Soares says: “Ultimately it is this experience of sonship which is the heart of the dharma of Jesus”. (p.206). Jesus’ liberated attitude towards law originated from his experience of God as *abba*. This experience of love as totally unconditional calls for ‘*radical obedience*’; it is not an external obedience of law but an interior obedience of the heart at the service of the Father’s

love.¹⁴ Such obedience is radical and fulfilling and it constitutes us as humans.

4.3. A *Dharma of Concern*

Sonship in the New Testament is closely related to 'brotherhood' since to experience God as *abba* is to experience *human* as brother (and sister). Hence *dharma* of Jesus inevitably leads to *dharma* of concern (agape). Mt 5:43-48; 7:12; and indeed it is evidenced throughout the NT (Mt 22:34-40; Jn 13:34; Rm 13:8; 1 Cor 13: 1-13; 1 Pt 4:8; 1; Js 2:8; Jn 3:23; 2 Jn 5.)

Soares argues that Mt 22:34-40 urges us not so much to love God and neighbor, but to love God by loving neighbor. Acceptance of sonship is not a matter for bargaining, (we have no claim on God Lk 17:7-10) but to live out this sonship in love, joy, peace, gentleness, patience, faithfulness, self-control, and goodness. (Gal 5: 22ff). These fruits of the Spirit are the unmistakable marks of 'sonship', marks of *dharma* of Jesus. Not striving for works, but we are urged on by a power from within, welling up from God's unconditional love, and producing 'fruits of love' in return. 'Fruits' –the spontaneous outcome of our *svabhava*, of what we truly are, (every good tree produces good fruit – Mt 7:17), and not works, action strained after under the goad of guilt or of greed, ('no one will be justified by the works of law – Rm 3:20) are what the *dharma* of the Sermon on the Mount requires of us.¹⁵ Concern for the neighbor is central to the *dharma* of Jesus; it must be universal - to all who are in need (Lk 10:29-37); and it must be gratuitous, without expecting any reward. (Lk 6:32). Eucharist is the act in which the community is created symbolically by sharing the bread and wine.

We shall conclude this description of Soares' *dharma* of Jesus with an account of his faith in Jesus:

The man who reads the Gospels critically, with the freshness of its first hearers brought to them, does indeed meet Jesus in all his strangeness and fascination. He finds himself face to face with this man who fits no category and yet belongs to all, who is gentle yet strong, patient yet violent, conscious of his towering authority yet spending himself in service, so tolerant towards sinners yet so adamant against sin. He finds a Jesus utterly like us in his doubt and suffering and anguish, yet awesomely remote in his consciousness of his mission (for he knows that it is in his words and deeds that the rule of God comes), in his relationship to the Father (for which Jew would have dared to address God as Jesus did, as ‘abba’, ‘dear Father’?), in his claim to absolute commitment (for what man could dare to say with Jesus ‘he who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me’?). He meets Jesus dying on a cross, only to rise again, and there he learns to accept a life that is always threatened, and finds the courage to be.¹⁶

5. Implications for Indian Christian Theology

5.1. *Experience as the starting point of theologizing*

The scripture scholar in Soares traces Jesus’ life back to its foundational moment as evidenced in the Gospels. The baptism of Jesus is depicted as the originating experience of his self-understanding and of his mission.

This is very significant for theology, especially for Indian Christian theology. In the classical Indian tradition, *Brahmājijñasa*, if followed in earnest, should lead to *anubhava* – an experience of God. The popular Indian tradition, rather than discussing God experience, try to lead people into God experience. Theology is challenged to start from experience and

to articulate that experience in a way that leads to such experience. Experience is often described as something subjective, emotional and inner and not 'objective' and rational. It is often contrasted with encounter or revelation that is 'verifiable' to some extent. However, in the true sense of the word, an experience is an encounter with Reality; that which takes me beyond me, that which relates me to the other, and thus fulfills me. In a genuine experience, the encounter with the reality draws me out of myself. It is this encounter – drawing me out of me – that makes experience the *sine qua non* of 'theology'. It is like the *ek-sistence* in Heidegger – something that stands out. This encounter takes place in actual, worldly, secular living. Experience is not in the narrow sense a privatized sensory moment, but an opening to the larger world and reality.

Experience is neither innerly (purely subjective) nor outwardly (purely objective); experience is in the relationality, in the relatedness of the self to reality. In Husserlian terms neither in phenomenon nor in noumenon but in their inter-relatedness.

As Landon Gilkey explains we need to avail 'limit experience' to encounter the reality. We are truly encountered at the 'limit' points either of joy or of pain and sorrow. Those limit moments enable us to encounter the Other, the opening up of horizons.

Jesus is drawn into the *abba* – his world and vision; that is starting point of his mission and self. This encounter takes place in the Jordan waters; it is an immersion into the waters of Jordan so that heavens are opened. This is the challenge for Indian Christian theology: to be immersed in the waters of the land so that an encounter takes place that takes us beyond ourselves, onto the beyond. God encounters in the sanctuary of our experience – taken in the comprehensive sense. This is a radical statement. We are encountered in us, we are led from within; in

the light of that encounter we become our own measure in the genuine sense of the word.

Unfortunately, we are accustomed to distrust our experience, we don't value our encounters, we are so alienated from ourselves that we look elsewhere for God. We have not devised ways and means of leading people to ek-xperience, we have not developed tools to value and analyze our experience, we are disappointing the Spirit working within us.

5.2. Dharma of radical freedom as India's perennial quest for liberation.

Soares elaborates on the dharma of Jesus for radical freedom. Freedom from any and every internal compulsion, and freedom to free others, especially from the bonds of law, disease and sin. Jesus is calling us for radical freedom which is a dangerous freedom because it brings us into conflict. 'Liberation' has been the perennial theme of Indian search. This has been interpreted in an exclusive other-worldly fashion. Jesus challenges us to take this notion to the world and people – to liberate them from every kind of oppression - internal and external.

We are not in conflict because we are not free, we don't risk the road of freedom: we want to be comfortable in our (false) security. The 'endangering spirituality' of Jesus has been domesticated by philosophical jargons and theological niceties. We escape into them because we do not want to travel the road less travelled – the road to freedom – confronting ourselves radically and thus getting empowered.

We have not worked out pedagogy to realize the inner freedom; we are so much dictated by our fears, attachments, mind-set and ego; we are the dictators of ourselves. Our theological teaching and learning has not enabled us to free ourselves from the dictates of our mind-set and our fears. We

talk about liberating others when we are slaves to our egos. This is where Indian theology is challenging us. Without engaging in a personal liberative process, theologizing is not possible.

5.3. *Mission as dharma of radical concern.*

Soares emphasizes much on the radical concern of Jesus. It is a radical concern for brothers and sisters because they belong to the same *abba* father. It invites a radical commitment to the other and radical universalism beyond all religion, caste and nationalities.

Often our radicality begins and ends with fighting for minority rights, with the protection of rights and privileges of individual churches' Rites, arguing for religious rights in order to protect our resources. The radical concern of the Gospels is domesticated into safeguarding the rights and privileges of the community. The universalism of the gospel breaks down all the borders. It is an ever-widening circle where no one is excluded.

Today we need to expand that universalism beyond the human family to radical concern for nature and the cosmos. '*Vasudev kudumbakam*' excludes no one and nothing. It is the prophetic tradition of Jeremiah asking Israelites to befriend the exile, to pitch their tent in Babylon rather than hoping for return to Jerusalem to worship. Kingdom of God is a relational reality: right relationship with YHWH and with each other and with the cosmos. It is holon pattern inter-related, inter-connected, and inter-dependent. In this there is no false polarity between the universal and the particular. In a holon perspective the universal is in the particular and the particular is in the universal. Every culture, language, tradition and people contribute to the whole, and each has a value and existence of its own and each one is open to the whole. Radical concern of the Gospels calls for attending to the part and whole at the same time.

5.4. *Symbolic structure of Reality*

Soares was keen on developing the *dvani* interpretation of the scriptures according to the best of the Indian tradition. His work in developing a course on the *dharma* of Jesus testifies to that. Supporting this approach, Francis D'Sa worked on a philosophical basis for such *dvani* interpretation referring to the symbolic view of the world.¹⁷ The universe is experienced as entirely pervaded by the Lord (Isa Upanishad I). The universe is the reflections of the radiance of Brahman (Mundaka Upanishad (II.ii 11-13). World is experienced as the symbol of the Absolute, having an aura of the numinous and a dimension of depth. This symbolic structure of reality invites us to develop a theology of the ordinary, a perspective of everything, a different way of seeing, a holon perspective – that we are divinely related and dependent. This has far reaching implications for Indian Christian theology. Everything is as Francis D'sa says is the expression of the inexpressible, the manifestation of the unmanifest. This symbolic structure of reality grounds *dvani* interpretation, according to D'Sa. In this perspective, every part is related to one another and to the whole. This means that individual liberation is not an isolated event, but is closely related to the liberation of all.

We are living in a field of compassion with regard to everything and everyone. We walk on this earth gently and reverentially; we relate with one another respectfully; because in all these we are related with the Whole. *Dharma* of Jesus is inviting us to develop a *sadhana* of Jesus where we grow in a new kind of filial relationship with God our *abba* which calls for a radical way of living with everyone and everything. A new depth dimension emerges in and through us.

5.5. An attitude of research and intellectual depth originating from and leading to praxis.

Soares invites us through his writing to be men and women of research and intellectual depth, to take interest in the issue of our times, to engage them in the light of the Gospels and to read the Gospels in the light of the issues, to be passionate about Jesus and his Gospels. May be Pope Francis is exemplifying that for us: To act according to the demands of the Gospels, then to theorize on it, and theologize on them rather than start from theories. ‘Wash the feet of a Muslim woman, marry those living together, not to condemn the gay people’ – and then theorize on them and makes doctrines. That was the gospel pedagogy, that was the style of Yhwh – engage in liberating people and through that act reveal the self of God.

6. Critical Remarks

Soares was very critical in his scholarship; hence it is but natural we offer critical view on him. Twenty years later when we read Soares, we still feel the passion and depth of his research. However, twenty years also give us space to locate him and evaluate.

1. One of the major criticisms meted out against him (by D’Sa and others)¹⁸ is that he focused too much and too exclusively on the core experience of Jesus. I find this criticism rather misplaced because the insistence on the core experience is not for reducing everything into it, rather to show that his teaching, ministry and his person flow out of the core experience. The latter enables one to see everything in perspective. Secondly, core experience does not mean a magical, dramatic and momentary experience though the Gospels do portray certain drama into the narrative as at the baptism scene at Jordan. Core experience was the ‘font’ out of which unfolded the story of his

life and ministry. Not a magical moment.

2. In the context of the recent scientific scholarship on evolution and eco-system, I find that in general Soares' theological thinking is too anthropocentric. Perhaps he is justified in this for two reasons: the de-humanizing situation of India (then and also now) demanded an anthropo-centric response based on the values of the kingdom. Secondly much of the modern scholarship in NT was highly anthropo-centric and Soares belonged to that generation. However, the emerging scientific understanding of the universe as holon reality – as inter-related and inter-dependent reality – perhaps calls for a new hermeneutics of the kingdom. Perhaps the heaven-opening, the immersing in the waters of Jordan, the dove above, the people around – all these implied a cosmic dimension that we have neglected even in interpreting the baptism scene as the symbol of the core experience. Entering into the waters of Jordan is to be incarnated in the life and struggle of the people. Similarly, 'water' is a cosmic element along with sky and the bird.

3. Soares emphatically mentions that kingdom is a relational reality. However, in elaborating that relationality, he is not defining relationality as constitutive of the person. Rather he seems to be guided by the Greek notion of 'person' as subsisting substance, and perhaps is unable to assert that relatedness constitutes the person. If so, we are related not only to one another but to every element in the universe, hence we are cosmic being. Hence kingdom is to be understood as a cosmo-theandric reality (to borrow from Panikkar) and not confined to anthropo-theism.

Having said these in terms of some critical remarks, let me add that George Soares Prabhu was an event, rather than an individual scholar, theologian, and writer. This event was constituted by his remaining loyal to his teaching in devotion to

his students, by committing himself to be a meticulous scholar critiquing the establishment – the church and the civil society and also the Society of Jesus, by presenting himself as a colleague who would engage his companions in enlivening dialogue, by remaining a true religious making huge demands on himself. We can celebrate that event, not by remembering him, but by enacting what he did.

Notes:

- 1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VOMFjQfJ8w>
- 2 Collected Writings of George Soares-Prabhu, (Vols 1-4), Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, 199: Pune; (henceforth cited as CWG) CWG: Vol.4 p.153ff.
- 3 CWG: Vol.4. p.154.
- 4 CWG: Vol:4. pp.190 ff.
- 5 CWG: Vol.3. pp.28-29.
- 6 CWG: Vol.1. pp.5.ff.
- 7 CWG: Vol.1. p.11.
- 8 CWG: Vol.4. p.162.
- 9 CWG Vol.4. p.168.
- 10 CWG.Vol.1. p.12.
- 11 CWG. Vol.1. pp.20ff.
- 12 CWG: Vol.4. pp.144.
- 13 CWG: Vol.4. pp.14-5.
- 14 CWG: Vol.4, pp. 165ff.
- 15 CWG: Vol.4, pp. 166 ff.
- 16 CWG Vol. 2, pp 120-121.

17 D'Sa. "Dharma as delight in Cosmic Welfare: A study of Dharma in the Gita", Bible Bhashyam, 6. 1980, pp.355-357.

18 CWG: Vol.4. Introduction xxxiii.