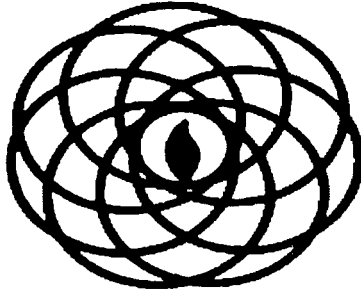


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# ***j*nanadeepa**

**Pune Journal of Religious Studies**



## **Dharma of Jesus**

**Volume 18 No. 2**

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# *Jnanadeepa:*

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George Soares-Prabhu, SJ (1929-1995) was one of the stalwarts of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth. He exercised enormous influence on his students and colleagues, challenging them to rethink Christian faith in a way that would bring it alive in the Indian context, especially the context of the poor. He was a biblical scholar, and his theology was “distinctly a biblical theology of liberation seen through Indian eyes.”<sup>1</sup> It is that sensitivity to the Indian context that led him coin the phrase “dharma of Jesus”. The Sanskrit word *dharma* has many meanings and is used in the Indian religions of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, besides that family of religions known as Hinduism. Coming from the root *dhr*, meaning ‘to hold’ or ‘to support’ it might be taken to mean as ‘that which upholds’. Roughly it can mean the ‘metaphysical basis of religion’, ‘cosmic order’, ‘ethical code of conduct’, ‘teachings’ of a guru, and so on. With such rich meanings, it becomes immediately clear as to how apt the word *dharma* is for describing what Jesus taught, and, above all, lived. In grateful memory of Soares-Prabhu’s contributions, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth organized a seminar in October 2014. The essays in this issue were presented at that seminar.

The presentation of the essays is done in a centrifugal fashion, beginning with the thought of Soares-Prabhu himself to extensions of his thought in different directions done by the authors of the individual essays. Thus the very first essay “The Dharma of Jesus”<sup>2</sup> is a summary of a well appreciated course that Soares-Prabhu used to offer at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth. It traces Jesus’ dharma to his experience of God as unconditional love, often known as the *Abba* experience of Jesus. The experience of God’s unconditional love becomes the fountain-head of the freedom he enjoyed in reaching out to all, especially

those in the periphery of society. This experience gave him the security to stand in solidarity with the poor and confront injustice, which, in turn, led him to the cross and the divine affirmation of his life and death in the resurrection.

In the remaining essays we turn from Soares-Prabhu to his students, colleagues, successors, and others. Joyce Kaithakottil, one of his students who turned out to be a biblical scholar himself, delivered the keynote address at the conference. He detailed how the dharma of Jesus is a response to the two questions asked by God in the Book of Genesis to human beings: “Where are you?” and “Where is your brother?” The first refers to our relationship with God and the second to our relationship with fellow human beings. The last book of the Bible (Revelation) is seen, then, as the Church’s response to these questions in the concrete context of the Roman Empire; it challenges contemporary Christians to respond similarly in their own situations. The essay by the well known theologian George Pattery deals with the implications of Soares Prabhu’s understanding of the dharma of Jesus for Indian Christian theologizing. He argues that (1) the foundational experience of Jesus invites us to make religious experience as the starting point of theology, and (2) Jesus’ own life and praxis invites to embrace his ‘endangering spirituality’ and engage in the mission of liberation.

The next two essays are by Scaria Kuthirakkattel, SVD, who is not only a biblical scholar who was enormously influenced by Soares-Prabu, but also a student, friend and colleague. His first essay “Experience and Context: the Basis of Jesus’ Dharma” explores how concrete contexts influenced Israel’s understanding of God. It traces five phases God’s self-revelation in the history of Israel, beginning with the patriarchs and culminating in the *Abba* experience of Jesus. The essay ends with some reflections

on God's self-revelation in the context of India with its dehumanizing poverty, oppressive caste system, and pervasive religiosity. The second article on prophetic theologizing traces the tradition of prophetic theologising in the Old Testament and in the symbolic deeds of Jesus and concludes by pointing out instances of prophets and prophetic theologizing in the contemporary Church, especially in India, instances drawn from his personal experience.

Helen Dantis, in her contribution, provides a feminine perspective on the Dharma of Jesus. She provides a panoramic view of the dharmic basis for taking a feminist perspective. The basis includes the Trinitarian relations, Jesus' own praxis, and Church teachings. She argues for a capability approach to empowering women. The essay by Denis Lemos focuses on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's presentation of the Dharma of Jesus. After giving it a cosmotheandric interpretation, he draws the implications of the Sermon for pastors.

The next two essays provide original extensions of the dharma of Jesus that are only remotely connected to the teachings of Soares-Prabhu. Beginning with a rather detailed understanding of *dharmā*, Stephen Jayard provides a philosophy of science perspective and argues that the dharma of Jesus can enrich our understanding of science. George Karuvelil takes the etymological meaning of dharma as foundations and goes on to provide an original interpretation of the foundational experience of Christian faith in terms of "person-mysticism" or the experience of the divine in the human person of Jesus. Here we see a clear shift in the understanding of foundational experience: Soares-Prabhu deals with the foundational experience of Jesus (the *Abba* experience); Karuvelil deals with the experience of the disciples of Jesus.

George Karuvelil, SJ  
Chief Editor

## Notes:

- 1 Francis X. D'Sa, S.J., "The Concerns of George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ" in Francis X. D'Sa (ed.), *Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective*, Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., Vol. 4 (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001), xi.
- 2 This was first published in Scaria Kuthirakkattel, SVD (ed.), *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action*, Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., Vol. 3 (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001), 3-12.