

Experience and Context: The Basis of Jesus' Dharma

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Abstract: The Bible's presentation of the progressive, ever-profound disclosure of God is such that humans experience God in specific historical contexts. In the context of the Patriarchal transition from a wandering pastoral community to a well-settled farming community, God revealed himself as '*El Shaddai* (=God of the hills) who promises them descendants and 'land' (symbolizing peace and prosperity, joy and freedom). In the context of the enslavement of the people of Israel, God discloses himself as *Liberator* to the enslaved people in the Exodus-event. During the prophetic period God discloses himself as *Inspirer*. Their understanding of God as Lawgiver and Judge undergoes a radical change in God's self-disclosure in Jesus; God is the *Abba*, Loving Parent and Jesus, his unique Son. This experience of God as unconditional love ushers in freedom, fellowship and justice, symbolically expressed as the Kingdom (reign) of God.

Keywords: Experience and Context; Jesus' *dharma*; God's love; *Abba*-experience; freedom; fellowship; justice.

Introduction

A careful reading of the writings of Fr. George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ, according to the chronological sequence (cf. D'Sa, *The Dharma of Jesus*, 469-479) shows a shift both in the method and in the content of his writings. In his writings from 1970-1977 he consistently used historical critical method. For his Ph.D. dissertation (*The Formula Quotations*, defended in 1969 and published in 1976) he applied historical critical method with meticulous precision. But from 1978-1979 onwards till his death in 1995, one notices a shift both in method and in content. In 1981 he published a thoroughly researched and well reflected critical essay ("The Historical Critical Method") in which he

persuasively argued that historical critical method in its origin, nature, function and purpose is inadequate to understand and to interpret the Bible, a religious text. Why such a disenchantment with historical critical method?

It was not so much a personal dissatisfaction with the historical critical method as the paradigm shift in biblical interpretation and in hermeneutics. Biblical interpretation has undergone a radical paradigm shift during the last six decades: it moved from author-based historical criticism to a text-based literary criticism and then from literary criticism to reader-response criticism. As a consequence, the focus of the hermeneutical interest also shifted from author-meaning, namely, what the author intended to say (the focus of redaction criticism) to the text-meaning, namely, what the text means whether the author intended it or not (the focus of structuralist analysis and rhetorical criticism) and then to the reader meaning, namely, what the reader understands (the focus of reader-response criticism). The latter is imaged as a fruitful ‘conversation’ between the text and the reader in which the reader plays a decisive role. These two paradigm shifts were known in exegetical and theological circles. Soares-Prabhu was well acquainted with these paradigm shifts.

But why do his writings from 1978-79 mark the beginning of the paradigm shift? Was it a quick, unreflected decision? Or was it the outcome of a prolonged, well reflected discernment which culminated in such a final decision? Those who were closely associated with him from 1975 would agree with me that certain challenging convictions were moulding his vision and mission. I mention his very significant convictions. (1) He was convinced that the duty and commitment of an exegete, for that matter any genuine follower of Jesus, demands service to the people of his/her constituency. In his case, the people of India, a nation

characterized by three dialectically interrelated factors of stark and widespread poverty; pervasive and pluriform religiosity; and, brutal and oppressive caste system. (2) Similarly he was convinced that an Indian exegete/theologian should be sensitive to and give deserving place to Indian worldviews and values. (3) He was also convinced that these convictions cannot be implemented without a deep religious experience (a profound personal experience of God) as well as an active and effective identification with the oppressed people in our country. (4) And he was strongly convinced that to realize these three convictions he had to undergo a challenging, demanding and, at the same time, extremely fulfilling transformation in his life-style, in his options, in his priorities and in his values. The creative, illuminating, thought-provoking articles and essays he has authored are, in fact, the collective and spontaneous expression of these fourfold convictions.

In other words, these fourfold convictions highlight that according to Soares-Prabhu experience in its rich, profound sense and context in its multifaceted, challenging circumstances constitute the basis of Jesus' *dharma*. In this paper I intend to explore this perspective of Soares-Prabhu from a broader angle.

The Bible presents the progressive, ever-profound disclosure of God in human history in such a way that humans experience God in a specific context. In this process the following phases are significant because they constitute decisive turning-points in the relation between Patriarchs (i); his self-disclosure to Israel through Moses (ii); his self-disclosure to the people of Israel and of Judah through the prophets (iii); his self-disclosure in a prolonged crisis (iv); the definitive self-disclosure through Jesus (v); and, the ongoing self-disclosure to us in the Indian-Christian context (vi).

I. God's Self-Disclosure to the Patriarchs

God revealed himself as *'El Shaddai* to the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). *'El Shaddai* means the God of the hills which is often rendered as God Almighty (cf. Gen 28:3; 35:11). Abraham was probably an eponymous figure (that is, a person whose name is taken for a people) to whom God promised land (Gen 12:1) and multitudes of progeny (Gen 15:5). Isaac was the fulfilment of God's promise (cf. Gen 17:15-21; 18:10-15) and land was promised to him as well (Gen 26:2-5). Jacob was assured of land and plenty of descendants (Gen 28:13-15). His name was changed from Jacob to Israel (Gen 32:28; 35:10) – the name Israel means that his struggles with God. Jacob had 12 sons: six from his wife Leah; two from his beloved wife, Rachel; two from Rachel's maidservant, Bilhah; and two from Leah's maidservant, Zilpah (Gen 35:25-36). In course of time Jacob's sons settled down in the land of Canaan.

In brief, God in the self-disclosure as *'El Shaddai* guides, leads and protects Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the transition from a wandering pastoral community to a well settled farming community. He promises them plenty of descendants and land. 'Land' does not primarily mean a piece of property but it has a profound symbolic significance – it means peace and prosperity, joy and freedom.

II. God's Self-Disclosure to Israel through Moses

The core of the faith of the people of Israel (Deut 26:5-9) is based on an extraordinary religious and social revolution mythologically narrated in the book of Exodus. Their escape from bonded labour in Egypt, their perilous journey through the desert to Sinai and their settling down in Canaan, a relatively fertile land, usher in a new experience of God and a new vision

of society. The main content of this experience may be stated in a nutshell: God is experienced as Liberator and the people of Israel as his personal and sacred possession (cf. Ex 6:2-9). Their mission has a specific liberating thrust as well: they should function as a contrast community with an alternative vision, namely, there should be no poor among them (Deut 15:7-17). This specific aspect of the mandate was respected about 250 years, that is during the rule of the Judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Gideon). But Solomon's reign put an end to this vision.

To sum up, God discloses himself as *Liberator* to the people of Israel in and through the liberating act of the Exodus-event and they are his personal, sacred possession. Unlike the neighbouring city States, they should not be exploitative and oppressive. Above all, they should be genuinely concerned about fellow-Israelites in such a way that there should be no poor among them.

III. God's Self-Disclosure through the Prophets

After the key OT event of God's self-disclosure as Liberator in the Exodus-event, the next important self-disclosure occurs through the prophets. The ministry of the prophets is confined to the divided kingdom. Therefore, a brief survey of the era between the last Judge, Gideon, and the beginning of the prophetic ministry is called for. This leads us to the rule of the kings (Saul, David, Solomon).

The Bible presents Samuel as the link between the pre-monarchical age and the prophetic era. He was a leader in whom prophetic, judicial, military and priestly roles were combined (cf. 1 Sam 7:3-17). As Samuel was aging and his two sons were not competent to judge, the leaders of Israel requested Samuel for a king to govern them just like other nations. In making such

a request they discarded a basic tenet of their covenantal relation with Yahweh that Yahweh and no one else should be Israel's king. Samuel, after discerning Yahweh's will, solemnly warned them of the consequences and disadvantages of the rule of a king (1 Sam 8:11-22) and then granted their request. He anointed Saul as their king in a private ceremony (1 Sam 10:1) and later people also acclaimed him as their king (1 Sam 11:15).

Saul failed to obey Yahweh's instructions communicated through Samuel. So Yahweh rejected Saul as king (1 Sam 15:10-23) and then Samuel anointed David as king (1 Sam 16:13). Later the people of Judah also acclaimed David as their king (2 Sam 2:4). By means of political manoeuvre in course of time, he became the king of the whole of Israel and chose Jerusalem as the capital of his kingdom.

Solomon, David's son by Bathsheba, succeeded him. Cutting across the old traditional boundaries he created administrative districts for political consolidation. He was vigorously engaged in international sphere – particularly in trade and commerce. According to 1 Kings 11:3 Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines – some of his wives and concubines were obviously foreign women. Solomon's reign marked the peak of Israelite success in political sphere. However, it also marked the beginning of religious degeneration – notably due to religious syncretism and influx of foreign religious practices.

Moreover, Solomon had three political enemies. Hadad, an Edomite prince who had escaped to Egypt when David and his commander, Joab, killed every male Edomite. So he hated Solomon, David's son (cf. 1 Kings 11:14-22). Rezon of Zebah had become king in Damascus and he was a lifelong adversary of Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 11:23-25). Jeroboam of Israel rebelled against Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 11:26-33).

A critical assessment of Solomon's reign underscores that religious degeneration within and political threat from outside (the three political enemies mentioned above) characterized his reign. He was not able to cope with the political turmoil and religious degeneration. So after his death, political situation became precarious and volatile. As a result, the country was divided into two: Israel and Judah. Jeroboam became the king of Israel in 931 and in the same year Rehoboam became the king of Judah. At this critical juncture Yahweh called prophets to fulfil his design for his people.

Because in the first two parts of the paper, "The Role of Prophetic Theologizing in Jesus' *Dharma*", I have highlighted some key features of prophetic theologizing, here I briefly mention a few salient points that were not mentioned there. (1) Prophets are classified into two groups: pre-classical and classical prophets. To the pre-classical group belong Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, etc. and to the classical prophets belong the three major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and twelve minor prophets. In this paper I deal with classical prophets only. (2) Among the fifteen classical prophets only two (Amos and Hosea) prophesied in Israel and the rest (thirteen) prophesied in Judah.

(3) Amos preached during the reign of Jeroboam II (783-743). Under his reign the Northern Kingdom expanded and grew wealthy. But the rich exploited the poor and the expensive and attractive liturgical show disguised true religion. Against this background Amos' prophecies couched in direct, rough language condemn corrupt city-life, social injustice and deceitful consolations of insincere ceremonial. (4) However, Hosea has a very different background. Hosea's failed married life (due to his wife's unfaithfulness) enabled him to depict God's relationship with Israel in terms of marriage – a metaphor most boldly chosen

and passionately expressed with immense affection and fiery anger. It is the first time that relation between Yahweh and the people of Israel is depicted through the imagery of marriage.

(5) Depending on the historical context and the fluctuation of Israel's faith in Yahweh, each prophet has a unique experience of his call and exercised his mission in a unique manner. Yet certain common features are decipherable in the ministry of all the prophets. The main common features are the following. (a) They intervene in situations of crisis and major turning-points of the nations' history such as the threat of Assyria, the ruin of the Northern Kingdom, the Babylonian exile, etc. (b) The dominant features of the prophetic ministry are in tune with the rest of the OT, namely, monotheism, morality and future salvation. (c) The prophets emphasized the distinguishing mark of the people of God, that is, they have to be a contrast community. This feature originated from the covenantal relationship. This, in fact, constituted a basic feature of the faith and religiosity of the people of God.

It is instructive to note that God inspired the prophet in such a way that the prophecies are ultimately God's words. Thus God discloses himself as *Inspirer* to the people of Israel and to the people of Judah.

IV. God's Self-Disclosure in a Prolonged Crisis

After Solomon's politically glamorous reign, the Jews of Israel and of Judah faced a very painful and prolonged crisis at four levels: religious, political, cultural and economic. Assyria conquered Israel in 723 BCE, transplanted the population (at least the upper and intellectual strata), and enforced their cult as the State religion. As a consequence ten tribes were uprooted. In 586 BCE Judea was conquered by Babylon, Jerusalem was destroyed and the upper stratum of the population was deported

to Babylon. Babylon also enforced its religion on the conquered people

Those in exile, though were forbidden to continue the temple cult, held fast to the Law of their God and observed the commandments of Sabbath and circumcision – signs by which Jews distinguished themselves from other peoples. This was conducive in creating an intellectual and spiritual precondition that made possible for a new beginning after the exile.

The turning-point came with the victory of the Persian king Cyrus who conquered Babylon in 539 BCE. Unlike Assyria and Babylon, Persia did not force largescale re-settlement nor did Persia insist on one State religion for all. “Persia ... was an empire under a Great King whose central government maintained its rule over large areas through military power, even though various provinces (*satrapies*) retained their cultural and religious independence” (Koester, I, 3). King Cyrus also issued a decree ordering that the house of God in Jerusalem should be rebuilt and the furnishings that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple should be restored (Ezra 6:3-5). The decree of Cyrus was implemented by Darius who “decided to launch a more serious drive to recolonize Judah as a strategic military and political salient on the frontier with troublesome Egypt” (Gottwald, 430). Accordingly a large immigration of exilic Jews returned to Judah in 520 BCE with Zerubbabel as civil commissioner and Joshua as high priest. The temple was rebuilt in 520-515 BCE. Again the king sent another mission to Palestine headed by Nehemia and then Ezra. Nehemia undertook to surround the city of Jerusalem with walls and made the Jews to promise that they would not enter into any marriage with the members of the alien neighbouring tribes. Ezra compiled a lawbook in the beginning of the 4th cent. BCE. Thus “the combined political authority of the Persians and the religious authority of the exilic Jewish

reformers succeeded in establishing a body of traditional legal materials as the binding law of the province of Judah" (Gottwald, 437). Thus Israel's law served as Persian law for the land of Jerusalem and Judah.

Although the Jewish community was reorganized under Nehemia and Ezra, both socio-politically (i.e., the province of Judah under the superpower, Persia) and religiously (i.e., a cultic and law-abiding community) the relationship between Jews and Samaritans continued to worsen. The strict Jews of Nehemian reform considered Samaritans as aliens and they were not permitted to have access to the temple of Jerusalem. The Samaritans, the proud sons of Joseph tribes, would not tolerate such a second rate treatment. Nor would they accept that the true Israel was the restored remnant of Judah. Above all, they held that Yahweh could be worshiped not only in Jerusalem; and so they built a temple of their own on Mount Gerizim.

From the end of the 5th century onwards the political situation in the Persian empire was not only precarious and volatile but also sickening. Darius II was succeeded by Artaxerxes II Mnemon (404-358) whom his own brother Cyrus (the Younger), the satrap of Asia Minor, plotted to assassinate on the day of his coronation. Soon after his accession Egypt rebelled and became independent. Artaxerxes won over the rebellious Greeks by diplomacy. Artaxerxes III Ochus (358-338) ascended the throne over the dead bodies of all his brothers and sisters whom he slew as possible rivals. He was poisoned and was succeeded by a son, Arses (338-336) who was in turn poisoned and all his children slain. The next king was Darius III Codomannus (336-331) in whose reign too the sad state of history continued (For details see Bright, 307-410).

In the meantime Macedonia was emerging as a strong

power. "The victory of Philip II of Macedonia over Athens and its allies at Chaeronea in 338 BCE ... marked the beginning of a new epoch" (Koester, I, 9). Philip was murdered in 336 BCE and then the army proclaimed Alexander, Philip's son, as the king of Macedonians. Alexander continued the conquest and defeated the Persian army stationed in Asia Minor in 334 BCE. The victorious progress of Alexander, the young Macedonian king, had a cataclysmic effect on the Semitic population of Syria and Palestine. The victory at Issus in November 333 BCE demonstrated the military superiority of the 23 year old Alexander and his small army.

He continued his conquest: the Phoenician cities (except Tyre) surrendered to him. He conquered Tyre in seven months. The orientals discovered not only the superiority of Greek military strategy and technology but also they experienced the brutality and harshness of their foreign conquerors. Alexander put 30,000 survivors – mostly women and children – on the slave markets and had 2000 able bodied men crucified (cf. Hengel 4).

Then he sped southwards along the coastal route of Phoenicia and Palestine. Gaza, the most important centre for Arabian trade, resisted under the Persian commander, Batis. After two months of resistance the city was stormed and as at Tyre the male population exterminated, women and children were sold as slaves. The wounded Persian general was dragged round the city behind a chariot. Gaza was made into a Macedonian fortress. Egypt submitted to Alexander without a battle.

His victory over Darius at Gaugamela on 1st October 331 BCE opened access to the central countries of the Persian realm. In 327 BCE Alexander reached India (modern Pakistan). But before he could advance further his army forced him to return. On June 10, 323 Alexander died in Babylon at the age of 33.

Judea submitted to Parmenio, Alexander's general, without offering resistance. The Jews readily acknowledged the superior power of the new lords and were highly impressed by them. Because the Jews submitted peaceably, the rights they enjoyed under the Persian rule were granted to them and "the Jerusalem community was permitted to continue practising its cult without hindrance" (Lohse, 20).

After the sudden death of Alexander the military commanders disputed about their respective jurisdiction. Alexander's successors (= the *diadochi*) fought among themselves (cf. Koester, I, 12-16). As a result the empire was divided among the generals. Ptolemy, the son of the commander, Lagus, received Egypt and he also controlled Palestine by means of military action. Ptolemies on the one hand refrained from the idea of reunification of Alexander's empire and on the other hand endeavoured to foster political stability and economic progress. The policies of the Ptolemies continued about hundred years. Consequently Egypt became rich and was considered a 'money-making machine'. Palestine also benefited in the progress (cf. Hengel, 23-30).

The Asian kingdom was ruled by Seleucus who defeated Ptolemy V at Paneas. Jews seeing that Seleucids were winning switched their allegiance to them. The Seleucids reciprocated the friendly gesture by arranging for the repair of the temple and granting certain tax exemptions.

The high priest was responsible for enforcing the laws enacted by the Syrian king and for the payment of the tax collected from the people. When Antiochus IV Epiphanes became the king of Syria, Jason bribed the king and bought the high priesthood. Jason on one side advocated cult in the temple and on the other favoured the process of Hellenization. Antiochus having emptied

his own treasury for war replenished it by plundering the temple of Jerusalem, its furnishings, the altar of incense, the seven-branched lampstand, the table of showbread, etc. (cf. 1 Mac 1:20-24).

This offensive act was followed by another: a fanatic Hellenization process. The walls of Jerusalem were destroyed, the Jewish community's indigenous way of life was abolished, and on pain of death penalty the observance of Sabbath and the circumcision of the male children were forbidden. The king's inspectors travelled throughout Palestine to enforce the orders. An altar was erected on the site of the altar of burned offerings and sacrifices were offered there to the supreme god, Olympian Zeus in 167 BCE. Even swines were offered as sacrificial animal.

The residents of the city were on the whole open to Hellenization but those in the villages strongly opposed this irreligious act. Mattathias (an elderly priest) killed the king's official and the one who was offering the sacrifice. This created great sensation. Mattathias and his five sons fled to the hills of Judea and likeminded people joined them. They waged guerilla attacks to destroy the pagan altars and to punish the apostate Jews. After Mattathias' death his son Judas undertook the leadership. He waged large-scale battles against the Syrians. The king, Antiochus, sent his able commander, Lysias, to fight against Judas and his men. But the Syrians were defeated. Then Judas marched to Jerusalem, occupied the desecrated temple and reestablished worship according to the Law. Thus began the Feast of Dedication. Later Jews were granted free exercise of their religion and in turn they acknowledged the sovereignty of Syrians.

Judas was murdered. Then his brother Jonathan became the leader who was an able manipulator. He was murdered in 143. His brother Simon succeeded as the high priest. He was

an able and competent high priest that he became also the field commander. Under him the Jewish community enjoyed privileges. He is much praised in 1 Mac 14:8-15. With him began the Hasmonean dynasty in 140 BCE. Many priests and devout Jews disapproved the rule of Hasmoneans because they came neither from the high priestly family nor from the family of David. So they withdrew into the desert – this is probably the origin of the Qumran community. Simon was murdered in 134 BCE. His son John Hyrcanus succeeded him. He was thirsty for worldly power. After his death his son Aristobulus seized power and to be safe he threw his mother and his three brothers into prison. After his death in 103 his wife Salome Alexandria freed the three imprisoned brothers and got married to the eldest. After his death Salome ruled with prudence and wisdom.

Salome died in 67 BCE. Aristobulus and the supplanted Hyrcanus tried to gain high priesthood and kingship. In the meantime Rome intervened. The Roman general, Pompey marched to Jerusalem and entered the temple. He took Aristobulus and his two sons to Rome as prisoners. He allowed temple worship to be carried on as usual. Hyrcanus once again became high priest.

Rome followed a strategy – conquer and divide. Accordingly Palestine was divided by granting independence to Samaria, to the cities in the coastal plain and to the cities east of Jordan. So the high priest's jurisdiction was confined to the cultic community of Jerusalem, Judea, the interior of Galilee and Perea on the east of Jordan.

In the meantime dispute arose between Pompey and Caesar about rulership of the Roman empire. Hyrcanus first supported Pompey but seeing that Pompey was on the losing side, Hyrcanus and Antipater switched over allegiance to Caesar. Hyrcanus was

confirmed high priest and named ethnarch and ally of Romans. Antipater received the rights of hereditary Roman citizenship and was installed as procurator of Judea. Antipater shared his power with his two sons: Phasael became the administrator of Judea and Herod of Galilee.

After Caesar's murder in 44 BCE Hyrcanus and Antipater continued their political manipulation. Antipater was assassinated. Hyrcanus and the two sons of Antipater (Herod and Phasael) were confirmed in office by Antony. But Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus II conquered Palestine. Hyrcanus and Phasael were taken as prisoners: Phasael killed himself and Hyrcanus' ears were cut off so that he is debarred from functioning as high priest.

Herod, the sole survivor, fled to Rome and Roman senate named him king of the Jews (but without a kingdom!). With the help of Romans he captured Jerusalem in 37 BCE. Two features characterized his reign: (1) elimination of anybody who may come on his way and (2) the processes of Hellenization.

First he dealt with hostile forces: (1) those who did not like him; (2) the nobility – 45 prominent men and their families; (3) Hasmonean family for the fear that power would be taken away from him. In the processes he murdered Hyrcanus, Aristobulus (the high priest), his own wife Mariamne and her two sons. Shortly before his death his first born son, Antipater, was also condemned to death.

He treated Jews and Greeks on equal footing. To be safe he surrounded himself with Hellenists and furthered his building activities. He enlarged and rebuilt the temple. He destroyed the city of Samaria and erected a new city named Sebaste. On the coast he constructed Caesarea in a magnificent way. In Jerusalem he built the citadel Antonia from where he could watch over events

taking place in and around the temple. He constructed a strong fortress, Masada, on the western side of the Dead Sea and in Jericho a palace for himself.

Towards the end of his life he divided the kingdom among his three sons: Archelaus was appointed king over Judea, Samaria and Idumea; Herod Antipas got Galilee and Perea; and Philip reigned over Transjordan. Of these three, Archelaus was most hated because he ruled arbitrarily and with much brutality. In 6 CE he was relieved of his office and was exiled to Gaul. His territory was placed under the jurisdiction of a Roman governor. So during Jesus' time Samaria, Judea and Idumea were ruled by the Roman governor (Lk 3:1). Pontius Pilate held the office of governor from 26 CE to 36 CE. His conduct was marked with corruption and violence, ill treatment and numerous illegal executions, unbearable cruelty and intense brutality. He had no regard for the religious sentiments of the Jews.

In brief, in the prolonged crisis that began with foreign occupation and the imposition of alien religion by Assyria and Babylon, the Jews experienced the cruel murder of the male population and their women and children being sold in slave markets, the plunder of the temple and the ban of their religious practices, culminated in the Maccabean struggle. During the long period of crisis (723 – 4 BCE) Jews felt that Yahweh is *Remote* and *Transcendent*.

V. God's Self-Disclosure as *Abba*

God's self-disclosure through Moses and the prophets was based on the understanding that God is Lawgiver and Judge. The same holds good in the prolonged crisis too. This perspective undergoes a radical change in God's self-disclosure through Jesus. God discloses himself as *Abba*, Loving Parent (cf. Mk 1:11; 14:36) and Jesus is his unique Son. So there is very personal, intimate,

loving relationship between the Father and the Son (cf. Lk 10:21-22). Furthermore, Jesus is the *Word* become *Flesh* and humans are Jesus' brothers and sisters. That is why Paul could affirm that humans are God's children (cf. Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:4-7). We humans belong to God's family. Therefore the discrimination based on gender (male/female), status (slave/free), race (Jew/Greek) and religion (traditional Christians/*Dalit* Christians) is not meaningful for us as Christians.

Jesus' experience of God as *Abba* is expressed through the symbol, the kingdom (reign) of God. The kingdom of God rooted in *Abba*-experience ushers in freedom, fellowship and justice. The kingdom of God is opposed to the kingdom of Satan (cf. Mk 3:23-27). The kingdom of Satan in modern categories would mean structural evil. Structural evil is rooted in national and international mechanisms and policies which aim at exploitation and oppression of the poor. Therefore, it is not enough to undergo *metanoia* (conversion) personally but the unjust structure too must be changed and uprooted.

VI. Ongoing Self-Disclosure in the Indian-Christian Context

Indian situation is characterized by three dialectically related factors: dehumanizing and widespread poverty; brutal and oppressive caste system; and, pervasive and pluriform religiosity. In such a situation Christians, as true followers of Jesus, have the duty to eradicate poverty and to eliminate caste system. These two societal evils can be eradicated only by establishing human communities based on the values of God's kingdom. Values of God's kingdom are in fact genuine human values as well.

Indian worldview is inclusive (not exclusive); primarily cosmocentric (in contrast with anthropocentric worldview of the West); symbolic (based on the metaphor that the world is the

Body of Brāhman); and pragmatic (the quest for liberation in the holistic sense). Conversion to Indian worldview will enable perceiving everything as rooted in God and experience liberation from bondage such as craze for power, money and status.

Religions are commonly grouped into two: (1) messianic/prophetic and (2) unitive/intuitive. To the first category belong Judaism, Christianity and Islam. On the other hand, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism belong to the second category. From the perspective of this paper it is better to focus on Christianity and Hinduism as complementary: two ways of God's disclosure.

Concluding Remarks

1. We have undertaken a rapid survey of God's disclosure to humans from Patriarchs to the present (that is Indian context). From this survey it is clear that God discloses himself to humans in specific contexts. The disclosure is geared to enhance the relation between humans and God and among humans themselves.
2. In the prolonged crisis God is remote and transcendent. This implies that God expects us humans to be compassionate, understanding and serving just as Jesus himself did (Mk 10:45) and love one another to the end (Jn: 31-35).
3. In the self-disclosure through Jesus more depth, new horizon and clear perspectives are highlighted.
4. The brutality and crime meted out by Alexander the Great on various nations are to be condemned. Is he great at all!
5. Christians have much to learn from Indian worldviews and Indian religions.
6. Hinduism, unlike Christianity, appreciates and respects different religions and gives space for their growth.

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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