Cite as: Jayard, Stephen S. (2015). Enriching Science with the Dharma of Jesus (Version 1.0). Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, Jan-June 2015 (Vol 18/2), 137-154. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4282256

JPJRS 18/2 ISSN 0972-33315. July 2015: 137-154

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

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4282256
Stable URL: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4282256

Stephen Jayard Susainathan
Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune

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

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

Introduction

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

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

Dharma

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

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

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

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

Dharma of Jesus

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

on love and justice, devoid of slavery, poverty, violence, oppression and discrimination of any sort.[4] I like to see the Dharma of Jesus as 'giving life and life in abundance' (Jn 10:10), which is expressed in and through his words, deeds and very being of his life. It can, I am sure, enrich science by giving it a human face. I like to look at Dharma of Jesus enriching science from two specific angles: inspiration regarding the role of *reasonableness* and enlightenment regarding the need for wisdom that enables *absolute surrender* to the Divine.

I. THE LIMITS OF REASON AND THE NEED FOR REASONABLENESS

1. Jesus' Insistence On Transcend Rationality

Jesus is very considerate towards the needs and the situations of the people. He uses stories and parables to show how we need to go beyond the minimum requirements of justice to reach the level of love in our dealing with others. I consider this as an effort to be reasonable, not just rational. This message comes out well in his parable where the master goes out to employ workers (Mt 20:1-16). They agree with him for a certain wage; the master, during the day, goes out at different times and employs more people; at the end of the day the workers receive their wages but interestingly those who worked only one hour also get the same wages as those who worked the whole day. When the latter complain against the master's 'unjust' action, the master clarifies that he is not doing anything wrong because he gives the wages to them as it has been agreed and whether to pay the same amount to the latecomers is left to his generosity. Perhaps justice might demand more wages to those who work more. Here I see the master acts 'reasonably' without, of course, denying justice. The master looks at those who came late to work in their holistic context of their responsibilities towards their families, not

being employed earlier for no fault of theirs, as they were ready to work (the master is not going to houses to wake up those who sleep in laziness and gives them the wages), and so on. So the master's concern for the workers is not blind or irrational. By this Jesus shows that God, being LOVE, is very generous; he goes beyond the demands of justice to love people. Though the minimum requirement of love is justice, genuine love can go beyond it.

Another parable that I can think of where the idea of reasonableness stands out is the famous parable the 'Prodigal Son' (Luke 15: 11-32). When the younger son returns after squandering all the money his father out of his extreme love accepts him and this is obviously unacceptable to his elder son. At one point the father tells his elder son, "all that is mine is yours" (verse 31). Usually one might think that he refers to the wealth and the properties, inviting him to enjoy and take whatever he wants. But in my opinion it refers to something else; for, in the verse 12 we find that 'he divided the property between them'. Once he has divided all the property between those two sons and he does not have 'anything as his own'. The younger son lost all his share and the remaining property actually is the share of the elder son. So when the father says, 'all that is mine is yours', he actually refers to the noble and divine qualities of love, compassion, forgiveness and tolerance; he invites his elder son to appropriate these sublime qualities as his own, without which he will not be able to accept his younger brother. This I think is a clear invitation to be reasonable, not just rational. A rational treatment towards the younger son would, perhaps, demand that they chase him away because he owns nothing in the house, neither property nor the rights of his son-ship. The father invites his elder son to 'love' his younger brother, though he may not 'like' him for what he has done. We all know that it is easier to love someone when we have something to like in them, but it becomes very difficult to

love him/her when there is nothing to like in him/her. Precisely this is what we find in God; he may not have anything in us that he actually 'likes about', but still he loves us. Perhaps, we can see that 'liking' operates at the level of rationality while 'loving' at the level of reasonableness.

2. Need for Science to Uphold Reasonableness

By the middle of the 20th century, philosophy of science, with its critical appraisal made humanity realize that the very understanding of science and its nature has to be revisited. Philosophers of Science, especially those belonging to the schools of Historical Realism, argue that even the notion of rationality has to be revised, as there is no one absolute rational framework to be imposed upon the activities of science in order to make it rational. The usual features of rationality don't seem to be sufficient to capture the actual picture of science. Rationality cannot be confined to logical consistency and justification; it cannot be equated to truth and therefore one can act in a perfectly rational way even on the basis of false beliefs.

Scientists have many assumptions that affect not only their beliefs and behaviours but also their scientific activities. A comprehensive understanding of rationality needs to involve in a very essential way *the agent* (the scientist). The role of the agent in the understanding of science is clearly brought out by Henry Harris. A scientist explores a hypothesis in her head first whether to proceed further or not. "Each scientist has his own mental store of facts, theories and associations, and a private set of value judgments about the relative importance of the different elements in that mental store".[5] Scientists also go by faith, imagination, and intellectual bias and they also act like any non-scientist. The understanding of rationality has to involve *the context* as well. Rationality can't be merely a rule-oriented

activity. When we give due importance to the agent and the context in which she acts, naturally rules take the back burner. I agree with Harold Brown in maintaining an account of rationalitywhich necessarily acknowledges the role of judgment. Brown develops a model of rationality in which judgment plays a crucial role.[6] Our account of rationality has to accommodate the role and importance of common sense also. Being rational, in my opinion, can never deny or over-rule common sense. Of course, rationality should not be confined to mere common sense but it should never negate or violate it either. Rationality involves going beyond mere rule-following. Of course, rationality does play a role in science but that is not everything. "Rationality helps", as Henry Harris puts it, "but it is not a prescription for making discoveries".[7] As Putnam asserts, "'Scientific' is not coextensive with the 'rational'. There are many perfectly rational beliefs that cannot be tested 'scientifically'".[8] Popper also shows that "poetic inventiveness" and "the invention of criticisms"[9] are also main component of rationality.

Going along these lines it is more appropriate to see science as a *reasonable enterprise* rather than a *rational enterprise*, in the traditional sense of the term. Its role in science can be seen at three important levels, though they cannot be strictly demarcated, nor that they are exhaustive: Reasonableness at the *personal level* of the scientist (imagination, judgment and intuition); Reasonableness in *scientific methodology* (rejection of zero-tolerance, an enriched notion of objectivity, need for skeptical attitude, and common sense); and Reasonableness in *scientific practice* (embracing pragmatism and the consensus of the scientific community). These features constitute the notion of reasonableness in science. Since these factors also make science what it is, it is more meaningful to speak of 'Reasonableness in Science' rather than 'Rationality in Science'.[10]

II WISDOM FOR THE ULTIMATE SURRENDER

1. Jesus' Surrender to his Father in Heaven

Jesus, in spite of the rootedness in his relationship with his Father, must have had lots of questions within him when he faced rejection and opposition in his life and mission, for instance, when his own people thought of him that "He is out of his mind" (Mk 3:21)... or when he is not accepted in his own hometown (Lk 4:24)... But all through his life he is convinced that the will and wisdom of the Father must prevail in everything and therefore he surrenders to him and invites others as well to do the same.

Jesus, therefore, invites people to trust God. He reminds them of the providential care that the Heavenly Father has for them: "Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?" (Lk 12: 24-25). He does not miss any occasion where he could remind and inspire his apostles to have deep trust in the Father. When he sends them on their mission he instructs them to have total trust in the benevolence and divine intervention of the Father and they should not bother about taking bread, or bag, or money for their journey (Mk 6:8). He cautions them not to give into the temptation of losing the focus in their mission by "selling" their spiritual powers for material gains of status or safety. That is why he instructs them "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give" (Mt 10:8). This trust needs to be continuously nurtured by them with the constant and deep relationship with the Father in prayer. He shows them by his very life of prayer; he prays before taking important decisions in his life, such as his calling of the apostles (Lk 6:12-13); he prays before performing important miracles (e.g. the multiplication of

the bread to feed thousands, Mt 14:13-21; before raising Jairus'daughter ... and Lazarus to life from death, Mk 5:21-43 and Jn 11:1-45 respectively); he prays alone early in the morning (Mk 1:35) or the whole night (Lk 6:12); he prays when he is "disturbed" in his life (e.g. at the Gethsemane garden Lk 22:41-43).

At Calvary, Jesus surrenders himself completely to the Father. The Gospel tells us: "Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). These words of Jesus have very many lessons for us: **i)** Jesus invites us to be committed to our work and do our best but at the same time to have the serenity to leave the rest to God. That is what he did in his life. All his work seemed to end in a void, but still confident surrenders to His Father, trusting that the Father would not abandon him and his work; **ii)** It is the bold acknowledgement that God knows the best. In spite of all our rational approaches we need to know that God's wisdom can differ from ours. We, being limited in space and time cannot have all the dimensions of our life, but God always has the whole picture. Therefore, St. Paul can say: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor 1:25); **iii)** Most importantly we learn that in the final analysis God's wisdom emerges vindicated. When Jesus was killed on the Cross his own apostles ran away; the beneficiaries of his mission were dumbfounded; those who crucified him were rejoicing. But their laughter did not long last. By raising Jesus back to life on the third day, the Father proved that the life and mission of Jesus, his servant, did not go waste; He saw to it that the truth and justice prevailed. The four letters on the cross of Jesus, INRI, as we know, are the abbreviation of the Latin expression, *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*, meaning, "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews" (Jn 19:20). I like to see

these letters as a change of acronym: before the Resurrection, Jesus was *Isolated* (as everyone, including his apostles, ran away from him); *Nameless* (though he gave the name and the identity to the downtrodden and the sick in the society, like healing the lepers); *Rejected* (by his own and others) and *Insulted* (by the soldiers, the onlookers and so on). But scenario changes after the Resurrection and the Risen Jesus becomes *Immortal*, *Necessary*, *Radiant* and *Illimitable*. Such a dramatic changewas possible precisely because he at the end totally surrendered to him.

2. Science Realizing its Limits and Limitations

Let us not be misled to think that only matters of spirituality and God are beyond our full grasp. Recent scientific developments teach us that even the material world is beyond our complete comprehension. Science struggles and stumbles in comprehending the world. For instance, scientific realism holds that a scientific theory represents reality as it is, whereas anti-realism holds that scientific theories are like instruments with which we look at reality, such that what we see is determined by how we see. Language generally encounters limitations in expressing our deeper experiential realities. Religions and spiritual traditions have always known this. But now scientists too have come to realize that the situation in science is not very different. They treat scientific theories as 'metaphors': "Language by physicists about the universe as a whole is highly metaphoric... Physics and astrophysics, despite their explanatory mathematics, emerge from a rhetoric and use metaphor-driven models to communicate their insights to appropriate audiences".[11] Similarly, do the models in science give the real picture of science? Far from it! In science, "Models are taken seriously but not literally. They are ... partial and provisional ways of imagining what is not observable; they are symbolic representation of aspects of the world which are

not directly accessible to us".[12]

In spite of great achievements science is still limited in very many ways. Our intellect is not enough to comprehend the world. Physical reality cannot be defined in the limited range of quantifiable categories. In the words of Werner Heisenberg, "The scientific method of analyzing, explaining and classifying has become conscious of its limitation... *The scientific world views have ceased to be a scientific view in the true sense of the word*".[13] Science is confronted by its limits on every side. Some of these limits are: *cognitive* and *epistemological* (limits due to our capacity to experience only three plus one dimensions; our brains have evolved over millions of years in a particular way, which shapes our very thinking, for instance, the way we inductively infer and deductively conclude to arrive at theories); *ontological* (for instance, due to natural laws and constants); *cosmological* (limits in our understanding about the origins, end, nature and structure of the universe and our position in the universe); *practical* (like cost, mathematical abilities, etc); *technological* (our inability to produce very high or very low temperatures for research, for example). Then, there are '*In-principle 'limits* like Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle). Limits of science raise questions about the reliability and the potentiality of science, the reliability of scientific experiments and in the scope of scientific knowledge. There is a realization the process of explaining has to stop somewhere as brute facts, as all the explanations are usually done in terms of something else. In other words, all scientific explanations are incomplete and all the riddles of the material world can never be solved, much less meta-physical riddles like mind-body/ consciousness-brain relationship, for "Consciousness cannot be studied in the same way as things you are conscious of. For as soon as you turn your attention on it, it ceases to be consciousness, and becomes just another thought

or experience".[14] Above all, no discipline can ever answer this perennial question: 'Why is there always something rather than nothing?'

Today scientists are increasingly becoming aware of the intrinsically unanswerable questions in the universe. Some of them, according to Russell Stannard are: the origin of the natural laws, the relationship between space and time, wave-particle nature of matter, the number of actual dimensions available in the universe and why some are curled up and others extended and so on.[15] Matter increasingly becomes 'mysterious' to us. Any discussion on matter is no more just an "ordinary matter". Many scientists are genuinely convinced that matter gets more and more complex and strange as we reach its bottom. We cannot even claim to measure them completely. For, "No matter how much the degree of accuracy is improved, all measurement is still just a way of comparing an unknown relationship with a known standard relationship".[16] It was Einstein who showed that matter (mass) and energy are inter-convertible. Matter itself is a concentrated form of energy, which can be liberated according to the formula $E=mc^2$, where e=energy, m=mass of the object and c= velocity of light. Since the value of 'c' is very high, namely 300, 000 KM per second, even a very small quantity of matter is equivalent to a large quantum of energy. It is calculated that one gram of mass can be converted into 21.5 billion kilocalories,[17] and to produce this amount of energy we need barrels of fossil fuel! In other words, this amount of energy would be equal to the energy of 22,500 tons of TNT (standard measure of strength of bombs). *If matter is so mysterious then how much more mysterious and un-understandable its Creator and his ways would be!*

Further there are several axioms and assumptions at work in science. For instance, the uniformity and the universality of cause-effect principle, the uniformity in nature, the universality of

physical laws, the measurability and knowability of all things, reliability of logic and mathematics etc. All these assumptions and axioms don't have complete justification and yet they have to be assumed for science to proceed. John Brockman has an interesting collection of sort of confessional statements by several scientists about their own necessary assumptions in their research fields; but they openly acknowledge that they cannot prove many of them; their theories emerge from bold assumptions, unconnected pieces of evidence and sophisticated leaps of faith.[18] Mathematics and logic are generally taken to be the most exactand precise disciplines, but even there things are not that final and definitive. For example, the value of π, known as *an irrational number*, cannot be expressed exactly as a common fraction. Its value 22/7, is only approximated to 3.14, as it does not give us permanent decimal representation, not even a repeating pattern. With increasing computational and calculating abilities, in 2013, the value of ð has been found out up to 13.3 trillion (1013) digits. It was done just out of sheer curiosity, as usually science does not need more than forty digits for its calculations.[19] π is also known as *a transcendental number* –a number that is not the root of any non-zero polynomial having rational coefficients. This transcendence further implies that it is not possible to solve the ancient challenge of squaring the circle with a compass and straightedge. Given this scenario it is high time that humanity surrendered to the Supreme Wisdom of Nature (God).

Concluding Remarks

Reading the Gospels we come to know about the life, words, and deeds of Jesus, all of which is value-oriented. He is convinced of the Supreme Wisdom of his Heavenly Father and is always prepared to surrender to it; he constantly invites his followers too to do the same. This attitude and approach of Jesus can, in my opinion, enrich science, giving it a 'human' face. We

have seen that as long as science is an interpretative enterprise, as long as science is a hermeneutical discipline, all that affects humans, their language, their value-systems, beliefs and moral principles, will also affect science principles, will also affect science.

We have more than one reason to be cautious in dealing with nature. We need to respect and value the mere 'age' of the universe. Compared to the age of the universe humans' age is just negligible. In the recent years we hear the experts in Astronomy and Cosmology speaking about the "Cosmic Calendar" that tries to fit in the whole evolution of the universe with the long history of about 13 to 14 billion years into twelve months of a calendar year. The original idea came from a prominent astronomer Carl Sagan (1934 – 1996), who spoke about the 'Cosmic Calendar', in his television series, "Cosmos".[20] If the whole process of evolution since the time of Big Bang is compared to a yearly calendar human beings appear on the face of the earth somewhere just during the last minute of the last hour, on the last day of the year! Still more interesting is that (modern) science appears in less than a second! A 'cosmic' month is equal to about one billion years; a 'cosmic' day is about 40 million years; a 'cosmic' second is about 500 years and our human life of 70 – 80 years is equal to 0.16 'cosmic' second! Because we and our science are very, very young compared to the natural history of about 13 long billion years, we need to be very careful and responsible in our dealing with nature. I don't mean that just because we came late, the other things that came before us are better than us. But age matters. We may be cognitively indispensable,[21] but cosmically insignificant. So it is appropriate that we who are cosmically youngest in the universe listen to it. As one realizes the mysterious nature of life and the limitations of human existence one may spontaneously surrender to the 'Divine' Wisdom of God.

Finally, a word of clarification. If I have equated wisdom of nature with God in this essay it is because God of physics is the cosmic order; many scientists, like most of the quantumphysicists, are satisfied in reaching this stage, but a few scientists go still further; for them the strictly logical and totally impersonal order (of the universe) does not satisfy our innate human longing; so it sounds reasonable for science to look for the cosmic Designer, who is LOVE. We pass through science to unravel the mysteries; so the path does not begin, nor end, with science. According to Paul Davies, "Science offers surer path to God, than Religion".[22] Perhaps, I would add, 'Science, *enriched by the Dharma of Jesus*, offers surer path to God than Religion .

Notes:

1. *Tadrisho ayam anuprashno yatra dharmaha sudurlabaha, Dushkamha pralisankhyatum tatkenatra vysvasyathi Prabhavarthaya bhutanam dharmapravachanam kritam, Yasyat prabhavasamyuktaha sa dharma iti nischayaha.* (*Mahabharatha*, *Shanti Parva*, 109-9-11).
2. See: http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Dharma; accessed on 20 January, 2015
3. See: http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Dharma; accessed on 20 January, 2015
4. For the elaboration of the themes one may look at Francis X. D'Sa, S. J., ed., *The Dharma of Jesus: Interdisciplinary Essays in Memory of George Soares-Prabhu* (Pune: Institute for the Study of Religion, 1997). This particular conference has other papers to explore and interpret the ideas of George Soares-Prabhu and therefore I, taking the clue from him, I move on to my personal understanding of the Dharma of Jesus, and to see how it, if taken seriously, can enrich the world of science.
5. Henry Harris "Rationality in Science", in *Scientific Explanation* ed. A. F. Heath (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 48,

6. Harold I. Brown, *Rationality* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988).

7. Henry Harris. 1981. 'Rationality in Science', in *Scientific Explanation*, ed. Heath. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 46.

8 Putnam, Hilary. 1979. "The Place of Facts in a World of Values". In The Nature of the Physical Universe, ed. Douglas Huff and Omer Prewett, New York: A Wiley-Interscience Publication. p. 115.

9. Popper, K. R. *The Myth of the Framework – In Defence of Science and Rationality*. (ed.) M.A. Notturno, Routledge, London, 1994, 40.

10. However, one can still use the term of 'Rationality' in science, provided that account of rationality includes all these features of reasonableness that are explicated here. Those who are convinced of the short comings of the traditional views of rationality, look for an alternative account of rationality. Philosophers like, Hilary Putnam ('Integrated View of Rationality'), Stephen Toulmin (denial of over--reliance of rationality), Christopher McMahon ('Collective Rationality') and Stephen Nathanson ('Reasonable form of Rationalism') propose alternatives to the traditional accounts of rationality, which captures the notion of rationality in a much more adequate manner. I have elaborated their details and the characteristics of reasonableness in science elsewhere: *Towards a Theory of Rationality in Science – A Plea for Reasonableness* (New Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2012).

11. Stephen Happel, "Metaphors and Time Asymmetery - Cosmologies in Physics and Christian Meanings,", in Robert John Russell, et. al. (eds), *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature – Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1993), p. 109.

12. Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms – A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974), p. 30

13. Werner Heisenberg, *The Physicists Conception of Nature* (London: The Scientific Book Guild, 1962), p. 29.

14. David Darling, *Equations of eternity – Speculations on consciousness, meaning and the mathematical rules that orchestrate the cosmos* (NY: Hyperion, 1993), p. 16.

15. See: Russell Stannard, The End of Discovery – Are we reaching the boundaries of the knowable? (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

16. Louise B. Young, ed., *The Mystery of Matter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 7.

17. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass%E2%80%93energy_equivalence; accessed on 24 March, 2015.

18. John Brockman, *What We Believe But Cannot Prove: Today's Leading Thinkers on Science in the Age of Certainty* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006).

19. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pi; accessed on 24 March, 2015.

20. Carl Sagan's ideas and talks can be accessed from various sources as the following; I rely on one such a source: http://visav.phys.uvic.ca/~babul/AstroCourses/P303_BB-slide.htm; http://scienceblogs.com/startswithabang/2011/12/30/the-entire-universe-one-pictur/

21. I say, we are cognitively indispensable. For, with human beings evolution has become conscious of itself. With the reasoning power we can now control the course of evolution at least to a certain extent. All our actions can cause repercussions in the environment and the whole of cosmos. Thus we seem to have become cognitively significant. For more reflections on this, please see my book, *A Book That Cannot Be Titled* (Tiruchy: Ilanthalir Trust, 2015), Chapter on: HUMAN BEINGS: COSMICALLY INSIGNIFICANT BUT COGNITIVELY INDISPENSABLE!

22. See: http://www.iscast.org/events/Faith_Hope_and_Quarks-inverse-colour-6pp.pdf; accessed on 24 March, 2015.

JPJRS 18/2 ISSN 0972-33315, July 2015: 155-181

Dharma of Jesus: Exploring Its Philosophical Foundations

George Karuvelil, SJ

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune

Abstract: This is an essay in fundamental theology, an attempt to communicate the foundational experience of Christian faith in an intelligible manner to all, including atheists. Beginning with a brief reference to the past attempts to do this task, it is seen that those who start with universal experiences find the specific character of Christian faith problematic and those who start with the Christian experience (the Christ event) make it inaccessible to non-Christians. The author sets out to bridge this gap with the category of "person-mysticism" for which a longer discussion of well known "nature mysticism" paves the way.

Keywords: nature mysticism; natural mysticism; person-mysticism; immanence-transcendence; "wholly other"; Jesus Christ.

1. Introduction

Coming from the root *dhr* ('to hold', 'to support'), dharma was understood as that which upholds, i.e., the foundations. By the Buddhist period, it comes to mean doctrinal foundations [1] For our purpose, dharma refers to the foundations of Christian faith. Pope Benedict spelt out this foundation clearly when he said, "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."[2] Further we want to explore this foundational encounter philosophically. Philosophy, in its original sense, is not a set of ideas, but a way of life,[3] a sort of guide map for living in a given world.[4] The word 'given' is important because phenomenologically, the world inhabited by the ancient Greeks or the medieval Europeans is not the same as the modern world or the contemporary world of ours. Therefore, if philosophy is understood as a way life, then

philosophy is bound to change as the world changes; only then will it be able to offer guidance to life.

Friedrich Schleiermacher was the first to realize that such a change was required in presenting Christian faith to the modern world. In keeping with the anthropocentrism of modernity, therefore, Schleiermacher took the experiential turn. Since he sought to address those intellectual elites of his time who were sceptical of Christian faith[5] it is better termed as fundamental theology than theology.[6] Schleiermacher's experiential turn, however, has been subjected to severe criticism, Karl Barth even calling it a betrayal of Christ.[7] Catholic thinkers, led by Karl Rahner also took the experiential turn[8] via mysticism.[9] But against a dominantly introvertive view of mysticism, he gave it a "transcendental" twist, according to which every concrete, limited, thematic experience (like perceiving a pen) involves an implicit, unthematic awareness of the unlimited divine mystery as the horizon or the ground of experience.[10] However, Rahner was not oblivious to the fact that this philosophical foundation of his fundamental theology is in the "most radical tension"[11] with the foundation of his systematic theology, i.e., the person of Jesus Christ.

The basic problem with the experiential turn is that the more universal, philosophical starting point does not do justice to the specific character of the Christian experience in Jesus Christ. If, on the other hand, one begins with the Christian revelation, as in traditional theology, then it remains inaccessible to its "cultured despisers" of religion, those disillusioned with Christian faith. This is the dilemma of Christian fundamental theology in the contemporary world: if it begins with the experience in Jesus Christ, it is not able to reach out to the non-Christians and if it begins with something more universal, it seems to bypass the Christian experience. One could call it the tension between the

identity of the experience and its accessibility to non-Christians, including non-believers. Similar tension can be seen in the scholarly study of mysticism, with the "universal core" of Walter Stace[12] and the "experiences-are-different" approach of Steven Katz.[13]

Situated in this context, the present article advocates an approach to mysticism that seeks to ease, if not resolve, the tension between identity of Christian experience and its accessibility to non-Christians. While endorsing Rahner's concern to maintain the universal accessibility of mysticism, I find his transcendental analysis of ordinary experience problematic. Therefore, I begin with a class of experiences that is acknowledged as mystical, but also universal, since they are relatively independent of prior beliefs and practices. This is nature mysticism. I go on to provide an alternative interpretation of nature mysticism to the one provided by Stace. In the process, it is seen that much of what Christians mean when they talk about God can be understood in terms of nature mysticism. Then I expand the notion of universally accessible nature mysticism into "natural mysticism", an important variety of which is dubbed as "person-mysticism". This helps to provide a preliminary account of the Christian experience in Jesus Christ that is both universally accessible and faithful to the specifically Christian experience. This approach to fundamental theology, however, needs to be complimented by a third requirement of any experiential approach, namely, empirical adequacy.[14] It should also be clear that as an exercise in fundamental theology that seeks to reach out to non-Christians and unbelievers is bound to lack the rich details of Christian faith. If Rahner called his lengthy book on fundamental theology a "first level of reflection",[15] this small article must be considered a preliminary to a first level reflection!