



The Liberative Spirituality of the Sermon on the Mount: George M. Soares-Prabhu's Contribution towards Biblical Spirituality

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Abstract: George M. Soares-Prabhu started teaching his course on the Sermon on the Mount in 1984 by comparing Legalistic spirituality of the Pharisees with Personalistic spirituality of Jesus and then went on to develop a Liberationist spirituality based on the Sermon on the Mount. Some of these ideas are found in the collected writings of Soares-Prabhu, especially in his paper on 'The Spirituality of Jesus' and the 'Dharma of Jesus' (CWG 2, 141-155 and CWG 4, 153-172). I shall combine my class notes with his published writings to bring out his understanding of Christian spirituality, and its foundation in the Scriptures.

Keywords: Legalistic spirituality, Personalistic spirituality, Liberationist spirituality, Sermon on the Mount.

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Introduction

In his article on the ‘Spirituality of Jesus,’ (CWG 3, 86) Soares-Prabhu describes the chasm between ordinary understanding of spirituality and the Liberationist Spirituality. Usually, talk on spirituality inevitably becomes talk about prayer, contemplation, inner freedom, detachment, and indifference and so on. It does not descend to the concrete realities of ordinary lives of people. The spiritual realm is the realm of religion and it is kept quite distinct from the material realm, the realm of science, history, economics and politics, etc. which is the realm of liberation of the oppressed. Spirituality treats things of the Spirit. Liberation is concerned about the socio-political and economic realities of the material world. A genuine spirituality is a contextualized spirituality, a way of life based on certain convictions and values which interacts creatively and appropriately with its historical context. The spirituality of a group is attentive to and affected by the situation in which it is lived. It must identify and confront the historical situation. A spirituality derives not from socio-economic situation but from a unique religious experience which is irreducible to any merely historical explanation. In the Gospels we find Jesus confronting the situation and identifying with it. To understand this thrust of the spirituality of Jesus, Soares-Prabhu first:

1. looks at the historical context in which Jesus lived and worked
2. describes his spirituality in terms of his reaction to that situation and
3. spells out the living symbols through which that spirituality can be experienced today (CWG 3, 89).

1. Legalistic Spirituality

All spiritualities begin with an experience of God. For the Pharisees and the Scribes, their experience of God as given in the Pentateuch began with the Law that God gave to Moses.

So God is imaged as a just judge who is judging people based on their observance of the Law. In modern terms, using an analogy from Transactional Analysis, we can say that God of the Old Testament is a critical parent. So, the God-experience of humankind is mediated by the Law. Law tells us what God wants. On Mount Sinai, God's will was revealed to Moses through the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments demonstrate the goodness in humankind at a time when the law of the jungle was dominating the nations around Mount Sinai as experienced by the Jewish people in Egypt. Their slavery in Egypt demonstrated to them what servitude meant and now as they experience deliverance from Egypt through the mediation of Moses, they experienced God's power through the Law. This legalistic spirituality demanded obedience to the Law. As the Jewish people wandered through the desert, they experienced God's wrath every time they broke the Law as it happened when they made the molten calf and worshipped it or when the snakes bit them to death when they grumbled against Moses. Thus, the goodness of a person is judged through obedience of the Law. For the contemporaries of Jesus, law was to be observed in a strictly formal way. Faithful execution of everything prescribed was expected. The obligation of the Law and the merit that accrued from obeying it thus depended 'no longer on content but on formal authority; not what was commanded, determined the will of the person, but the fact that it was commanded.

Legalists consider religion as being a series of do's and don'ts, cold and deadly set of moral principles. Here one is concerned merely with the keeping the Law as an end in itself. This implies that godliness is an outward job. As such, legalists focus on the outer at the expense of the inner. A person's outward façade is more important than the inward reality. For instance, as long as an individual goes to every church service, it's okay to be a malicious, lying, envious, arrogant, abusive and sexually immoral. Simply put, legalism is religious hypocrisy. It's putting on an act. This type of legalism can be illustrated by the Pharisees who confronted Jesus over healing on the Sabbath day (Mt12:9-14).

They were concerned only with the letter of the Law and avoiding anything that might look like work to them. These teachers missed the spirit of the law, which was directed against ordinary labour that is not required to maintain life and not against efforts to heal the sick.

In addition to the Law, the Pharisees had fashioned many man-made rules (as found in the Mishna and Talmud) that imposed a huge burden on people, and some of these trampled the Law of God. That is why Jesus warned his disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees. They would make their tradition, which they thought was God sanctioned, but they ended up transgressing His commandments because of their tradition. The yeast of the Pharisees was the false doctrine, or tradition they put in place to keep from breaking the Law of God, which consequently in many cases did not work.

Soares Prabhu, in his lectures, explained the tenets of the Legalistic spirituality as given in the following table:

Tenets of Spirituality	Legalistic Spirituality
Experience of God	God as Just Judge and critical parent
Mediator	Law Descending mediation where law tells what God wants. Here law is revelation of God's will. It reveals human goodness. By obedience to the law, God comes to know whether I am good.
Attitude to God	Conditioned approval. Judge does not love. He only approves it or not. He only gives punishment or rewards according to the merit of the deed.

Human response	Formal obedience to the law. Do what is told in the law.
Aim of spirituality	To accumulate merit. To avoid sin.
Dispositions	If successful (if one keeps the law) then one becomes self-righteous. If unsuccessful then one becomes anxious and develops scruples.

2. Personalistic Spirituality of Jesus

The scribes at the time of Jesus had considerable authority. They belonged to one of the three dominant classes of the Jewish society along with the priestly class and the lay nobility. The authority of the scribes came from their learning. They specialized in the knowledge of the 'Torah' and the oral traditions. They acquired such knowledge after long years of discipleship in the scribal schools. These schools licensed them for key positions in the administration of justice, in government and in education. Innumerable scribes studied the Law night and day, hoping to find, through ingenious and often quite fanciful interpretation, rules of conduct for every possible situation in life; so that in everything people had to do, they might have prescribed alternative, by performing which they could practice obedience and merit. Soares-Prabhu looks at the situation as follows:

Unlike the Pharisees or the sectarians of Qumran, Jesus was not a rigorist but a radical. He did not attempt to follow the letter of the law as strictly as possible but sought to reach its spirit. The spirit of the law for Jesus who had experienced God as Abba, Father, was love. The 'love command', that one loves God by loving neighbor is the basis of the law (Mt22:40); the golden rule' that we do to others what we would have others do to us, is the sum total of the law (Mt 7:12). A new experience of God (God as loving parent and not as just judge) leads Jesus to a new principle of spirituality

(love not Law). This spirituality excludes any surrender to, withdrawal from, or violent rejection of his situation. It leads him instead to the two basic strategies of identification and of confrontation. In his sharply polarized society, clearly divided into economic and social classes with conflicting interests, Jesus takes sides. He identifies with the poor and the outcast, and he confronts the 'establishment' which impoverishes and rejects them (CWG 3, 101).

This authority of Jesus enables him to confront the religious, social and political establishment of his people with sovereign freedom. He re-interprets the Law with an authority which seems to parallel the authority of God himself: "it was said to them of old" (that is, 'God said to our ancestors'), he announces, quoting not just rabbinic interpretations of the Law but the Written Law itself (Mt 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38); and then goes on to correct this with his "but I say to you" (Mt 5:21-48). No prophet has ever spoken like this. The prophets spoke in God's name, with God's authority communicating God's message. "Thus says the Lord" was the prophet's way of speaking, but Jesus says "I say to you". Such authority is very evident in the Sabbath controversies which were a visible feature of Jesus' ministry, attested to in all the Gospel traditions (Mk 2:23-28; 3:1-6; Lk 13:10-17; Jn 5:1-18; 9:1-34). Jesus breaks the Sabbath whenever human need demands it, justifying his violation of the sacred law of Sabbath rest with the radical principle that the "Sabbath is made for the human person, not the human person for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). Every human institution or law (no matter how sacred) is thus subordinated to human need.

The Law of purities which restricted every aspect of Jewish life, is abrogated by Jesus in the single striking observation that 'nothing which enters anyone from the outside can make the person unclean; it is what comes out of the person that makes him or her unclean' (Mk 7:15). All purity laws are thus abolished with a stroke. Cleanness or uncleanness is not a matter of ritual purity, but of the disposition of the heart.

In a patriarchal society where women were numbered with children and slaves as ‘minors’ with diminished responsibility, and a restricted role in worship and in public life, Jesus admits them into his movement as helpers and disciples. Not only do women follow him to take care of his needs (Lk 8:2), but Mary who sat at his feet listening to what he teaches and so assuming the role of a disciple is commended for having chosen “what is best” (Lk 10:42). Three important incidents in the ministry of Jesus, each heavy with theological significance, feature women (Jn 4:42; Lk 7:36-50; Mk 14:3-9). In all these women are not only occasions of significant teaching, but emerge favourably in comparison with their male counterparts.

1.1 The Elements of the Spirituality of Jesus

Soares-Prabhu explained the spirituality of Jesus through a diagram as shown in Fig above. He then explains each of the elements of that spirituality (CWG 3, 101).

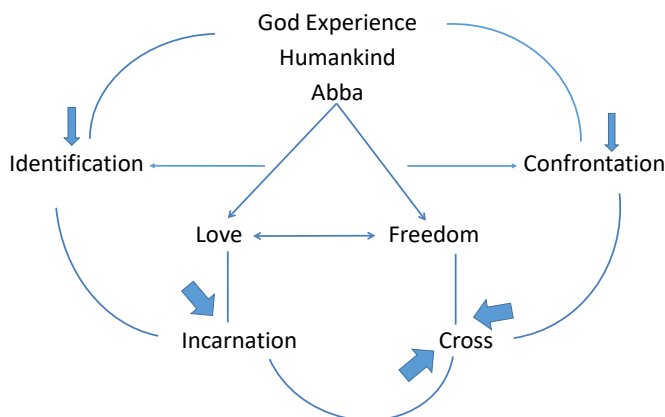


Fig 1. Elements of the Spirituality of Jesus (CWG 3, 101)

God-experience

The spirituality of Jesus originates in a profound experience of God and of humankind, which leads to the freedom and the love which empower him to identify with the poor and the outcast and confront the powerful and the rich. The process of this spirituality and the symbols in which it shows itself to us today are outlined in Figure 1. Its outer circle shows us the praxis of Jesus, the inner triangle the inner experiences which ground and are grounded by this praxis (CWG 3, 101).

Freedom of Jesus

The freedom of Jesus is remarkable because he lacked position and power. Jesus could claim no religious prestige. He was not a priest born into a priestly family. He enjoyed no intellectual status. He was not a recognized theologian who had been trained in scribal school. He commanded no political power. He did not enjoy the privileges of wealth. Yet he taught with authority in word and deed. “The crowds were astonished at his teaching”, we are told on the occasion of the first miracle he performed (Mk1:27); and of the first sermon he delivered (Mt 7:28). They were astonished because “he taught as one having authority and not as the scribes” (Mk1:22).

Love

The freedom of Jesus originated in his experience of God as Abba which found fulfilment in his passionate concern for people. That is why Jesus could sum up his ethics in a love commandment (Mt 22:34-40) which he formulated by joining the great text of Judaism (Dt 6:4-5 “The Lord your God is one God and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind”) to a little known text from the Holiness code of Leviticus (Lev 19:18 “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”). As understood by Jesus this commandment does to ask us to love God and neighbor as if these

were two different objects to our love. Rather Lev 19:18 is meant to be an interpretation of Dt 6:4-5. The content of this is spelled out by Leviticus. The love commandment of Jesus therefore reads “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, this means, you shall love your neighbor as yourself”. To love God means, concretely, to love neighbor. The one commandment that Jesus gives us as the ‘great commandment’ one that founds and includes all the others is therefore that we love God by loving neighbor.

Who then is my neighbor? In defining neighbor, Jesus allows no distinction of caste, race, gender or class (Lk 10:30-37). For the love with which we love neighbor is not a human disposition, determined by human prejudices or preferences, but it is the result of the experience of God’s love for us. To the extent we experience God’s love, we love neighbor the way God loves us. But God loves us unconditionally.

But by ‘love’ Jesus does not mean primarily friendship, or fellowship or erotic passion – all these are understood as ‘love’ today. The *agape* which the New Testament uses as its own very special term stands rather for an active, effective concern. It is best understood perhaps as the attitude of those who have experienced God as a parent, translating that experience to their fellow human beings as brothers and sisters, and so respond spontaneously to their needs. Love then is effective love. In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus defines love as responding effectively to the real needs of the people we encounter.

Justice

Jesus sees the coming of God’s rule as end of Satan’s reign. Satan stands for structured evil, and organized might. It is this satanic power structure that Jesus combats through his controversies, his healings and exorcism. The miracles of Jesus are not to be taken as isolated actions of compassion. As such the thirty or so healings and exorcism that Jesus performed would not have amounted to very much. Rather they are an indication

that God's rule has dawned and that Satan's rule has ended. In an unequal world where class, caste, race and gender conflicts exist, love must take sides. The love of Jesus lends to make an unambiguous option for the poor and the outcast, because they are as the Bible sees them, always victims of oppression. Because of this self-defining option, the life of Jesus is lived out in the twin dimensions of solidarity and conflict leading to justice.

1.2 Solidarity with the poor: Incarnation

Born into a lower middle class family, Jesus declassifies himself becoming an itinerant religious preacher with nowhere to lay his head. He abandons himself wholly to God's provident care (Mt 6:28-34) depending for his livelihood on the casual help provided by sympathizing friends (Lk 8:1-2). He associates with outcasts, becoming an untouchable with the untouchables. He touches a leper (incurring ritual uncleanness) to welcome him back to human fellowship (Mk 1:40-42). He dines with the ritually unclean and socially ostracized tax collectors and sinners, incurring the hostility of the religious elite (Lk 15:2, Mk2:16) and demonstrating without any possibility of doubt that there are no 'outcasts' before God.

Conflict with the Powerful: The Cross

The solidarity of Jesus with these victims of economic, social and political oppression is not merely a passive solidarity which assumes and endures their lot. It leads to a confrontation with the religious and political establishment which oppresses them, and to a struggle with Satan which in his worldview are the ultimate sources of oppression. Jesus confronts the theological establishment (the scribes) to free people from a burdensome interpretation of the ritual and moral law (Mk 2:1-3,6); the religious establishment (the chief priests) and their misuse of the Temple, to protest against the exploitation of the people in the name of religion (Mk 11:15-18); and the political establishment (Herod) whose threat to kill him (a clear sign of the political

impact of his ministry) he dismisses with contempt (Lk 13:31-33). The life of Jesus is riddled with conflicts leading to his death on the cross.

The cross is therefore no arbitrary intrusion into the life of Jesus. It is the natural outcome of a life of solidarity with the poor and the outcasts and of confrontation with the powerful who oppress them. Conflict with the rich and the powerful leads inevitably to the fatal confrontation which could only end with a foreseen and freely accepted death. And this death becomes the appropriate fulfilment of a life lived out with and for the poor and the outcasts. For on the cross Jesus is wholly poor and totally outcast. Identification and confrontation have here reached their furthest possible limits. Jesus is one with all the marginalized and the martyred victims of the earth. Now we can compare the tenets of the legalistic spirituality with that of the Personalistic spirituality of Jesus.

A comparison of the Legalistic Spirituality with the Personalistic Spirituality

Tenets	Legalistic Spirituality	Personalistic Spirituality
Experience of God	God as Just Judge and critical parent	God as Nurturing Parent Or Loving Father
Mediator	Mediator is Law Descending mediation where law tells what God wants. Here law is revelation of God's will. It reveals human goodness. By obedience to the law, God comes to know whether I am good.	Jesus is the Mediator. Jesus is substituted for Law. Jesus reveals the father as Love. Jesus is the human face of God.

Attitude of God	Conditioned approval. Judge does not love. He only approves it or not. He only gives punishment or rewards according to the merit of the deed.	Unconditional love It means acceptance. God accepts me as I am in my freedom and responsibility. God will also accept the consequences of our decision.
Human response	Formal obedience to the law. Do what is told in the law.	Radical obedience
Aim of spirituality	To accumulate merit To avoid sin	Be perfect. Become children of the father. We become like God by loving.
Dispositions	If successful (if one keeps the law) then one becomes self-righteous. If unsuccessful then one becomes anxious and develops scruples.	Peace and joy

2. The Liberationist Spirituality of the Sermon on the Mount

The Personalistic spirituality of Jesus is a model for all Christians and it is inviting all of us to a Liberationist Spirituality. Sharing in the God-experience of Jesus is a must for his disciples. Soares-Prabhu explains this God experience in the following way:

What makes a person a Christian is not professing certain beliefs, nor practicing particular rituals, nor undergoing an initiation rite, nor belonging to a recognizable social group, nor even confessing the name of Jesus though all these are inevitable stages in the evolution of a religious tradition. To be a disciple of Jesus means to experience God the way that Jesus experienced (CWG 3, 35).

The meaning of Liberation is different in the Asian tradition as compared with that of South America. This is how Soares-Prabhu defines Liberation:

Liberation is an experience of unconditioned freedom resulting from an experiential realization of the radical relativity of the empirical world, a state of absolute freedom from psychological and sociological bondage, which finds its concrete, institutionalized expression in the Buddhist monk (bhikku) or the Hindu wandering ascetic. Liberation for the Asian psyche is liberation which leads to that poverty which is freedom from illusion, attachment and greed (CWG 1, 55).

We find that unconditional freedom in the life of Jesus. He lived a life of freedom from illusion, attachment and greed. These aspects which offer Liberationist spirituality in the Sermon on the Mount are brought out in the following section.

2.1. Inner Freedom Leading to Liberation

The Law is interpreted far more radically by Jesus than it is by the scribes. Its demands now reach down to the innermost intentions of the heart, and do not stop short, at the external performance of an action (Mt 5:21-47). They embrace a person's life in its entirety, and not only just the avoidance of evil ('thou shall not') but a positive never-ending endeavor to do good, which reaches out to the perfection of God himself (Mt 5:48). Yet these demands are liberating demands. For they are not arbitrary norms imposed on people from outside, but merely spell out for them the implications of the obedience and the love which are their spontaneous response to the acceptance of the Gospel. This new

law of Jesus does not constrain our spirit, but invites us to grow in love. For love is ultimately the essence of the Law. And all the demands of Jesus come down eventually to this one demand; that people give themselves away wholly in love, so that by losing their lives they may truly find it (Mt 10:39).

Both law and cult are overshadowed by the love in the prophetic proclamation of Jesus. Jesus protested against a cult which has become a mechanical ritual (Mt 9:13) and a law which has degenerated into casuistic legalism (Mk 7:9-130). He proclaimed himself as the 'eschatological alternative' which takes the place of law and cult. Salvation is now no longer the automatic outcome of the performance of prescribed rites, nor a merited reward for the faithful observance of the detailed prescription of the Law. It is a free gift from God to be accepted by faith in Jesus, and shown forth in a life of love. It is in this sense that Jesus both fulfills (Mt 5:17-21) and at the same time abrogates law and cult. That is to say he relativizes them, subsuming them into a higher economy where law and cult have no independent value of their own, but are significant only as expressions of that inner attitude of obedience and concern in which a person's true renewal consists.

God is to be worshipped neither in Jerusalem nor in Gerizim, for the time has come 'when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23). The coming of Jesus has sanctified the cosmos, eliminating the distinction between the sacred and the profane. There are no 'holy' places to which the presence of God is confined. Just as there are no holy places, there are no 'unclean' things.

The Sabbath too is 'made for man, not man for the Sabbath'(Mk 2:27). This saying is a dramatic reversal which puts every institution in its place subordinating it to a person's welfare and demanding that it be a means of service and not an instrument of power. Thus, Jesus liberates us from the restraints of the cult and sets us free from the burden of the Law as well.

So we are not to worry anxiously about the future, piling up treasures on earth (Mt 6:19) or merit in heaven. And striving desperately to keep our record clean, so that, like the one-talent servant in the parable (Mt 25:14-30) we might be safe before an exacting God. That way leads to the scrupulosity and self-righteousness that are the inevitable pathologies of legalism. Rather, the law of Jesus invites us to confront the future with the simplicity and confidence of a child (Mt 18:2-4) fully conscious of our sinfulness and need, but with the joyous assurance that we have indeed been forgiven.

Jesus who has experienced God as love, was supremely free. He was driven by no demons of greed or ambition. "The Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for many", he announced (Mk 10:45), offering a pointed and moving summary of his life and mission. In a society that was politically colonized, socially patriarchal, and religiously conservative, he moved around with absolute freedom and authority.

2.2. Lifestyle of Jesus

Jesus identified himself with the poor, he makes himself an outcast by associating with outcasts. He touches a leper to welcome him back into human fellowship. He eats with tax collectors and sinners earning the wrath of the religious elite, he puts aside the laws of ritual cleanliness to which the Pharisees attached so much importance. These are not casual gestures on the part of Jesus. They are expressions of his spirituality of love which leads him to a consistent and radical identification with the poor and the marginalized of society, not only announcing their liberation and protesting on their behalf, but by sharing their life and their misery.

2.3. The Message of Jesus

The message which Jesus proclaims is subversive. His demand for radical obedience to God, rules out blind obedience to

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any human power, his proclamation of humankind as the ‘family of God’ wholly excludes all forms of racist, sexist, ethnic or caste discrimination.

His demand for radical concern for the neighbor calls for a rejection of any system which creates or enhances an unjust distribution of wealth, status or power. The Kingdom he announces is revolutionary and so arouses the opposition of the guardians of the religious, social and political status quo. Jesus’ identification with the poor and the powerless leads inevitably to his confrontation with the rich and the powerful.

The spirituality of Jesus, the love which drives him to identification with the poor and the freedom which allows him to comfort the rich both derive from his foundational experience of God as Abba. Spirituality of freedom and of love expressing itself in a radical identification with the poor and the outcast and a resolute confrontation with all the oppressive powers of the world arrives at its paradoxical outcome, the cross. For the Cross shows forth not just the death of Jesus but his resurrection as well (Phil 2:6-11). The cross is a sign not of death but of life. And so, the Cross exemplifies and vindicates with absolute assurance the spirituality and the praxis of Jesus. Jesus in his freedom and his love chooses to identify with the weak and the foolish and oppose the wise and the strong. It summons us as followers of Jesus to assume the same spirituality of solidarity and struggle.

The manifesto of Jesus is found in Lk 4:16-21. Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth and he read the passage from Isaiah the prophet (Is 61:1-2). “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” Then he told his audience, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” This manifesto receives greater precision in the Beatitudes and Woes of Lk 6:20-26. The first three of these beatitudes- poor, hungry, those who weep – are not distinct but rather expressions of a single beatitude and woe.

The poor, the hungry, and those who weep are the oppressed. The rich, the full, and those who laugh are the oppressors. Jesus thus pronounces blessings on the poor and a curse on the rich.

The way in which the Sermon on the Mount ‘fulfils’ the Law and the Prophets is illustrated in the six antitheses of the Sermon (Mt 5:21-48). These result in an interiorization of the Law, a shift in emphasis from external performance to interior intention (5:21ff ; 5:27 ff). These also result in its simplification, that is, in the reduction of the multiplicity of its many precepts into the unity of a single fundamental attitude. For the anti-theses all climax in the core demand of the Sermon: ‘you must, therefore, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’(Mt5:48). This core demand sums up for us the ‘essence ‘ of the antitheses, indeed of the whole Sermon itself. For to be perfect does not mean here to be ‘flawless’ or without imperfections, but it means ‘whole hearted’ or undivided in one’s love. The core-demand of the sermon, then, is that we be as whole-hearted and undivided in loving God, as God is undivided in loving others.

The Sermon on the Mount follows the proclamation for the Kingdom by Jesus and of the call to repentance that goes with it “Repent for the Kingdom of the Heavens is at hand” (4:17). The Sermon on the Mount is spelling out the concrete modalities of ‘repentance’- of the turning of the whole person to God which is the unforced response of anyone who has listened to the proclamation of the Kingdom and experienced the unconditional love of the Father which this proclamation announces.

Christian existence is not a static condition acquired once and for all, but a ‘way’ along which we must walk ‘following’ Christ. We are all becoming Christians by following Christ. For the eschatological tension of the ‘already and not yet’ is mirrored in our lives too. The Sermon on the Mount sketches out the life-pattern towards which we must grow. Rather than obliging us to this or that particular action, the Sermon on the Mount obliges us to move in a given direction. For the law of Christ is essentially concerned not so much with the nature of an action, but with the

quality of the act and the direction in which it is moving (CWG 3, 101).

With this background, now we are in a position to compare the tenets of legalistic spirituality with that of the Personalistic spirituality and the Liberationist spirituality as given below:

Tenets	Legalistic Spirituality	Personalistic Spirituality	Liberationist Spirituality
Experience of God	God as Just Judge and critical parent	God as Nurturing Parent Or Loving Father	Indulgent parent
Mediator	Mediator is Law. Descending mediation where law tells what God wants. Here law is revelation of God's will. It reveals human goodness. By obedience to the law, God comes to know whether I am good.	Jesus is the Mediator. Jesus is substituted for Law. Jesus reveals the father as Love. Jesus is the human face of God.	There is no need of a mediator because God's spirit is moving in me.

Attitude of God	<p>Conditioned approval. Judge does not love. He only approves it or not. He only gives punishment or rewards according to the merit of the deed.</p>	<p>Unconditional love It means acceptance . God accepts me as I am in my freedom and responsibility God will also accept the consequences of our decision.</p>	<p>God gives unconditional approval. There is no responsibility here.</p>
H u m a n response	<p>Formal obedience to the law. Do what is told in the law</p>	<p>Radical obedience</p>	<p>No need of obedience</p>
Aim of spirituality	<p>To accumulate merit To avoid sin</p>	<p>Be perfect. Become children of the father. We become like God by loving.</p>	<p>Self-fulfillment</p>

Disposi- tions	<p>If successful (if one keeps the law) then one becomes self-righteous.</p> <p>If unsuccessful then one becomes anxious and develops scruples.</p>	Peace and joy	There is no happiness except in loving.
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Conclusion

The Sermon on the Mount is grounded on an experience of God's unconditional love. Jesus' own life was totally determined by his own experience of God as Abba. His ministry was a sustained attempt to evoke this experience in his disciples and in the crowd through word and deed, in his parables, his healings, his concern for the untouchables (the lepers and the possessed) his table fellowship with outcasts- indeed in all the various ways in which he proclaimed the Kingdom of God, Jesus draws on and communicates his Abba experience.

But the experience of God as Father has as its inseparable counterpart the experience of man as brother. Rooted in this experience of sonship and brotherhood (God experienced as Father, man experienced as brother) the norm of the Sermon on the Mount shows three features which derive directly from its root experience. It is a new law of freedom, of sonship and concern. This new Law is the eschatological age of the Spirit replacing the external code of conduct. We need law because we have not yet attained the fullness of eschatological existence.

Concern for the brother looms large in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:43-48,7:12) that it is arguable that the double

commandment of love propounded by Jesus urges us not so much to love God and neighbor, as to love God by loving the neighbor. Concern for the neighbor is the central to the new Law. It must be absolutely universal, reaching out to any one in need (Lk 10:29-37) even to those who are hostile to us (Lk 6:35f). The Sermon on the Mount invites all persons to live a life of love leading to liberating the sufferings of the oppressed. It is a radical way of life as Jesus lived.

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In His Own Words

“Jesus appears in the Gospels as non-clerical, even as a somewhat anti-clerical figure. He is not a priest, for he does not belong to a priestly family; and he is shown in continuing conflict with the priestly establishment which ultimately arranges for his death.” (Soares-Prabu, “Christian Priesthood in India Today,” CWG 2, 222.)

“For a change of structures without change of hearts will lead to new forms of oppression; while a change of hearts without change of structures will leave the present crushing form of oppression intact. Attitudinal and structural change are both necessary, because ultimately attitudes and structures are dialectically related.” (Soares-Prabu, “Jesus and the Poor,” CWG 4, 192-93.)

“Poverty in India is not just an economic category, it is a religious value as well. Caste, even in its most degrading form of untouchability, is legitimized by India’s dominant religion and tolerated by others, Christianity included!” (Soares-Prabhu, “Interpreting the Bible in India Today,” CWG 4, 6.)

“The poverty of most Asian countries, and the alarming extremes of social and economic inequality to be found in them, derive from and are maintained by their stagnant social and religious institutions (like the caste-system in India), which as popularly understood and practised, are often “a tremendous force of social inertia”. But it would be unfair and unrealistic to stop here. For Asia’s underdevelopment is at least equally the result of induced socioeconomic processes.” (Soares-Prabhu, “Inculturation - Liberation – Dialogue,” CWG 1, 55.)

“Jesus (1) identifies himself with the poor, in order (2) to show them an active and effective concern. Such a concern looks to (3) the ending of their “social” poverty, while calling for (4) a “spiritual” poverty that will set them and their rich exploiters free from “mammon”, the compulsive urge to possess. Together, these four elements spell out the “compassion” of Jesus (Mt 9:36; Mk 6:34; 8:2) — that active, caring and passionate love which defines so sharply his life-style and sets a pattern for the life style of his followers.” (Soares-Prabhu, “Jesus and the Poor,” CWG 4, 176).

“The Christian response cannot be that of a spectator, exhorting from the side lines. It must be the response of the committed participant, involved in the struggle for justice and identified with his struggling brothers and sisters - even as God is involved in his history, and as Jesus has identified himself with humankind. An incarnational response will thus always be an active and an involved response.” (Soares-Prabhu, “The Christian Response to the Indian Situation,” CWG 4, 204.)