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GEORGE M. SOARES-PRABHU

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Editorial:

George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ: A Passionate Biblical Exegete and a Committed Liberation Theologian

Twenty-five years have gone by since George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ (1929-1995) left behind his precious memories in Jnana Deepa. Unfortunately, I did not have a chance either to see him or to attend his lectures in Jnana Deepa. Nonetheless, two years after his tragic death (on July 22, 1995) I came to De Nobili College, where he lived for more than 25 years, to do my Bachelor's in Philosophy at Jnana Deepa. Since then, I have been hearing about him as being an excellent teacher, brilliant biblical scholar, first-rate biblical theologian, creative author, thought-provoking preacher, original thinker, scientific researcher, eloquent speaker, committed activist and so on. As I heard about him more, read about him, and tried to understand his writings, all these epitomes became personal realizations. I had the opportunity of reading his collected writings during my Bachelor's in Theology at Jnana Deepa, and since then my reading of the Bible has been challenged by the concerns that he raised for reading the Bible in the Indian context. Now, as a faculty member of the biblical department, where he taught and preached the Word of God for more than two decades, I am

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inspired by his erudite biblical scholarship and his prophetic role in communicating the message of the Bible for a –"poverty-religiosity-caste- ridden" Indian society.

As one of the pillars of Jnana Deepa, he exercised enormous influence on his students and colleagues, challenging them to interpret the Bible in a way that would bring it alive in the Indian context, especially focusing on the poor. As a testimony to this, I quote the words of Prof. Scaria Kuthirakattel, SVD, a student and later a colleague and a close friend of Soares-Prabhu:

> His lectures and his personal life inspired a number of students to shift from a notional study to a personal understanding of Jesus, to move from a lethargic academic life to an active interest that combined with a committed ministry, and to lead a life of radical following of Jesus with minimum personal comforts and facilities but with maximum service in love (Kuthirakattel, 2009:42).

Prof. Francis X. D'sa, SJ, another friend and colleague of Soares-Prabhu describes him like this:

> Scientist by training, artist by inclination, thinker by nature and theologian by commitment, George approached Scripture with the precision of a scientist, the hermeneutic sense of the artist, the questions of a philosopher and the passion of a committed theologian. In addition to all this he brought with him the pen of a poet and writer. The literary quality of his theological work is the achievement of a meticulous mind who though born with a talent for writing nonetheless crafted his essays with great care and labour (D'Sa, 1997: vii).

A careful and discerning reading of his writings will reveal that his goal was to work out a biblical theology that could respond to contemporary issues and challenges in India. His theological approach was contextual, inclusive, holistic, cosmocentric, symbolic and pragmatic with an Indian world-view. As a biblical exegete, Soares-Prabhu was moved by a singular concern throughout his career: to interpret the message of the Bible for contemporary India.

Therefore, the dialogical hermeneutics that he proposed for an Indian reading of the Bible comes from deep reflection and wide experience of several years. For him, an Indian reading of the Bible entailed reading the Bible using traditional Indian methods in the light of specifically Indian social concerns, with an Indian mind and with the sensibilities proper to Indian culture. He firmly believed that if one expected the biblical text to reveal itself to the reader, then the world of the text and the world of the reader would have to interact dialogically and meaningfully. Such an Indian method of interpretation would be "critical and relevant - faithful to the text and responsive to the specific concerns of the Indian interpreter" (Soares-Prabhu, 2003: 34). It was this approach that made him brilliant in his interpretation of the biblical texts.

He was perhaps one of the most influential biblical scholars that the Indian Church has ever known. What distinguished him in this regard was not simply his analysis and exegesis of biblical texts, but his reading and interpretation of the Bible from the Indian situation, characterized by massive poverty, dehumanizing hereditary caste system and pervasive pluriform religiosity. He firmly believed that living in the midst of massive poverty, deep social stratification of caste, religions vying with each other, no biblical theologian in India can seriously reflect on the message of the Bible without understanding closely what the Bible has to say about these grim realities. Thus, his interpretation of the biblical texts had serious implications for understanding the role of the Church in our Indian society.

The readers of the *Collected Writings of George M. Soares Prabhu, SJ, (Vols. 1-4)* will undoubtedly agree that he was a creative, insightful biblical exegete and a committed, radical liberation theologian. Twenty-five years later when we read them, we still feel the passion and depth of his research and commitment to the issues of contemporary society. He devoted his whole life to develop an Indian theology of liberation from a biblical perspective that is basically Indian. He never considered liberation as something that happens towards the end time, or an arbitrary act which ignores human history, but as something that happens in the concrete flux of human history, here - and - now. Therefore, he has brought the issues of human rights, the poor, oppressed and exploited in the discussion

of theology and envisaged their socio-economic liberation, a liberated and a liberating community in the Indian Church and society. What made him refreshingly unique in this process was his use of the Bible to give a foundational theological background. He explored the Bible from the standpoint of the poor, the victims, the oppressed, the marginalized, the voiceless and the exploited. The starting point of his dialogical contextual theology was a biblical theology which he then interpreted in the Indian context.

His primary concern, as I understand, was not with "doctrinal preoccupations" but with a faith that liberates humans from their 'non-freedoms.' He made a conscious effort to present a Jesus to India/Asia who responds to the challenges of our cultures, and the grim realities that we are grappling with, in our day-to-day life situations. Thus, he reflected upon the relevance of the Jesus of Faith in the context of the religions and ideologies in India today. All his exegetical efforts, I would say, were directed towards this goal. He reconciled the dichotomy between the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith by placing the Jesus of Faith in the Indian context for a transforming experience in solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed and the exploited in some way or other. As Francis D'Sa says, his "Jesus was not the metaphysical Jesus of the ecumenical councils," (D'Sa, 2003:6) but Jesus who identified himself with the poor and the oppressed in order to show them an active and effective concern (Soares-Prabhu, 2003:173 -196).

We are indebted to him for the phrase "*Dharma* of Jesus" as he was instrumental in studying and speaking about this concept especially from the Indian context and biblical perspective. As Francis D'Sa held, he thought that it was imperative to present Jesus' Dharma in a multireligious and multicultural context of Asia so that any person of good will would be able to understand and appropriate it (D'Sa, 2003a: 3). Indeed, he had a keen sensitivity towards Indian social and religious traditions, and therefore, he could cite Indian social thinkers and religious texts authoritatively and draw critical insights from them.

He was aware of the need for inculturating the Gospels in the Indian socio-cultural context. Therefore, he called for an openness and receptivity to the East and West, to religions and cultures of

Asia and Europe. Consequently, the theological method that he proposed for our consideration is basically of an inclusive, holistic and dialogical one. At the same time, he was not afraid to speak out against the injustice that the Church practised within its ecclesial functions. For him the "the unprejudiced Jesus" was always the inspiration for critiquing the "prejudiced Church." The way and dharma of the biblical prophets always challenged him to carry out his prophetic vocation in the specific context of India. He critically reflected upon the mission of the Church, and proposed a vision of a new society, taking into consideration the challenges of Indian Church and society. He showed us a world-view that cuts through the sacred-secular, faith-justice, and contemplation-action divide. Taking Jesus in the Gospels as a measuring rod, he proposed a liberative biblical spirituality, against the legalistic spirituality of the Pharisees, for everyone who likes to follow Jesus radically.

Striking in his contribution was his attempt to interpret the Bible from the perspective of the poor and the marginalized. He has hermeneutically interpreted the Bible by considering Jesus' radical option and revolutionary mission for the poor and marginalized in the Synoptics. He could brilliantly explain the liberative notion of poor in the Bible, the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount and the table fellowship of Jesus from the perspective of the poor to bring equality, justice, peace and liberation, to the poor, marginalised and the most suffering and oppressed Dalit Christians in India. His identification and solidarity with the oppressed classes of society made him a passionate champion of the cause of the poor and marginalised.

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of his untimely departure from our midst, I am glad to dedicate this issue of Jnanadeepa in memory of this unforgettable teacher, George M. Soares-Prabhu, who was always inspired by the liberative pedagogy of His Teacher, Jesus. The essays in this issue are soul searching studies of his writings, a tribute to his seminal contribution towards Indian biblical theology and biblical interpretation.

We are grateful for his prophetic vision, leadership and pioneering spirit that led Jnana Deepa to its heights and to achieve its goal. He was a passionate biblical exegete and a committed liberation

theologian who had the depth and vision of seeing things in their ultimate perspective. Through his writings, he continues to invite us to take interest in the issues of our times, to engage with them in the light of the Scriptures and to read the Scriptures in the light of the issues, and to be passionate about Jesus of Faith and his Kingdom upon Indian soil.

Thomas Karimundackal, SJ

Guest Editor

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George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ: A Prophet for Our Times

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Abstract: Fr. George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., was a prolific and creative writer covering a wide range of themes and issues. This paper is an attempt to cover most of his articles and to portray him as a prophet for our time. The first section, The Way of the Prophets, describes how the biblical prophets performed their prophetic ministry. The second section, The Way of Jesus, presents how Jesus realized his prophetic mission. The third section, The Way of Soares, interprets as to how Soares himself understood and carried out his prophetic vocation in the specific context of India. The last section, The Way Ahead, is a brief and humble attempt to understand our task in the future as Indian Christians in terms of mystical prophets.

Keywords: Soares-Prabhu, Way of the Prophets, Way of Jesus, Way of Soares-Prabhu, Soares-Prabhu as a Prophet.

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Introduction

Jesus, who told his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth, … You are the light of the world…" (Mt 5:13, 14), could have as well said, "You are the prophets of the world!" Going through the articles of late George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., one could surmise that he had definitely understood his Christian identity in terms of a prophet. In fact, in one of his articles he says: "The Church is nothing if not prophetic." (Soares-Prabhu 1999: 170).[1] The present paper attempts to outline the significance of George Soares-Prabhu Christian vocation as a prophet and its implications for us as Christians in India today.

It is true that George Soares-Prabhu was, professionally, a biblical theologian, an exegete with a clear, committed liberationist perspective (D'Souza, 1997: 3-35).[2] But he lived that profession in the model of biblical prophets (Soares-Prabhu, 2001: 14-23). So, in order to understand the spirit of George Soares-Prabhu as a prophet it would be helpful to look at how Soares-Prabhu himself understood the role of biblical prophets and also how he saw the prophetic ministry of Jesus.

1. The Way of the Prophets

Biblical prophets were rooted in and committed to the foundational God-experience of the Jewish people – God as a liberator from their slavery in Egypt.[3] The main features of this experience are: (a) four hundred years long oppression of the Israelites by the Egyptians (cf. Gen 15:13); (b) the call and the commission of Moses by God; and (c) the prophetic ministry of Moses in liberating Israelites and creating an alternative community out of them. The foundation for this alternative community is an alternative consciousness[4], which enables Moses, on the one hand, to criticize and dismantle the dominant consciousness and on the other hand, inspires Moses to energize the community of liberated slaves in forming an alternative community.[5] This two-fold ministry of a prophet is expressed

poetically by Jeremiah: "to pluck up and pull down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and plant." (Jer 1:10)

The Mosaic experiment lasted for 250 years only. After Israel shifted from charismatic leadership to monarchic rule (cf. 1 Sam 8), gradually the Mosaic vision of a contrast community receded into oblivion and the royal ideology cleverly engineered a social change triptych in form[6], a change that resembled the state of Israel in Egypt before their liberation. It is precisely during the prolonged period of the monarchy which had reversed the movement of the Mosaic revolution that the prophets are seen performing their prophetic ministry of dismantling the royal consciousness and energizing an alternative consciousness to reclaim the contrast community envisaged by Moses. Implicit in their ministry is a kind of socio-cultural analysis of the economical-political-religious nexus. The result is an explicit two-fold critique of the royal consciousness: The prophets (1) condemn ***idolatry*** – which took either the form of worshipping gods of the surrounding city states or turning Yahweh into an idol by making him the legitimizing principle of the economic and political program; and (2) they criticize ***social injustice***, that is, the concrete expressions of exploitation and oppression that result from such legitimizing idolatry (*CWG* 4, 18-19).

The ministry of the prophets, also, reveals, something more fundamental than the socio-cultural analysis -- "an unusual kind of religious consciousness: one in which profound mysticism is jointed to an intense historical concern."[7] Both the pre-classical (Samuel and Elijah) and the classical prophets (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah) were all politically active. The religious concerns of the prophets necessarily took political form, because in the theocratic society of ancient Israel religion and politics could not be separated. With the exception of Ezekiel, Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi, all the prophets were operative during the monarchical period, because it was precisely the kings, by the misuse of their political power, were dismantling the contrast community established by Moses.

The common religious experience of the prophets was the "God of pathos" (Herschel, 1975: 13)[8] – the God who identified with the suffering of the powerless, the poor, the needy and the oppressed. So the primary political concern of the prophets was a politics of justice, because the God of pathos is a God of justice (cf. Deut 32:4; Amos 5:21-24; Hosea 6:6; Isa 58:7) (*CWG* 3, 115). For speaking truth to the power and demanding for justice relentlessly, the prophets inevitably entered into conflicts with the power wielding dominant class. That, definitely, was not a pleasant experience for the prophets and one is not surprised to see the reluctance and resistance when they were commissioned for the work (cf. Ex 3:11; Jer 1:6). And yet, Jeremiah admits candidly "the existential inability to do otherwise" (Jer 20:9).[9]

This paradoxical experience of the prophets is not fully explainable by means of mere psychological or sociological dynamics. The prophetic call-narratives, presented in a stereotypical format, point to the personal call by a concerned God as the decisive element that distinguishes the prophetic ministry (*CWG* 3, 117).[10] Through this call the prophet is invited to enter into the horizon of God, as it were, and interpret human existence from the divine perspective (*CWG* 3, 123).[11] Thus, the prophet's concern for the poor, the exploited and the oppressed is actually the concern of God. The essential function of the prophet was to influence the human beings to bring about a change in the divine pathos. Therefore, the basic and the common message of all the prophets is "to repent" (meaning "to return back to God"), which, in practical terms, means to be concerned with God's concern for all human beings, especially the poor, the exploited and the oppressed.[12]

I conclude this section with an interesting insight of Klaus Koch. He raises a question as to what of permanent importance of biblical prophets for an understanding of human existence in this world is, and answers the question in terms of passionate social criticism of prophets. The interesting nuance that Koch adds is that the human ability to respond constructively to the society, especially to its weaker members, is the indication of the moral

character of the person, which is not only a matter of faith, but the result of rationality, the human ability to be and to behave in accordance with reason or logic. "The God of the prophets demands nothing of men and women except what is reasonable. But human beings fail, and fall prey to irrational self-isolation" (Koch 1984: 193). [13]

2. The Way of Jesus

George Soares-Prabhu believed that no one title could comprehend adequately the mystery of Jesus.[14] The term 'prophet', however, seems to describe the Jesus of history adequately enough, at least as Jesus' contemporaries must have perceived him (*CWG 3*, 126).[15] As in the case of all the biblical prophets, a profound personal experience of God was the foundation for the prophetic ministry of Jesus. The call narratives of the prophets were indicative of their God experience (cf. Is 6:1-13; Jer 1:4-10; Ezek 1:4-3:11; Amos 7.14). But there is no such a call narrative in the case of Jesus, unless we take his baptism at Jordan as one in a broad sense. In any case, Jesus' baptism was his foundational experience (*CWG* 4, 258). Biblical scholars call it the "Abba Experience" of Jesus, an experience of God as unconditional love. It was nothing short of a mystical experience, eliciting the mystical consciousness in Jesus.[16] Like the prophetic symbolic acts in the First Testament, this was the first symbolic act of Jesus, the symbolic significance of which is succinctly expressed by St. Paul in terms of paschal mystery in Rom. 6:3-11, esp. v.10: "the death he died, he died to sin and the life he lives he lives to God." Before dying to sin, Jesus identifies with the sins of humanity.[17]

This experience definitely shattered Jesus' ordinary pattern of existence and impelled him to adopt a different kind of life with far reaching consequences (*CWG* 3, 93). Soares-Prabhu unravels the contours of that life "both as the dharma he practiced (Jesus' dharma) and the dharma he preached (Christian dharma)."[18] We saw that one of the two-fold function of prophetic ministry was to reclaim the Mosaic vision of contrast community. Jesus does something similar, but goes far beyond a contrast community.

His vision was for a "contrast humanity" (an alternative way of being human)[19] and the term he used for it was "the kingdom of God" – a term he adopted with significant adaptations from the Jewish tradition.

Kingdom of God was a typical expression of Jesus through which he articulated his personal experience of God and the concomitant mystical consciousness. The proclamation of the Kingdom of God was definitely the central concern of his prophetic ministry in words and deeds and it was also the content of his symbolic actions such as table-fellowship with sinners, and his healings and exorcisms. Jesus, of course, never spoke in terms of a vision of a new society. But it is not at all difficult articulate that vision from the abundant data available from Jesus' public ministry.

In an excellent exegetical article on Mk 1:14-15 George Soares-Prabhu recapitulates precisely this vision for us (*CWG 4*, 223-51). Although the expression "Kingdom of God" was typical of Jesus the concept was not. His contemporaries did have an understanding about God's kingly rule and articulated it differently in terms of political power, armed power, moral power and cosmic power. What was unique to Jesus was that he experienced it and expressed it in terms of unconditional love. So, what Jesus basically proclaimed was about the free offer of God's unconditional love, which in turn demands from us a response. The following is a good summary of the article, in Soares-Prabhu's own words:

> When the revelation of God's love (the Kingdom) meets its appropriate response in man's acceptance of this love (repentance), there begins a mighty movement of personal and societal liberation which sweeps through human history. The movement brings *freedom* inasmuch it liberates each individual from the inadequacies and obsessions that shackle him. It fosters *fellowship*, because it empowers free individuals to exercise their concern for each other in genuine community. And it leads on to *justice*, because it impels every true community to adopt just societal structures which alone

make freedom and fellowship possible. Freedom, fellowship and justice are thus the parameters of the Kingdom's thrust towards the liberation of man (*CWG* 4, 238-239).

As it is clear from this summary, Kingdom of God is the foundation that Jesus laid for a New Humanity, a New World, thereby taking the biblical prophets' way of energizing a contrast community to a new height. Jesus not only proclaimed the Kingdom of God, he also practiced it and inaugurated it by embodying the parameters of that Kingdom in his own person, thus emphasizing the fact that the Kingdom, a gift from God, is, also, both a human responsibility and a human possibility.

Jesus manifested an extraordinary freedom despite the fact that he held no social position or power and he associated it with his baptism experience (cf. Mk 11:27-33).[20] In a society that was politically colonized, socially patriarchal, and religiously conservative, the God experience of Jesus enabled him to confront the religious, social and political establishment of his time with absolute freedom and authority. That authority was evident in the way he taught in word and deed and the manner in which he related with women, children and those who were socially excluded and remarkably in his interpretation of Mosaic law, especially the law of Sabbath and the law of purity. Personally, he was free from inner conditioning, such as addictions and attachments, fear, greed and ambition.

A person who is ***free from*** internal conditionings and external compulsions is ***free for*** loving, that is, to be one's authentic self as an image of God who is love. Unlike the Pharisees and the Sectarians of Qumran, "Jesus opted for a radicalism which sought to realize as perfectly as possible, the spirit of the Law, which he saw embodied in love (agape), that is in interhuman concern" (*CWG* 3, 7). In a very creative way, Jesus, not only, sums up the entire Scripture in terms of the two love commandments - Deut 6:4-5; and Lev 19:18 – (cf. Mt 22:34-40), but further seems to reduce the two into one, by understanding Lev 19:18 as an implication of Deut 6:4-5. In fact, our love for the

neighbour issues from (1 Jn 4:4) and images (Mt 5:43-48) God's love for us.[21] Jesus' practice of and preaching about love, surely, presents *agapē* as "an existential attitude, deriving from a change in one's being."[22] When love received from God is shared with one another it becomes the foundation for fellowship and justice in the human family.

Soares-Prabhu cites Paul's exhortation (Gal 5:1, 13) and Paul's own example (1 Cor 9:19) while explaining the connection between freedom and fellowship, and further asserts: "The freedom of the Kingdom finds its fulfilment not in selfish wilfulness but in commitment. … in our unconditional love for others" (*CWG* 4, 240). Jesus' own example is his prophetic symbolic act of "table fellowship" with those people excluded from the society. "It is the expression of a radically new (and therefore thoroughly disturbing) theological vision, rooted in a new experience of God, and calling for a new kind of society."[23] Later on in the same article just quoted, Soares significantly emphasizes the fact that, "The Eucharist has always carried the memory of Jesus' meals with tax collectors and sinners."[24]

Jesus' commitment for justice is evident from the way "Jesus confronts the exploitative situation of his time by taking a decisive stance for the poor (the oppressed) and against the rich (the oppressor)."[25] Through two comparative studies of Lk 4:18-19 with Is 61:1-2 (LXX) and Lk 6:20-23 with Mt 5:3-12, Soares highlights Luke's clear understanding of Jesus' social stance for the exploited and suffering poor (*CWG* 3, 157-61). Surprisingly, Soares interprets Jesus' ministry of healing and exorcism as incidents of Jesus' subversion of an oppressive power structure, on the basis of Jesus' apocalyptic world-view.[26] Finally, Soares cites a number of incidents as examples of a sustained attack on an 'establishment' which was not just a religious authority but packed much economic and political clout, and therefore an attack on the structures of the society as well (*CWG* 3, 156).

Thus, the brief public life of Jesus could be summed up in terms of a two-dimensional (inter-connected) prophetic ministry of

solidarity and conflict – solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, the victims of injustice and conflict with the people of the establishment responsible for that injustice – both expressions of his foundational God-experience.[27] His experience of God as love, though universal in its object – without any discrimination, is, however, differentiated in its expression, on the one hand in terms of solidarity with the oppressed and on the other hand confrontation with the oppressors.[28]

Teaching was a prominent element in the prophetic ministry of Jesus, which set him apart from the biblical prophets of old. Soares-Prabhu quotes three Markan texts to highlight three aspects of Jesus' teaching: "He went about ***among the villages*** (of Galilee) teaching (Mk 6:6); "he taught them as one who had ***authority*** and not as the scribes" (Mk 1:22); "he taught everything in ***parables***" (Mk 4:33) (*CWG* 4, 253).[29] He, further, qualifies the pedagogy of Jesus as non-elitist and praxis-oriented and in addition, highlights the authority of Jesus as both revolutionary and liberative – an authority that is ultimately rooted in Jesus' foundational God-experience. Finally, he explains as to how the pedagogy of Jesus was liberative in a double way:

> As non-elitist, dialogical teaching, it liberated people by making them conscious of their worth as the children of the one Father in heaven (Mt 6:9) … And as prophetic and critical teaching it freed them from the manipulative myths which legitimized their oppressive and alienating society, and pointed them" (*CWG* 4, 263).

Soares devotes another long article to explain Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, which according to him, "gives us the authentic *dharma* of Jesus – the pattern of existence he lived by and proclaimed."[30] Thus, Jesus' prophetic ministry of teaching was a way of raising an alternative consciousness as a foundation for an alternative world.[31]

3. The Way of Soares-Prabhu

The previous two sections were, in summary form, Soares' own understanding of the prophetic ministry of both the biblical prophets and of Jesus. In the present section, we shall see as to how Soares himself carried out his prophetic ministry in his own specific way.

Almost like Amos (7:14) Soares-Prabhu might have said, "I am not a prophet, but a professor of biblical theology and a writer," and associated his call to be a Jesuit with his prophetic mission, at least in retrospect. And I would imagine his foundational God-experience during his month-long Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, to be more specific, during the meditation on the Call of the Eternal King to labour with him in His mission (cf. Sp. Ex. 91-100). And I would like to envisage his prophetic mission in the pattern of biblical prophets and especially of Jesus in terms of dismantling and energizing, pulling down and building up.

Most of his articles reveal Soares-Prabhu as an expert exegete. He did not claim to speak on behalf of God as the biblical prophets did nor did he have the temerity to declare, "…but I say unto you," as Jesus did. But he did take the pain to tell us "the meaning, now, of what God spoke then." His main task was to bridge the spatio-temporal gap between the biblical time Palestine and the present modern India. He does this by presenting a critique of 'Historical Criticism' as ineffective, irrelevant and ideologically loaded method, and alternatively presenting an exegetical method for India.[32] I can only summarize the salient features of that method.

Soares-Prabhu's major contribution is in terms of proposing two complementary approaches to the Indian reading of the Bible – an Indian 'religious' reading and an Indian 'social' reading – corresponding to the two major and peculiar aspects of the Indian context – the wealth of India's religious traditions and the desperate economic poverty of its people.[33] According to Soares, in a dialogical hermeneutics, essential for an Indian exegesis, the meaning of the text emerges from a creative and

dialogical encounter between the concerns of the interpreter and the semantic autonomy of the text. Having said that, next, he elaborates on the 'hermeneutical circle,' highlighting the two poles of this circle: the negative pole is to do with an ***ideological suspicion*** about our understanding of reality, which in turn leads to an ***exegetical suspicion*** about the way in which Bible has been interpreted; the positive pole is to do with the concerns of an Indian interpreter, namely, a commitment to the poor and religious plurality made within the perspective of the ***inclusive, cosmocentric, symbolic*** and ***pragmatic*** Indian world-view.[34] In brief, the prophetic significance of these efforts of Soares is to pose a challenge to make strenuous efforts to free ourselves from our Western bourgeoisie conditioning in order to get in touch with, and articulate the questions which the 'real' India addresses the Bible.[35] Soares spells out the Christian response to the Indian situation within the liberative thrust of the biblical perspective marked with the following four features. It will be ***historical, incarnational, preferentially weighted,*** and ***integral*** *(CWG* 4, 198-207).

I have come across at least eight articles in which Soares applies the hermeneutical method he has suggested for India, and brings out interesting and relevant insights for our context.[36] Soares studies Jesus' revolutionary praxis of 'table fellowship' with the socially excluded people and relating it to the scandalous practice of caste system in the Indian Church, he makes a very strong prophetic critique of the same Indian Church. He also envisages a Dalit reading of the Mosaic Decalogue of Ex 20 in contrast with the Hindu law of Manu. By highlighting the universal scope of the Decalogue (with no trace of class discrimination) and its underlying vision of an egalitarian society, he critiques the law of Manu. On the other hand, Soares looks at the Tribal community in India and studying their values of anti-greed and anti-pride, he presents those values as strikingly similar to those taught in the Bible in general and in the teaching of Jesus in particular, with a special reference to Mk 10:17-27 and Mk10:35-45. The prophetic function of this article is to emphasize these values as

something which Jesus demanded from his followers, because, "They are the structuring principles of the alternative community he sought to build" (*CWG* 1, 256).

The prophetic passion of Soares is evident in his "Class in the Bible," where he presents a sociological and a dialectical understanding of the poor in the Bible "as all those who are actually or potentially oppressed"[37] to preclude any romanticized or spiritualized understanding of poverty. The Bible also presents the poor as a dynamic group playing a significant role in history, which is understood as the locus of God's encounter with humankind. The prophetic hope (expressed through this article) of realizing a contrast community, which is free, just and non-exploitative, is based on a new understanding of God, who always acts in favour of the poor.

Soares is not just an exegete; he is primarily a theologian.[38] He starts presenting biblical prophets as theologians, highlighting social analysis as an essential aspect of their theologizing process whose ultimate scope is social transformation.[39] And he ends envisaging every theologian as a prophet.[40] Thus, it is obvious that Soares would have understood his mission as a theologian in prophetical terms. We shall see, now, some aspects of his prophetic mission.

Like the biblical prophets, the theologizing process of Soares contains a thorough analysis of the peculiar situation of the Indian context.[41] His prophetic urge is to understand his Christian God-experience in this Indian context and respond to that context from the power of his God-experience. He blends beautifully compassion and care with criticism and challenge. His is a universal perspective and so more theocentric than Christocentric and much less church-centric. Interestingly, the universal perspective of Soares is a legacy he acquired from Christ himself.[42]

If theology means to contextualize one's faith, then, according to Soares Indian theology must be "inculturated theology." Unfortunately, the missionary preachers of the Gospel in the past

did not enter into dialogue with ancient civilizations, instead imposed their own monologue. As a result, Indian Christian theology has remained a borrowed and impoverished theology. An authentic Indian Christian theology is possible only when it attempts to understand Christian God-experience in the specific Indian context with its multifaceted religiosity, its overwhelming poverty and its oppressive caste system.[43] The prophetic concern of Soares is evident in that very attempt when he discovers with reverence the pluralism of religions as "the homage which the finite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the infinity,"[44] on the one hand and the pathos of God in the suffering of the poor and the dalits, on the other. As part of the prophetic energizing mission, he proposes transformative actions with inculturation[45] and dialogue[46] as essential aspects of that liberative process.

As a part of constructing an inculturated Indian theology, Soares-Prabhu contextualizes Christian mission in the context of India and presents exegetical studies on Christian mission in his usual lucid and convincing style. He studies the shape of the biblical story, developed in three cycles, ultimately leading to the triumph of creation in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev 21:1). According to the logic of the trajectory of the biblical story, the primary mission of the Church is to lead humankind and cosmic history to its fulfilment, in the full realization of God's Reign. The concerns of Christian mission therefore extend beyond the interests of the Church to embrace all the manifold demands of the Reign of God -- its concerns embrace every aspect of human and cosmic liberation (*CWG* 1, 3-15).

Reflecting on Mt 5:13-16 Soares-Prabhu offers a corrective to a flawed understanding of Christian mission and draws attention to forgotten dimensions of mission which are of particular relevance to the Church in India. His concludes that mission is not Christocentric (making disciples of Christ) but theocentric (giving glory to God by building up God's Kingdom); and the way to this mission is not so much individual proclamation as the witness of the Church as a community (*CWG* 1, 16-25).

According to Soares-Prabhu's exegetical study, the two great 'mission texts' Mt 28:16-20 and Mt 10 are not primarily texts about mission but about Christian discipleship. They are addressed not to missionaries, but to the followers of Jesus, exhorting them to continue the mission of Jesus, who did not come primarily to build a Church or even found a religion, but to bring total liberation to humankind (*CWG* 1, 26-47).

Dialogue is not a matter of strategy for proclaiming our faith, but a matter of genuine give and take – openness to learn from the experience of others and willingness to share our experience. As a sign of his openness, Soares-Prabhu proves biblically something which he knows intuitively. From the way in which the Old Testament is quoted by the New, he argues, we can speak meaningfully of the inspiration of the Old Testament and, further, extend it to non-Christian scriptures as well (*CWG* 2, 98). As if to prove his point, he studies a Buddhist text and shows that it is not only inspired, but it "helps us to arrive at a more rounded interpretation of the mission command in Matthew, by pointing to elements implicit in it, which, though explicit elsewhere in the Gospel, could be overlooked in an over-focused, atomistic reading of the text" (*CWG* 4, 66). Soares goes one step further. In defending the idol worship in Hinduism, he does a prophetic critique of a prophetical text (Is 44:9-20).[47] He considers the ferocious attack on idols as both a display of prejudiced ignorance and a fallacy within the logic of monotheism. Ironically, he opines, the religion of Second Isaiah, on account of its "mental images" for God, is as "idolatrous" as that of the people he mocks.[48]

Next, as the foundation for a self-critical exercise, Soares-Prabhu studies the sociological moorings of the Jesus movement. It was one of several responses to the Jewish society of Jesus' time in deep crisis – a crisis caused by colonialism – which had affected all the areas of Jewish life - economic, political, cultural and religious. Jesus' response was in terms of building a community, emerging from and embodying the God-experience of Jesus -- a community that was free, all inclusive, open to sharing, prepared for service, and radically equal. He concludes

the study with this thought-provoking prophetical statement: "Two thousand years after its emergence we still have to 'realize' the radical vision of the Jesus community" (*CWG* 4, 148). In the same prophetical spirit and on the basis of the radical community that Jesus had envisaged, Soares-Prabhu critiques the present state of the Church in India as a community that is divided on the basis of caste (*CWG* 1, 223-40), prejudiced against other religions (*CWG* 3, 163-72) and communalistic in its ideological outlook (*CWG* 1, 173-90). He, however, acknowledges: "Yet there is among Christians today (both Roman Catholic and others) a growing universalist praxis. Christian groups do reach out to others in authentic, respectful dialogue, and in a wholly noncommunal social concern" (*CWG* 1, 186). Basing his hope on this "radical remnant" Soares-Prabhu presents the relevance of Jesus for India today in terms of his ability to hold together in an intimate and indissoluble unity man's God-experience (the concern of various religions) and his human-concern (the concern of various ideologies operative in India) (*CWG* 1, 198).

The deep desire behind Soares-Prabhu's teaching and writing must have been to enlarge and strengthen that "radical remnant" who would actualize the radical vision of Jesus. He was addressing the priests, and men and women religious of India and through them eventually the Christian laity.

On the basis of his inspiring insights into the New Testament, he boldly asserts that Jesus' horizons were prophetic and not priestly and that the sacralization and clericalization of Christian priesthood as unfortunate distortions. The attitude of service is essential to the New Testament understanding of every form of Christian office and priesthood in particular. Further, this service is specified in terms of working for the eschatological 'contrast community' which Jesus called Kingdom of God. He quotes *Gaudium et Spes* 42 in support of his assertion (*CWG* 2, 214-44). In a similar vein, following the lead of Vatican II (*Perfectae Caritatis*), Soares grounds his understanding of religious life solidly in the Gospels and presents it as a way of following Jesus. The religious communities – as communities of ***being***

(following Jesus in his life-style) and as communities of ***action*** (following Jesus in his mission) – are expected to be "contrast communities" symbolically representing the Kingdom of God (*CWG* 3, 205-24). "This twofold structure of religious life as a following of Jesus (the mystical and the political) defines its prophetic dimension. For biblical prophetism can be described appropriately as the presence of the mystical in the historical" (*CWG* 3, 214). From this it is obvious that both as a priest and a religious Soares definitely understood his vocation in terms of prophetic ministry.

Next, Soares-Prabhu explores the three vows (poverty, chastity and obedience) of the Christian religious life against the background of the three puruṣārthas (artha, kāma and dharma) of classical Hinduism and articulates on the meaning and the goals of Christian existence (*CWG* 3, 260-75). He highlights the positive orientation of the three vows as "expressions of the specific Christian freedom … which derives from the core Christian experience of God's unconditional love" (*CWG* 3, 269). But, this freedom, as St. Paul would explain in Gal 5:13, is not a freedom ***of*** the ego, but a freedom ***from*** the ego (the false self) resulting in the freedom ***for*** being one's authentic self as the "image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:27), in other words, in the freedom for loving as God loves. Soares links this positive aspect of freedom with the purpose of human existence as intended by God in Gen 1:28 in terms of dedicating oneself to the compelling task of creating a more human world, the Kingdom of God (*CWG* 3, 270-271).

Summing up, we can say that Soares-Prabhu was and (his presence immortalized through his writings) continues to be a prophet for our times. He definitely understood his call to be a Christian in general and a priest and religious in particular in terms of prophetic mission. He carried that mission, in the specific context of India, relying on the legacy he had received both as an Indian and as a Christian. He followed the prophetic paradigm set by the biblical prophets, especially by Jesus. The foundation for his prophetic mission is the foundational God-experience of

Jesus – God as a loving parent – assimilated, appropriated and made personal. The contours of his prophetic mission consist, on the one hand, in energizing the imagination of Indians with the vision of Jesus for an alternative humanity and, on the other hand, in critiquing both the situation in India and in the Church on the basis of that vision. His deep desire was that Christians would live their prophetic vocation on the model of Jesus himself and that Indians would follow Jesus, not necessarily by becoming Christians but as free and loving human beings experiencing God as the loving parent and loving one another as brothers and sisters and thus creating a New Humanity.

4. Conclusion: The Way Ahead

Twenty-five years since the death of Soares-Prabhu, the situation of India has only worsened. There has been a concerted effort to reduce the rich heritage of Hinduism to a horrendous Hindutva fascist ideology, thereby endangering religious harmony. Many thousands of migrant workers walking miles homeward, during the recent lockdown on account of the Covid-19 pandemic, was only the tip of an iceberg of the widespread poverty in India. The new phenomena of mob-lynching and other atrocities reveal the sorry state of Dalits and minority in India. Added to these is the real danger of systematic dismantling of democracy and the undoing of Indian Constitutions. But one could see a flickering sign of hope in the recent incident of mass support for the senior advocate Prashant Bhushan and the widespread anti-CAA agitation earlier.

In this scenario, what does it mean to be a prophet? We Christians are not only a minority, but a silent minority. Inculturation, dialogue and collaboration are absolutely essential, not only for the sake of survival in the midst of pluri-religious society, (*CWG* 1, 164) but mainly because of the mission of building the Kingdom of God. The very nature and dynamics of the Kingdom demands that. One of the obstacles is an in-built dilemma between two opposing beliefs that Christians

hold . According to Soares, "… the Church's understanding of herself must be coherent with her professed attitude towards others."[49] Fundamental to the challenging theological issues that the Church faces in this self-understanding is Christology – a Christology that embodies a spirituality leading to transformation and praxis.[50] This is the challenging task ahead of us.[51]

Francis D'Sa had already undertaken that task in 1977 (D'Sa, 1977: 418-68). On the superficial level the confluence (***sangam***) of the myth of ***Samsāra*** (the core of Hinduism) and the myth of Salvation History (the heart of Christianity) does not appear to be feasible. But D'Sa takes up the insights of both the traditions and lets them grow into a symbiotic union within an enlightening cosmotheandric perspective proposed by Raimon Panikkar. Within that perspective he shows the complementarity of Bhagavad Gita's vision of ***Lokasangraha*** and Jesus' vision of ***Kingdom of God.*** It is true that, strictly and technically speaking, D'Sa is not presenting any Christology, but if one could realize, on the one hand, that, within cosmotheandric vision, "Humans are not merely Humans and the Cosmos not merely Cosmos and where the Divine Mystery interpenetrates and is interpenetrated by the Human and the Cosmic" (D'Sa, 1997: 456-57) and on the other hand, perceive that Jesus was the embodiment of the Kingdom, then there are enough hints to build a Christology from the Indian perspective. And that Christology, unlike the medieval Christology that we seem to follow, will surely embody a spirituality leading to transformation and praxis.

It is only through this transformative praxis we can sustain the Kingdom reality initiated by Jesus. But for that it is essential to understand and participate in the two "mysteries" of the confessional history of Jesus -- "incarnation" and "resurrection".[52] Because a "mystery" understood in terms of a "myth" points to the transcendental dimension in every human person.

In an enlightening article, George Gispert-Sauch, using an Indian insight, explains the eschatological mysteries of Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus (Gispert-Sauch, 2002: 282-

302).[53] According to Gispert the resurrection of Jesus provides us with a *pāramārthika* experience of reality[54], the ultimate goal of life as life with God (*CWG* 4, 290). This goal of life is realized via the way of the cross – dissolving one's life in the service of others, especially in the option and struggles for the poor.[55] Following the same insight of Gispert, I feel, we could understand "incarnation" as a way of summing up Jesus' life from the perspective of *pāramārthika*. According to Soares, "The solidarity of Jesus with the poor and the outcaste finds its Christological symbol in the *incarnation*." The same could be expressed in terms of the Johannine original (1:14), with a slight modification: "And the ***concern of God*** became flesh and lived among us…."[56] In brief, I like to understand "incarnation" not as pointing to pre-existent Christ (existing before time) and "resurrection" as an end-time experience, but both as *pāramārthika* experiences in the stillness of the present, where time ceases. Gispert explains *pāramārthika* experience as "a higher form of consciousness that will enable us to be aware of the "Supreme Reality" (paramārtha*)* underlying our experience… It transforms our vision of the world and thereby heals us of the experiences of suffering" (Gispert-Sauch, 2002: 296-97). Gispert, actually, is pointing to the need to commute, daily, between the depth dimension of our existence (***pāramārthika)*** and the practical dimension of our daily life (***vyāvahārika***).

I repeat a statement of Soares-Prabhu I had quoted in the first page: "The Church is nothing if not prophetic" (*CWG* 1, 170) Karl Rahner had made a statement: "The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not exist at all." Combining both the statements, the Christian in the future is expected to be both a mystic and a prophet, because both the aspects are inseparable as two sides of a coin, as we saw in the case of biblical prophets and in a special way in the person of Jesus.

The way ahead of us, as human beings in general and Indian Christians in particular, is to follow the life pattern set by Jesus both as a mystic and a prophet. A new earth is possible with a new heaven. (cf. Rev 21:1) The motto of the World Social Forum:

"Another world is possible" is a verbalization of the dream for "the new earth". According to Eckhart Tolle "*'A new heaven' is the emergence of a transformed state of human consciousness, and 'a new earth' is its reflection in the physical realm."*[57] As Albert Einstein had pointed out, we are trying, pathetically, to solve the problems of our daily life with the same mind that had created them in the first place. Therefore, we need to bring the *pāramārthika* dimension of our life (the higher level of consciousness) in order to infuse new vitality into the *vyāvahārika* aspect of our practical life. Finally, if we understand our prophetic ministry not just in terms of speaking but of comprehensive acting on behalf of God then it is an imperative for all to be ***mystics in prophetic action***.[58]

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Notes

1. I have consulted all the articles of George M. Soares-Prabhu from the four volumes of "Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., published by Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, Pune. For the sake of space and brevity, henceforth, CWG refers to The Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J. For more details of the four volumes please see the Reference.
2. Keith D'Souza, while presenting a summary reading of the written works of George Soares-Prabhu, portrays him as "A Theologian for Our Times". In the course of discussing Soares' contributions to Indian theology, Keith quotes Soares: "And how are we to understand professionalism in such a theology? Should not professionalism be at the service of prophetism? Will not the theologian in India be at his or her most professional when he or she is most prophetic in word and dead?," (D'Souza, 1997: 11).
3. This section is a summary of the three articles of Soares-Prabhu, with a few additions from other scholars: Soares-Prabhu, "Socio-Cultural Analysis in Prophetic Theologizing: A Biblical Paradigm" CWG 2, 61-67; Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of the Biblical Prophet" CWG 3, 103-25; Soares-Prabhu, "The Prophet as Theologian: Biblical Prophetism as a Paradigm for Doing Theology Today," CWG 4, 14-23.
4. This is articulated well in the four codes: the Covenant Code of Ex 20:22-23:33; the Holiness Code of Lev 17-20; the Priestly Code of Lev 2-12; and the Deuteronomic Code of Deut 12-26.
5. Brueggemann,(1978: 13). Here, we can see not only Moses as a paradigm for prophets but the exodus liberation itself as a paradigm for various revolutions in world history. See (Walzer, 1984)
6. Triptych in form, because the three dimensions of the change wrought by Solomon (an economic of affluence, a politics of oppression and a religious ideology of domesticating God) could be distinguished but not separated one from the other. See Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of the Biblical Prophet" (see n.

4 above) CWG 3, 112-13. See also Brueggemann, (n.5 above) 36-37.

7. CWG 3, 113. Buddha in his mystical experience found the root of human suffering in general, but the prophets in their mystical experience discovered the social dimension of human suffering.

8. Abraham Heschel, The Prophets, Vol. II, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1975, 6. According to Heschel pathos of God is the most fundamental understanding of the biblical God.

9. I heard this phrase from my Novice Master and it expresses Jeremiah's situation well.

10. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of the Biblical Prophet," CWG 3, 117. Soares-Prabhu is quoting Max Weber.

11. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of the Biblical Prophet," CWG 3, 123. Here Soares-Prabhu is quoting Abraham Heschel who describes prophecy as exegesis of existence from a divine perspective.

12. See Abraham Heschel, The Prophets, Vol. II, 11. In fact, Heschel understands biblical religion not in terms of what the human person does with his/her solitariness, but rather in terms of what he/she does with God's concern for all human beings (p. 10).

13. Later on, Koch makes a statement to the effect that the biblical God is thought as the "rational" ground of all positive reality and all progressive history (p. 196).

14. This section is very important to understand Soares-Prabhu as a prophet for two reasons. One, we will consider Jesus as the prophet par excellence. Two, Jesus plays the central role in the way Soares-Prabhu understood his prophetic ministry. Here, I will try to synthesize a number of Soares' articles on the person of Jesus.

15. Soares-Prabhu, however, prefers and so coins a term "Jesus of Faith" and places it in the trajectory of Christological development somewhere between "Jesus of History" and "Christ of Faith". See Soares-Prabhu, "The Jesus of Faith: A Christological Contribution to an Ecumenical Third World Spirituality"

CWG 4, 267-95. Soares-Prabhu spends nearly one third of the article in presenting the rationale for his preference.

16. As reported by Mt, 11:27, Jesus would say "No one knows the Father, but the Son…" using the word "know" in the deep biblical sense of "sexual union between a man and his wife" (cf. Gen 4:1). Later, John the evangelist would imply the same meaning in Jn 10:30; 14:9. Although the experience is presented in a dramatic way, my personal hunch is that the experience must have preceded the narrated event.

17. Mk 1:4 makes this point obvious without any embarrassment, while Mt 3:14-15 tries to justify and Lk avoids the issue. Along with Mark and Paul, we could understand the baptism experience of Jesus as the first paschal event symbolizing the movement from human alienation to human at-one-ment with God, a movement from divisive consciousness to the unitive consciousness. According to Soares, "… it is this act of identification … that becomes the occasion for Jesus' foundational experience of God." (see Soares-Prabhu, "The Spirituality of Jesus" CWG 3, 99)

18. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus," CWG 3, 3. I would designate as 'human dharma' rather as "Christian dharma" for the obvious reason that Jesus never addressed Christians as such. Besides, his self-understanding as a Son will lead him to conclude, logically, every other human person as a brother or sister – a point Soares emphasizes so often.

19. The motto of the World Social Forum – "Another World Is Possible" – could be considered an equivalent for Jesus' vision of "Kingdom of God".

20. In a couple of articles Soares-Prabhu explains convincingly the psycho-social dynamics of the experience of (God's) love in general and its concrete manifestations in the person of Jesus with telling examples from the Gospel narratives. See Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus," CWG 3, 4-7; "The Kingdom of God," CWG 4, 239-40; "The Jesus of Faith," CWG 4, 283-286.

21. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus," CWG 3, 8. If we understand agapē in the typical New Testament sense as an active and effective concern for the other, then 1 Jn. 4:10-11 captures

beautifully the logical flow of love dynamics in the Kingdom of God. [Understood in this sense, the word love in Deut. 6:4-5 may not mean the same thing as the same word in Let. 19:18. Love in Deut 6:4-5, probably, means "reverence," "respect," or "honour." Soares-Prabhu himself says, "Our appropriate response to God's love for us, is not that we love God in return (for God cannot be the object of our concern: "no one has ever seen God," as 1 Jn.4:12 says,) but that we love our neighbour." See his "The Kingdom of God," CWG 4, 241. Abraham Heschel, too, seems to have understood the core of biblical religion in the same sense. See n. 12 above.

22. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus," CWG 3, 8. Soares-Prabhu elaborates the same point, also, in "The Love Commandment," CWG 3, 65-71; and "The Synoptic Love-Commandment: The Dimensions of Love in the Teachings of Jesus," CWG 4, 110-25.

23. Soares-Prabhu, "The Table Fellowship of Jesus: Its Significance for Dalit Christians in India Today," CWG 1, 226. Soares studies elaborately, in this article, the theme of this extraordinarily revolutionary praxis of Jesus, "in which," he quotes Geza Vermes' opinion, "Jesus differed most from both his contemporaries and his prophetic predecessors," 226. The present quotation is practically the summary of Soares-Prabhu' article.

24. Soares-Prabhu, "The Table Fellowship of Jesus," CWG 1, 235. Further, Soares-Prabhu quotes biblical scholars Norman Perrin (end note 32) and Joachim Jeremias (end note 33) in support of this fact. Moreover, he also discusses two related situations in the New Testament: the conflict between Paul and Peter in Gal 1:11-16 and the scandalous way of celebrating the Lord 's Supper in 1 Cor 11:20ff (see p. 236).

25. Soares-Prabhu, "Jesus and Social Justice: A World in Need of Liberation," CWG 3, 152. See also his brief note on, "The Social Stance of Jesus," CWG 3, 145-48.

26. Soares-Prabhu, "Jesus and Social Justice," CWG 3, 156-57. He makes a significant statement: "The miracles of Jesus are thus paradigms for the struggle for social justice rather than examples of 'social work,' quoting his own article, "The Miracles

of Jesus: The Subversion of a Power Structure?" in S. Kappen (Ed), Jesus Today, (Madras, AICUF, 1983), 24-29, which is also available in CWG 3, 23-30). Further, see, Soares-Prabhu, "Signs Not Wonders: Understanding the Miracles of Jesus as Jesus Understood them," CWG 3, 13-22; and "The Miracles of Jesus Today," CWG 3, 31-42 for further elaboration of the same theme.

27. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus," CWG 3, 10. See also his, "Jesus and Conflict," CWG 3, 136-44.

28. Soares-Prabhu, "The Spirituality of Jesus," CWG 3, 93-98, and "The Jesus of Faith," CWG 4, 288-90.

29. Soares-Prabhu, "Jesus the Teacher," CWG 4, 253 (Italics in the original, boldface added).

30. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus: An Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount," CWG 4, 155.

31. Soares-Prabhu, "Jesus the Teacher," CWG 4, 262. Soares-Prabhu considers the parabolic teaching of Jesus as a form of what Paulo Freire calls "conscientization". I would like to extend that to the overall teaching of Jesus.

32. See Soares-Prabhu, "Towards an Indian Interpretation of the Bible," CWG 1, 207-22. We must note, however, that Soares-Prabhu does not 'throw the baby with the bath-water'. He does acknowledge the limited value of the Historical Criticism for checking arbitrary interpretations and eisegetical attempts.

33. See Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method," CWG 3, 75-82. The clarion call of Soares in this article is for an "Integral Indian Reading" combining the two 'readings' suggested as two inseparable sides of a coin.

34. See Soares-Prabhu, "Commitment and Conversion: A Biblical Hermeneutic for India Today," CWG 4, 27-41. In the rest of the article Soares discusses the question, "How does an Indian reading of the Bible relate to Historical Criticism…?," 41-47.

35. See Soares-Prabhu, "Commitment and Conversion," CWG 4, 35. In this context, it is essential to read two important articles of Soares-Prabhu which elaborate on the two major concerns of Indian situation: "The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty

and Caste," CWG 1, 141-56 and "The Indian Church Challenged by Pluralism and Dialogue," CWG 1, 157-72.

36. Soares-Prabhu, "The Table Fellowship of Jesus: Its Significance for Dalit Christians in India Today," CWG 1, 223-40; "Antigreed and Antipride: Mark 10:17-27 and 10:35-45 in the Light of Tribal Values," CWG 1, 241-59; "The Man Born Blind: Understanding a Johannine Sign in India Today," Vol.2, 187-97; "The Sacred in the Secular: Reflections on a Johannine Sutra: 'The Word Was Made Flesh and Dwelt Among Us' (Jn. 1:14)," CWG 2, 201-13; "'And There Was a Great Calm': A 'Dhvani' Reading of the Stilling of the Storm (Mk. 4:35-41)," CWG 2, 245-55; "Laughing at Idols: The Dark Side of Biblical Monotheism (An Indian Reading of Isaiah 44:9-20)," CWG 2, 272-96; "A Dalit Reading of the Decalogue," CWG 4, 208-13; "John 1:1-18: An Asian Perspective – Reading the Prologue of John with an Indian Mind," CWG 4, 214-19. On account of space limit, I can't afford to comment on all of these exegetical articles except a few which has a direct bearing on the theme of my paper.

37. Soares-Prabhu, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor a Social Class?," CWG 1, 269. Consequently, the prophetic concern of Soares-Prabhu has less to do with social work of dispensing charity and more to do with social justice, demanding change of oppressive structures of the society.

38. Soares-Prabhu was a theologian in the sense of Anselm's definition of "seeking to make sense of the foundational experience articulated in the Bible." Interestingly, such theological endeavour is evident in the Bible itself.

39. See Soares-Prabhu, "The Prophet as a Theologian," CWG 4, 14-23, especially the last statement on p.21.

40. See Soares-Prabhu, "Socio-Cultural Analysis in Prophetic Theologizing," CWG 2, 61-67, especially his five suggestions for theologizing today on p.66 which he concludes with: "Would that all our theology were prophetic in this way!" Actually, the two terms – prophet and theologian – are, for Soares, interchangeable.

41. "Contextual Analysis", being more comprehensive, might be a better term than "social analysis". Interestingly and imaginatively Soares-Prabhu rephrases Anselm's definition of theology: "To do theology means to contextualize one's faith." Soares-Prabhu, "From Alienation to Inculturation: Some Reflections on Doing Theology in India Today," CWG 1, 79. Soares-Prabhu presents three aspects of Indian context with a progressive focus: wide spread poverty (common to the Third World countries); rich religious traditions (peculiar to Asian countries); and caste (specific to India). For Soares-Prabhu "Doing Theology" is not just a professional activity of a theologian, but is a concrete way of living Christian faith by every Christian.

42. See Soares-Prabhu, "The Unprejudiced Jesus and the Prejudiced Church," CWG 3, 163-72. According to Soares-Prabhu, we must relate to God as Jesus did rather than relate to Jesus as God.

43. It is not within the scope of this paper to describe as to how Soares-Prabhu does this. That may be done by other writers in this book. My purpose is to highlight the prophetic dimension of his theological endeavour.

44. Soares-Prabhu, "The Indian Church Challenged by Pluralism and Dialogue," CWG 1, 164. We must note that Soares' analysis of the Indian context is based on the universal perspective of his God-experience.

45. See Soares-Prabhu, "From Alienation to Inculturation: Some Reflections on Doing Theology in India Today," CWG 1, 79-111, esp. 93-103 where he presents inculturation negatively as freedom from "colonized consciousness" and positively on the model of "conversion". See also G.M. Soares, "The New Testament as a Model of Inculturation," CWG 1, 112-23.

46. See Soares-Prabhu, "The Indian Church Challenged by Pluralism and Dialogue," CWG 1, esp. 169-70, where he talks about the challenges of this dialogue in terms of articulating an adequate theology of religions, theology of salvation, a Christology and theology of mission.

47. Soares-Prabhu, "Laughing at Idols: The Dark Side of Biblical Monotheism (An Indian Reading of Isaiah 44:9-20)," CWG 2, 272-96

48. We must remember that Soares-Prabhu had presented the prophetic critique of idol worship as a legitimate prophetic ministry, on account of the social behaviour such worship legitimized. See Soares-Prabhu, "The Prophet as Theologian" CWG 4, 18-19. But, unfortunately, Soares-Prabhu does not enter into that issue here.

49. Soares-Prabhu, "Religion and Communalism: The Christian Dilemma," CWG 1, 186. Soares-Prabhu describes this dilemma in detail in pp.185-86.

50. See Soares-Prabhu, "The Indian Church Challenged by Pluralism and Dialogue," CWG 1, 170 and see n. 46 above for the four challenging theological issues.

51. Not that nothing has been done. There have been excellent efforts made along this line. I like to single out one attempt by Francis D'Sa.

52. See Soares-Prabhu, "The Jesus of Faith," CWG 4, 288-92. For Soares both incarnation and resurrection are essential aspects of Jesus of faith, not of Jesus of history, because both are not "historical" in the normal sense of the word.

53. G. Gispert-Sauch, S.J. (2002). "Eschatological or Pāramārthika? Some Reflections on a difficult theological category," in Leonard Fernando, S.J. (ed.) Seeking Horizons – Festschrift in Honour of Dr. M. Amaladoss, S.J., Delhi: Vidyajyoti Education and Welfare Society and ISPCK.

54. See G. Gispert-Sauch, 2002: 298-99. Note also that Gispert does not see this as an exclusive privilege of Jesus, but as a mystery that belongs to the whole human race, 299. Although Gispert does not use the term Cosmotheandric yet the concept is evident in his article, 299.

55. See G. Gispert-Sauch, "Eschatological or Pāramārthika?," 300. St. Paul expresses this in Rom. 6:3-11, esp. vv.10-11.

56. Understanding the word "flesh" in the biblical sense, Soares would apply this verse to the whole human race. See Soares-Prabhu, "The Jesus of Faith," CWG 4, 289.

57. Eckhart Tolle, globally popular author of The Power of Now, A New Earth, and Stillness Speaks, advocates a new spirituality, based on transformation of consciousness, arising to a large extent outside of the structures of the existing institutionalized religions – a spirituality that is appropriate for the future world – a spirituality that integrates the pāramārthika and the vyāvahārika. It also integrates the mystic and the prophet in all of us.

58. Could this be the deeper meaning of Ignatius of Loyola's phrase: Contemplatives in Action?

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Dialogical Biblical Hermeneutics: George M. Soares-Prabhu's Contribution towards an Indian Biblical Theology

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Abstract: This paper analyses George M. Soares-Prabhu's contribution towards developing a method for an Indian biblical interpretation and biblical Theology is quite unique and admirable. As a biblical exegete, Soares-Prabhu was moved by one singular concern throughout his career, such as to interpret the message of the Bible for contemporary India. Therefore, the dialogical hermeneutics that he proposed for an Indian reading of the Bible comes from a deeper reflection and experience of several years. For him an Indian reading of the Bible means to read the Bible using the traditional Indian methods in the light of specifically Indian social concerns, with an Indian mind and with the sensibilities proper to an Indian culture. Such a dialogical hermeneutics will generate a hermeneutical circle giving

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us an Indian reading that involves a fruitful 'conversation' between the text and the reader, the biblical text and its Indian context. This dialogical hermeneutical reading will involve a radical commitment to the poor with a contextual, inclusive, holistic, cosmocentric, symbolic and pragmatic Indian world-view. This could be done with a three-fold reading keeping in mind the sensibilities proper to the Indian culture and context, such as a religious, social and an inter-textual reading.

Keywords: Dialogical Hermeneutics, Indian Mind, Hermeneutical Circle, Text and the Reader, Holistic Orientation, Cosmocentrism, Symbolic Perspective, George Soares-Prabhu.

Introduction

George M. Soares-Prabhu's contribution towards developing a method for an Indian biblical interpretation and biblical Theology is quite unique and commendable. He proposed to have an Indian reading of the Bible and spelt out its characteristics, keeping the 'Indian mind' of the reader and context. According to him, "an Indian reading of the Bible is a reading from an Indian point of view: a reading guided by a sensibility shaped by Indian culture, and provoked by questions emerging from the Indian situation."[1] He was convinced that "ideally, one ought to read the Bible in India in the light of Indian concerns, with a sensibility that is Indian, using where helpful traditional Indian methods of interpretation" (*CWG* 2, 273). Even though, it is rather difficult to speak of an Indian mind in a country where the cultural scene is so immensely varied, he believed that there is "a certain 'attitude to life', a certain way of experiencing reality, which is distinctively Indian" (*CWG* 4, 8).

He devoted his whole life to solve a question that haunted him throughout his life, namely "how is one to read the Bible in India today, in this India of ours with its vigorous and pluriform religiosity, its grinding poverty and its dehumanizing caste? Is an

Indian reading at all possible?" (*CWG* 1, 207). He confronted the conservative and liberal schools which assumed that "the text of the Bible has only one true meaning, wholly independent of the class or cultural conditioning of the reader" (*CWG* 1, 207). and came up with an alternative reading of Bible with a dialogical, contextual and hermeneutical reading of the Bible. Since 'Indian mind' experiences things as part of a whole, he envisaged a holistic and inclusive Indian interpretation of the Bible (*CWG* 4, 79). According to him, everything is bound by a context without which it cannot be properly understood. Since the Indian mind perceives things and persons are interconnected, interrelated and interdependent, the Indian interpretation of the Bible must be contextual, dialogical, integral, holistic and inclusive (*CWG* 2, 274).

He envisioned biblical interpretation as "a fruitful 'conversation' between text and the reader, in which the reader (not the implied reader of the literary critic, but the real reader who reads the text from a concrete historical setting) plays a decisive role" (*CWG* 2, 272). Such an Indian method of interpretation will be "critical and relevant - faithful to the text and responsive to the specific concerns of the Indian interpreter" (*CWG* 4, 34). He believed that this sort of Indian interpretation "can at best aspire to be a sort of pastoral embellishment to the real study of the Bible effected by the historical critical method" (*CWG* 1, 208).

He was aware that the traditional biblical methods of interpreting the biblical texts remained "adamantly mono-cultural in its outlook serve to alienate them from their traditional culture, and prevent any local reading of the text. In India, a reading of the Bible from "this place", instead of being a natural process (as a reading of the Vedas, or of the Pali Canon would be), becomes a reading against the grain, which needs to be undertaken with considerable self-conscious effort" (*CWG* 2, 273). It was this realization that led him to propose a contextual dialogical biblical hermeneutics for interpreting the Bible for an Indian context.

1. Historical Criticism: Ineffective and Irrelevant for an Indian Context

The starting point for an alternative way of interpreting the Bible was his disillusionment with the historical criticism. According to him historical critical method was proved ineffective, irrelevant and ideologically loaded (*CWG* 1, 208). The ineffectiveness of the historical critical method was shown by "its chronic inability to arrive at conclusive results", as it gives only "hypothetical possibilities," (*CWG* 1, 208) and the belief that "the assured results of today will be automatically challenged tomorrow" (*CWG* 1, 209).

He firmly believed that "as long, then, as Historical Criticism remains the standard method of biblical exegesis there is little hope for an 'Indian' exegesis" (*CWG* 1, 208). According to him, historical critical method does not measure up to the nature and intention of the text, because it is a method "fashioned to obtain the exact information of the text", and not "to interpret a text which aims at the personal transformation of the reader through his response in faith" (*CWG* 1, 209). Therefore, he argued that "the historical critical method at least as traditionally practised, does not measure up to the concrete literary and historical dimensions of the biblical text" (*CWG* 1, 210). He maintained that "the objectivism of the method prevents it from appreciating the role of the reader in constituting the meaning of a text, and so blinds it to the authentically new meanings that a text may, indeed must, acquire as it is read in ever new situations" (*CWG* 1, 210). He contended that mere philological and grammatical analysis of the critical exegete would not be sufficient to unlock the meaning of the biblical text, because the text is "a living reality which is 'created' through the interaction of a reader in his concrete historicity (bringing with him his specific perspective and his concrete commitments) and a text bringing with it all its history" (*CWG* 1, 211). It is therefore, he says: "The critical exegete sees himself as a dispassionate and uncommitted 'observer' of the text, who will release the meaning locked up in it by juggling expertly with philological and grammatical keys" (*CWG* 1, 211).

For him a "method which deliberately brackets off the concerns of the subject" remains necessarily 'academic'(*CWG* 1, 211). and therefore, it is unacceptable.

According to Soares-Prabhu, historical critical method remains irrelevant in India because of the way it is carried out in seminaries in a cultural isolation, cutting off from the real life experiences. He says:

> The problem of irrelevance is accentuated in India where biblical exegesis (what there is of it) is done almost exclusively in seminaries and Church faculties, where academic irrelevance is compounded by cultural isolation. The Seminary professor living in his utopia (his 'nowhere', the closed culture of the seminary, isolated in language and lifestyle from the lives of people around), theologizes only too often in a vacuum, cut off from the real life experiences that should nourish his theology (*CWG* 1, 212).

Consequently, such exegesis would lose its social moorings and its social concern, and thereby no longer becomes the message of the Bible significant. Accordingly the Bible becomes like any other book to be discussed, dissected, analysed, annotated, and it would spell out everything except the significance of its challenging and transforming word (*CWG* 4, 33).

2. Dialogical Biblical Hermeneutics

Disillusionment with historical criticism led him to the exploration of more contextualized ways of reading the Bible. Following the hermeneutical principles of Gadamer he proposes a contextual dialogical hermeneutics for an Indian reading of the Bible. And in this process, he identified two significant issues in biblical hermeneutics which enabled him to propose an interpretation of the text that will be objective, relevant and Indian, i.e. to become aware of the semantic autonomy of the interpreted text, and to realize the importance of the concerns

of the interpreter for the operation of the hermeneutical circles (*CWG* 4, 27). He states: "A dialogical hermeneutics locates the meaning of the text not in some original author-meaning (what the author intended to say), to be recovered by the controlled use of neutral methods, but in the text-meaning which emerges from a creative and dialogical encounter between the interpreter and the text" (*CWG* 4, 28). According to him biblical interpretation does not mean to dig out an original author-meaning supposedly hidden in the text under layers of subsequent interpretation, as historical criticism attempts to do, but to enter into a conversation with the text (*CWG* 4, 4). Thus, a dialogical hermeneutics invites for a mutual reciprocal openness of interpreter and text. He says,

> It is along the lines of such a hermeneutical conversation between text and reader, where each is open to and respects the claims of the other, that an Indian reading of the Bible is to be attempted. An Indian Christian reading will be a reading of the Bible by an interpreter sensitive to the Indian situation and true to the biblical text. It will be, that is, a true-to-the-text reading made with an Indian pre-understanding and responsive to Indian concerns (*CWG* 4, 28).

While the text is open to the questions the interpreter brings, the interpreter is open to the truth claim of the text (*CWG* 4, 28). Such mutual reciprocal openness of interpreter and text leads to the appropriation of the meaning of the text. Because in this process, as he articulates, "the interpreter makes the text his own, enters into its world at its intersection with his own, shares its perspective, is changed by it. In a dialogical hermeneutics, therefore, appropriation is not the 'application' of a previously understood text, but is part of the process of understanding itself" (*CWG* 4, 30). Thus, the mutual openness of text to interpreter and interpreter to text leads to a mutually enriching encounter of the one with the other leading to a hermeneutical circle (*CWG* 4, 31). Such a hermeneutical circle envisages a synchronic reading of the text, rather than a diachronic reading of the text. Therefore,

he says, "it is the Bible as a whole, then, not this or that particular passage or book in it, that will be the 'text' for a hermeneutical reading. Any particular biblical passage will be read in the light of the text - that is, in the perspective of the great 'metaphors' or lines of signification that the Bible as a whole reveals" ((*CWG* 4, 43).

The hermeneutical circle is initiated by the interpreter's understanding of the text, which calls into question both his present, commonly accepted understanding of the text, and the questions which the interpreter keeps on addressing the text from his continually changing situation. Therefore, the context and concerns of the interpreter become equally important for a hermeneutical reading with the questions which the interpreter keeps on addressing the text, which he defines it as 'exegetical suspicion' (*CWG* 4, 32). Therefore, the hermeneutical reading that he proposes is invariably guided by a sensibility shaped by Indian culture, and provoked by questions emerging from the Indian situation (*CWG* 4, 34). It is concerned about what the text has to say to the interpreter today. Therefore, "the questions it asks are not historical (what happened?), nor redactional (what did the author intend to say?), but existential (what does the text mean to me?)" (*CWG* 4, 43).

His quest was for developing new and more contextualized ways of reading the Bible, and therefore he made a conscious effort to include the concerns of the Indian society in the proposed dialogical reading of the Bible. According to him, the Indian context is constituted by massive poverty, pervasive religiosity and apparently immovable social structure of caste. And all these factors are closely interrelated because "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!" (*CWG* 4, 6). Therefore, he says "An Indian interpretation of the Bible must be attentive to these determinative factors of the Indian situation, if it is to avoid

the kind of irrelevance which, to Indian eyes, seriously afflicts academic exegesis in the West" (*CWG* 4, 6).

According to Soares-Prabhu, the Bible should be interpreted for 'today,' by retrieving the context of the text and interpreting it in the context of India. Having retrieved the context of the text, the exegetes need to analyse the context of our times, of our region, of our country and our community, so that they may reveal the message of the Word of God in and through the happenings of our times.[2] Therefore, the exegetes should have a familiarity, if not the mastery, of the economic, political, social and religious structures of our times, and their influence upon the day-to-day life of the faithful. In such a way, the exegetes should be able to unravel the meaning of the texts in the reader's universe of meaning.

He spells out the concerns of an Indian exegete in a dialogical hermeneutical reading. First of all a dialogical hermeneutical reading must be read from the perspective of the poor in the country. He says,

> Indeed commitment to the poor is demanded of the Indian exegete, not only by his Third World situation of overwhelming poverty which is the true context of his interpretation (however much he may try to isolate himself from it), but also by the thrust of the Bible itself. For the Bible, in spite of all the efforts of Western exegesis to domesticate of remains a revolutionary text proclaiming 'good news to the poor' (*CWG* 4, 35).

Secondly, he requests every Indian exegete to have an Indian world-view. He argues:

> The radical commitment to the poor which is the starting point of any genuine Indian hermeneutic in India must be made within the distinctive understanding of humankind and its world, which constitutes the Indian world-view, and gives particular shape and colour to its Third Worldness. An Indian hermeneutic will respect the specific sensibility shaped by

the Indian world-view - or, more accurately perhaps, world-views (*CWG* 4, 35).

Thirdly, he asks every Indian exegete to be inclusive in understanding and interpreting the text: He tells,

> Indian thinking is inclusive. It is guided by the principle of identity rather than that of contradiction. That is, it defines truth not by exclusion (A is A because it is not B), but by identity (A is A, whether or not it is also B). And because it is profoundly convinced of the relativity of all 'beliefs' (for it knows that the Absolute cannot be packaged into a formula), and is determined to risk the chance of error rather than the loss of any part of the truth, it will opt for the 'Ying-Yang' way of complementarity (both/and) rather than for the Aristotelian way of exclusion (either/or) (*CWG* 4, 36).

Fourthly, he appeals to have a cosmocentric world-view because the Indian world-view encompasses the whole cosmos rather than focusing on humankind alone. He says, "humankind is experienced not as standing over against nature and dominating it, but as rooted in the cosmos and integrally related to it" (*CWG* 4, 37). Humankind does not stand alone, but must always be understood as part of the totality of the cosmos. Indian thinking is thus inevitably "cosmocentric, not (like Western thinking) anthropocentric" (*CWG* 4, 9). Therefore, he argues that, the Indian exegete should be particularly sensitive to the stream of biblical tradition which is aware of nature as the backdrop to human history, and is conscious of the cosmic responsibility of humankind (*CWG* 4, 38).

Fifthly, he calls for a symbolic world-view because the Indian concern for the cosmos is rooted in the awareness that the world is the symbol of the Absolute. It is here he recourse to the traditional Indian *dhvani* method of interpretation of the sacred texts. He says,

> All things have an aura of the numinous and a dimension of depth. They are the visible expression of the invisible Real *(sat),* the inexpressible expressed, the unmanifested

(avyakta) made manifest. It is this experience of the world as symbol that grounds *'dhvani,'* the method of interpretation through evocation proposed in classical Sanskrit poetics. … the Indian exegete will always approach the biblical text with an openness to its depth meaning. He will be sensitive to the evocations of the text, aware of the "other echoes (that) inhabit the garden" (*CWG* 4, 38).

Sixthly, he suggests having a pragmatic world-view because the new meanings disclosed by a symbolic Indian reading of the Bible will always bear practical meanings, as they will lead to a transformation of the interpreter and his world. He believes that "the reading of Scripture in India has never been an academic exercise (the pursuit of truth for truth's sake), but always a severely practical quest for liberation" (*CWG* 4, 39). In his efforts to unravel the meaning of the biblical texts, the Indian exegete should express his concern for justice, transformation of the individual, human society and the cosmos. Therefore, the pragmatic world-view of the exegete leads to liberation of the individual and society. He articulates it:

> It is such a dialectic between the historical concern for justice (the righteousness of the Kingdom of God) on the one hand, and the longing for individual liberation (*mumuksa*) on the other, leading to a 'passionate desire for the welfare of all being' *(sarvabhutahite ratah*) that will determine the horizon of the Christian Indian exegete of the Bible, and save him from the academic bareness which afflicts so much of Western exegesis today.[61] An *exegesis* which is not fully liberative, that is, which does not result in a word that transforms the individual, human society and the cosmos, will not be truly 'Indian' (*CWG* 4, 40-41).

He gives a few criteria for such an Indian hermeneutical reading, namely (*CWG* 4, 46):

1. Fidelity to the linguistic structure of the text because a valid reading must not say more than the text permits it to say.
2. Continuity with the author meaning of the text because, in a religious text, it is the author meaning that mediates the originary experience which constitutes the text as a religious text and allows it to make demands on us.
3. Responsiveness to an Indian pre-understanding; for a reading will be Indian only to the extent that it is guided by the perceptions and values of an Indian world-view, and responds to concerns that arise from the Indian situation.
4. Eventual acceptance by the Christian community in India and elsewhere; for only such eventual acceptance will show that the new Indian reading is also a Christian reading, made from within the perspectives of the Christian tradition.

A hermeneutical reading based on the above criteria, according to him will be true-to-the-text, prompted by concerns arising from the Indian situation and guided by a sensibility shaped by an Indian world-view (*CWG* 4, 45-56). It will "respect both the historical distance of the text and the specificity of the religious experience it seeks to communicate."[3] "Laughing at Idols: the Dark side of Biblical Monotheism (an Indian Reading of Isaiah 44:9-20" is a best illustration of this hermeneutical reading that he proposed (*CWG* 2, 272-296). Here, he situates the text in its literary and sociological context, spells out the structure of the text as accurately as possible, and reflects on the significance of what the text has to say to a reader in India today.

In short, the dialogical hermeneutics that he proposed based on a radical commitment to the poor with an inclusive, cosmocentric, symbolic and pragmatic Indian world-view. Such a dialogical hermeneutics will generate a hermeneutical circle giving us an Indian reading which involves a constant

dialogue between the biblical text and its Indian context, by formulating appropriate biblical answers to the stream of questions exerting dialectically from the Indian situation (*CWG* 4, 41). Therefore, an Indian hermeneutical reading will not be satisfied with applying already acquired meanings of the biblical texts to the Indian situation, rather it will read relevant meaning directly out of the biblical text, reading it from a concrete, specific, real-life, point of view.

This does not mean that hermeneutical reading will not make use of the tools of the historical criticism, and will not undertake a close reading of the text. He very clearly says,

> A hermeneutical method, then, will study the text as closely and as carefully as historical criticism does. It will use the techniques that historical criticism has developed (particularly form and literary criticism) and will draw on the splendid philological aids (dictionaries, grammars, word-statistics) that historical critics have compiled. But it will do this for purposes different from those of historical criticism and from a very different point of view (*CWG* 4, 43).

Moreover, he affirmed that an Indian exegesis will result from the cross-fertilization of modem methods of biblical exegesis with contributions from Indian exegetical tradition, rooted in the socio-cultural reality of India today (*CWG* 1, 216). Though he critiqued the modem historical critical methods thoroughly, he was convinced that a sound exegesis could never do without analyzing the text philologically and semantically (CWG 2, 3-48 and *CWG* 2, 105-125). Therefore, he says that an Indian reading of the Bible will not replace an historical reading but will complement it. He makes it clear in the following way:

> In the universe of Indian exegesis there is room for a wide variety of methods - historical criticism to determine the origin and the transmission of a text, literary criticism to analyse its literary and linguistic structures, canonical criticism to find out what function the text had in successive believing communities. But all these must be completed, if the

> interpretation is not to remain barren, with a hermeneutical reading which will determine the significance of the text for the reader here and how, by engaging text and reader in a critical conversation, that respects not only the meaning trajectory of the text but the new Indian context in which the text is now read (*CWG* 4, 6).

In short, as he says "in many ways, then, the intensely visual, pluriform, inclusive, cosmocentric Indian mind is the polar opposite of the word-oriented, exclusivist, anthropocentric mind-set of the Bible. Reading a biblical text with an Indian mind can therefore be a disconcerting experience" (*CWG* 2, 275).

3. An Exegetical Model for India

He asks the Indian exegetes to be firmly rooted in the Indian culture and situation, if they have to produce an Indian interpretation at all. For this, he says that the Indian exegetes must free themselves from the Western bourgeoisie conditioning so that they can "get into touch with, and articulate the questions which the 'real' India addresses the Bible" (*CWG* 4, 35). Since the Indian exegetes are sensitive to context, their interpretation of the text should be interconnected, interrelated and interdependent whole. This makes Indian exegesis holistic and inclusive. Thus, the contextual dialogical hermeneutical method that he suggests for India consists of a three-dimensional reading: a religious reading, a social reading and an inter-textual reading.

3.1 A Religious Reading

According to Soares-Prabhu, "a 'religious' reading brings to the text a pre-understanding informed by India's rich religious tradition, so as to discover in it resonances missed by the Western exegete with his very different sensibility" (*CWG* 3, 76). It will apply the traditional methods of Indian exegesis to the biblical text and transpose its symbols into Indian ones, without destroying the social concern which is very essential to the Bible's message (*CWG* 1, 216). However, he warns that an Indian religious

reading of the Bible should not be reduced to a Hindu reading or to a *brahmanic* reading of the Bible by applying the traditional Indian hermeneutics (*mimamsa*) and poetics (*kavyasastra*). But it must also take into consideration the rich folk, dalit and tribal traditions that make up nearly one fourth of the Indian population (*CWG* 3, 77). That is to say, a religious reading of the Bible will not attempt merely to discover traditional Indian values in the Bible, but it "will strain to find an Indian 'language' for the specific incarnational insights of biblical religion - that man is now the locus of one's encounter with God; and that to 'love God with all one's heart' now means 'to love one's neighbour as oneself'" (CWG 1, 217.

"The *Dharma* of Jesus: An Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount" (*CWG* 4, 153-172) is basically an interpretation of Mt 5-7 with an Indian religious mind, and he shows that the '*dharma* of Jesus' can serve as a paradigm for Indian Christian theologizing, and building up a fraternal human society characterized by freedom, 'sonship,'and concern. He places the *dharma* of Jesus, as portrayed in Mt 5-7, as normative for Indian Christian community. It was his sensitivity to the Indian religious context that led him to coin the phrase '*dharma* of Jesus,' and within no time this Indian phrase became the sum and substance of his understanding of Jesus' message for the Christian community in India.[4] As Francis D'Sa held, he thought that it was imperative to present Jesus' *Dharma* in a multireligious and multicultural context of Asia so that any person of good will would be able to understand and appropriate it (D'Sa, 2003: 3).

An Indian reading of the Prologue of John shows that it echoes the 'prologue' of the *Isha Upanishad* and takes us beyond it (CWG 4, 214-219). In his own words:

> John too implies that the world, all that lives and moves, is pervaded by the Lord. The Word pervades the whole of creation and all human history, because all things were made through the Word (1:3) and every human being enlightened by it (1:9). But when the Prologue goes on to affirm that the

Word became flesh and lived among us, (1:14), it reveals a dimension of God's presence in the world which goes beyond what Hinduism has conceived (CWG 4, 217).

In "The New Testament as a Model of Inculturation," (*CWG* 1, 112-123) he clearly illustrates that the New Testament can be read with an Indian religious mind, and shows how a religious reading of the Bible can stand as a model for the 'accommodation', 'adaptation' or 'inculturation' through which the Christian proclamation must become "all things to all men that (it) might by all means save some" (1Cor 9:22). "The Man Born Blind: Understanding a Johannine Sign in India Today" (*CWG* 2, 187-197) invites us to read the Gospel of John with truly Indian mind, and urges us to a radical openness to other religions and dialogue. "The Sacred in the Secular: Reflections on a Johannine Sutra: "The Word Was Made Flesh and Dwelt among Us" (Jn 1:14)" (*CWG* 2, 201-213) demonstrates how a religious reading of Johannine Sutra (Jn 1:14) strives to hold both poles – sacred and secular- together in their mutual connectedness and integrity. As the Indian mind cannot separate the sacred and secular, the exposition of Jn 1:14 with an Indian religious mind shows us how the sacred interpenetrates the secular in the mystery of Incarnation.

Likewise, the articles, on "Inculturation - Liberation - Dialogue: Challenges to Christian Theology in Asia Today" (*CWG* 2, 201-213), "From Alienation to Inculturation: Some Reflections on Doing Theology in India Today" (*CWG* 1, 79-111), "The Indian Church Challenged by Pluralism and Dialogue" (*CWG* 1, 157-172), "Religion and Communalism: The Christian Dilemma," (*CWG* 1, 173-190) and "Jesus Christ amid the Religions and Ideologies of India Today" (*CWG* 1, 191-204) emphasize the need to read the Bible with a 'religious world-view of the Indian culture' and show how a religious reading of the Bible can serve for linguistic and theological inculturation of the Gospel message in India.

3.2 A Social Reading

According to Soares-Prabhu, a 'social reading' will read the Bible in the light of a liberating praxis among the socially oppressed, without succumbing to the sociological reductionism of a strictly Marxist approach (*CWG* 1, 216). He is very much convinced that a 'social reading' of the Bible is not a socio-economic analyses of the biblical texts. "Instead it will search the biblical text for transmaterial (anti-consumer) values which could inspire the change of attitude ("the abolition of the 'mental' cause that engenders capitalism"), which alone can make a genuine social revolution possible" (*CWG* 1, 216). He further says,

> A growing awareness of the massive social evils that plague our land (in which eighty percent of the people are below, on, or just above the poverty line, and fully seventy percent are totally illiterate; where just ten percent of the rural rich own more than sixty percent of all the cultivable land, and ninety percent of private-owned industry is producing consumer goods for less than fifteen percent of the population) is having its impact on Indian theology - particularly among Indian theologians who have been exposed to a social analysis which points, correctly, to institutional structures rather than personal ill will as the source of social ills (*CWG* 3, 79).

In his article "Socio-Cultural Analysis in Prophetic Theologizing: a Biblical Paradigm," he shows how the prophetical messages, which are always linked to contemporary events, become the basis of theologizing in the Bible (CWG 2,61-67 and CWG 4,14-23). He says that "the prophet's message always derives from a reflection, (and not just a religious or an ethical reflection but a historical and therefore ultimate social reflection) on what is going on around him" (CWG 2, 66). The prophetical messages always communicate a God who sets the oppressed free, and project a free, equal, non-exploitative alternative community; their critique of society is linked to a critique of religion; they rebuked the structures of the dominant society and encouraged the dominated to build an alternative community. Thus, he argues for

a prophetic theologizing for an effective transformation of Indian society and people.

His interpretation of the table fellowship of Jesus with a *Dalit* Christian perspective shows how Jesus' table fellowship becomes a liberative paradigm for the oppressed *Dalit* Christians in India today (*CWG* 1, 223-240). As Jesus, through his meals with the religious and social outcasts of his day, presented a new experience of God and a new understanding of community, a *Dalit*-reading of Jesus' table fellowship will challenge everyone to see every fellow Christian as a brother or a sister. Through "a *Dalit* Reading of the Decalogue," he unravels the plight of the *Dalits* in Indian society, and the Decalogue with its implicit proclamation of the equality of all human beings draws the broad outlines of a liberative community, towards which all *Dalits* everywhere, can aspire (*CWG* 4, 208-213).

His interpretation of Mk 10:17-27 and 10:35-45 in the light of tribal values shows that the values which undergird the ethos of tribal society are strikingly similar to those taught in the Bible and Jesus (CWG 1, 241-259. An egalitarian, antigreed and anti-pride social order preserved in the Indian tribal society is similar to the counterculture envisioned by Jesus in the Gospels. He argues that Jesus sees himself as standing within the tribal traditions of India (cf. Mk 6:4; Lk 13:33).

He firmly believed that if we are to understand the challenges that India poses to the Church, it is important that we try to understand the Indian situation in its complexity and its otherness, especially the challenges posed by massive poverty and caste system. His article "The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste" urges us to begin with an analysis of the Indian situation, the diversified society both in its social structure and extreme poverty, so that the Church in India may opt for a meaningful mission in a highly polarized and divided society (*CWG* 1, 141-156). In "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor a Social Class?," he further elaborates on 'the poor in the Bible' and shows that they constitute a sociological group which is both

the victim of history and its maker; a dialectical group whose identity is defined not by their religious attitude but by their social situation determined by antagonistic groups standing over and against them (*CWG* 1, 260-282). In "Jesus and the Poor," he analyses Jesus' attitude and response towards the poor in the land of Palestine and in the Bible, and he asks whether the response of Jesus towards the poor serve as a model for our response to the situation of the poor in India today (*CWG* 4, 173-196). He says that "Perhaps it can - but only if we remember to follow Jesus, not to imitate him! For Jesus gives us no concrete strategy for the ending of poverty … [and] his strategy and his blue print would surely have become obsolete in the very different world we live in today" (*CWG* 4, 173-194). However, as he says, we can surely adopt his Abba experience of "God as our Father and of human beings as our brothers and sisters; a set of values clustering round freedom and love which grow out of this experience; the vision of a new humanity free, fraternal, non-exploitative in which these values will be concretely expressed, and the inspiration of a life lived out in absolute commitment to the building up of this community" (*CWG* 4, 173-194),

3.3 An Inter-Textual Reading

According to Soares-Prabhu an intertextual reading of the Bible will certainly be of much help for better understanding and appreciation of the Scriptures of different religions. He firmly believed that when texts of different cultures are brought together the light of one text brings out elements that were hidden or missing in the other. For example, by applying the *dhvani* theory of Indian poetics to Jesus stilling the storm in Mk 4:35-41, he points out how the application of such a method elicits deeper meaning in the hearer which otherwise would not have been perceived at all (*CWG* 2, 245-255). Likewise, taking the *Mahavagga* text of the Buddhists he compares the context and the content of the mission command of Jesus in Mt 28:16-20 and shows how the text of Mt 28:16-20 throws light on

aspects which are either hidden or ignored or found missing in the *Mahavagga* text (*CWG* 4, 53-69).

4. Problems of an Indian Interpretation

While trying for an Indian method of biblical interpretation, he also identified certain problems for an Indian interpretation, such as the alienation of the Indian interpreter from the Indian situation, and the Indian mind. The reason for such an alienation, according to him, is "biblical interpretation in India is not emerging from grass-root communities (as is happening in Latin America and the Philippines), but is the work of Westernized scholars, living in the seclusion of culturally isolated church institutions, patterned on Western models, and forming enclaves of a Western clerical culture in the alien vastness of India" (*CWG* 4, 10). Therefore, he says that Indian interpreter "needs to be rescued by the people of India as the Latin American theologians were rescued by their poor" (*CWG* 4, 10).

Conclusion

As a biblical exegete, Soares-Prabhu was moved by one singular concern throughout his career, such as to interpret the message of the Bible for contemporary India. Therefore, the dialogical hermeneutics that he proposed for an Indian reading of the Bible comes from a deeper reflection and experience of several years. For him an Indian reading of the Bible means to read the Bible using the traditional Indian methods in the light of specifically Indian social concerns, with an Indian mind and with the sensibilities proper to an Indian culture. Such a dialogical hermeneutics will generate a hermeneutical circle giving us an Indian reading that involves a fruitful 'conversation' between the text and reader, the biblical text and its Indian context. This dialogical hermeneutical reading will involve a radical commitment to the poor with an inclusive, holistic, cosmocentric, symbolic and pragmatic Indian world-view. This could be done with a three-fold reading keeping in mind the

sensibilities proper to the Indian culture and context, such as a religious reading, a social reading and an inter-textual reading. According to him such an Indian method of interpretation will be critical, relevant, faithful to the text and responsive to the specific concerns of the Indian interpreter.

He earnestly believed that his knowledge of the Bible is not to make him a "technician of the Bible" but to acquire the courage "to enlarge the tent and widen the horizon so 'that nothing that affects the plight of one's fellow human beings is absent from the scope of biblical interpretation" (*CWG* 4, 238). Therefore, he not only proposed a theoretical framework for a contextual dialogical interpretation of the Bible for India, but also applied it in his exegetical treatment of the biblical texts. As Francis X. D'sa rightly noted, "What distinguishes Soares-Prabhu from other exegetes is that for him exegesis was only a spring-board for theologizing. Besides, in his exegetical endeavours he employed tools whose validity he did not take for granted; he tested them very critically and gave a reasoned account of them" (*CWG* 4, xii).

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Notes

1. General Note: Collected Writings of George.M. Soares Prabhu, SJ, Vols. 1-4 (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999-2003) have been used all along in this article. For the sake of space and brevity, henceforth, CWG refers to The Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J. Soares-Prabhu treats of the subject thematically in his "Socio-cultural Analysis in Prophetic Theologizing", CWG 2, 61-67.
2. Soares-Prabhu, "Interpreting the Bible in India Today," CWG 4, 5. He says that "fundamentalist Christian readings, a growing trend in India just now, fail to maintain the historical distance of the text, because they read the Bible as if it were a work written directly for the contemporary reader." CWG 4, 5.
3. The word dharma is derived from the Sanskrit root dhr, which means to uphold, to support, to nourish, and therefore dharma has to do with upholding, supporting and sustaining. Therefore, dharma can be understood as that which holds the people together. As D'S a says, "In the Indian subcontinent it stands for the complex of relationships that one thing has with every other thing", Francis X. D'Sa, "George M. Soares-Prabhu: A

Theologian for Our Times," in The Dharma of Jesus, George M. Soares-Prabhu, ed. by Francis X. D'Sa (Orbis Books: Maryknoll 2003), 3. The term dharma has been used not only in Hinduism but also in Budhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

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Selected Quotes by Soares-Prabhu

"When the revelation of God's love (the Kingdom) meets its appropriate response in man's acceptance of this love (repentance), there begins a mighty movement of personal and societal liberation which sweeps through human history. The movement brings freedom inasmuch it liberates each individual from the inadequacies and obsessions that shackle him. It fosters fellowship, because it empowers free individuals to exercise their concern for each other in genuine community. And it leads on to justice, because it impels every true community to adopt just societal structures which alone make freedom and fellowship possible. Freedom, fellowship and justice are thus the parameters of the Kingdom's thrust towards the liberation of man." (Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God," CWG 4, 238-239.)

"Jesus opted for a radicalism which sought to realize as perfectly as possible, the spirit of the Law, which he saw embodied in love (agape), that is in interhuman concern." (Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus," CWG 3, 7.)

"The Eucharist has always carried the memory of Jesus' meals with tax collectors and sinners." (Soares-Prabhu, "The Table Fellowship of Jesus," CWG 1, 235.)

"An Indian reading of the Bible is a reading from an Indian point of view: a reading guided by a sensibility shaped by Indian culture, and provoked by questions emerging from the Indian situation." (Soares-Prabhu, "Commitment and Conversion: A Biblical Hermeneutic for India Today," CWG 4, 34.)

"It is along the lines of such a hermeneutical conversation between text and reader, where each is open to and respects the claims of the other, that an Indian reading of the Bible is to be attempted. An Indian Christian reading will be a reading of the Bible by an interpreter sensitive to the Indian situation and true to the biblical text. It will be, that is, a true-to-the-text reading made with an Indian pre-understanding and responsive to Indian concerns." (Soares-Prabhu, "Interpreting the Bible in India Today," CWG 4, 28)

"Indeed commitment to the poor is demanded of the Indian exegete, not only by his Third World situation of overwhelming poverty which is the true context of his interpretation (however much he may try to isolate himself from it), but also by the thrust of the Bible itself. For the Bible, in spite of all the efforts of Western exegesis to domesticate of remains a revolutionary text proclaiming 'good news to the poor'" (Soares-Prabhu, "Commitment and Conversion: A Biblical Hermeneutic for India Today," CWG 4, 35.)

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Jesus of Faith: The Christological Reflections of George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ

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Abstract: Based on his scholarly research and studies on the New Testament witness about the Person and mission of Jesus, George Soares-Prabhu presents his insights into the mystery of Jesus of Faith. Thus, he overcomes the dichotomy between the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith that plagued the discussions about the NT Christologies for more than a century. It is the Jesus of faith encountered by the early community of the disciples that is articulated in the gospels conditioned by the specific context of the communities in which they were formed. Soares-Prabhu affirms that in the Indian context relevant Christological reflections can be developed only by those who are graced to have an experience of the Person of Jesus and actualize that transforming experience in solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, the discriminated against and all who are oppressed in some way or other.

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Introduction

The history of Christological reflections has been on the ontological identity of Jesus or "who is Jesus Christ?" or on his functional identity or "what has he done for me?" The Catholic Christological reflections emphasized an ontological Christology and the Protestant theological reflections emphasized a functional Christology or *Christus pro me.* Responding to the demands of Enlightenment's thinking that only what is empirically verified can be affirmed as truth the Western biblical theology tried to prove the historicity of gospels and in the process raised the issue of the Historical Jesus and the Christ of Faith. Some went to the extent of separating the Historical Jesus from the Christ of Faith as if they were two distinct realities. While many biblical theologians are still grappling with this issue the well-known Indian biblical theologian George M. Soares-Prabhu having taken this issue and the questions raised by these perspectives seriously went beyond them providing a synthetic biblical perspective about the person of Jesus Christ as Jesus of Faith.

In this paper an attempt is made to explain the Christological reflections of George Soares-Prabhu on Jesus of Faith and the implications of his insights into the mystery of Jesus of Faith based on his scholarly research and studies on the New Testament witness about the Person and mission of Jesus. Using the historical-critical method of analysing the Gospel texts only to the extent they are useful for an Indian reading of the Gospel that is, by an integrated 'religious' and 'social reading' of the texts "which will disclose the liberation announced by Jesus in its totality" (CWG 1, 35). Soares-Prabhu presents Jesus of Faith who is witnessed by the New Testament. Jesus of Faith is the One encountered by his disciples during his earthly life as 'a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people' (Lk 24: 19) and as the Lord and God of their lives after his crucifixion,

death and resurrection. The Gospels narrate to us the belief of the disciples about the Person of Jesus and their transforming faith-experience or their belief in Jesus as the meaning of their life.

1. A Critique of the Traditional Christology

The relevance of the Christ-talk in terms of Jesus of Faith can be seen only when it is compared and contrasted with the traditional Christology of the Church. We have inherited the dogmatic Christology of the post-apostolic Church which was developed from a single strand of logos-Christology of John. It was finally articulated in the councils of Nicaea (325 AD) Ephesus (431 AD) and finally in Chalcedon (451 AD). This unilinear development of Christology, according to Soares Prabhu led to the progressive alienation of Jesus from the world in which he lived as human. The logos Christology was further articulated through the use of Greek philosophy and the Hellenistic categories of thought like substance, nature subsistence, person etc. led to many Christological controversies which were to some extent resolved in the council of Chalcedon. For Soares-Prabhu, the Christological tradition of the early Church which finds its articulation in the Chalcedonian formulae "though 'correct' it might be, represents a narrow culturally conditioned and even politically motivated development which offers only a small fraction of the Christological potential that the New Testament offers" (CWG 1, 267).

Soares-Prabhu arrives at three conclusions about the historical development of Christology which has failed to unleash the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ. First of all, he affirms that any formula 'however intricate, subtle and complex, is bound to be inadequate theologically and pastorally'. It is obvious that the mystery of Christ cannot be defined. To define is to mark limits. The philosophical categories that were used to encapsulate the mystery of Christ alienated Christ from life. The life-giving mystery of Christ can be understood to some extent at least and its significance can be articulated not by way of analysing

it with conceptual methods and expressing them ontologically but metaphorically. Soares-Prabhu is probably indicating that the mystery of Christ and its significance can be made experiential only by approaching it as an eternal poem written by God!

Secondly, no Christological formula was accepted as normative by Christians as a whole. The Christological affirmations of Nicaea were rejected by Arians, of Ephesus by the Nestorians, of Chalcedon by the Monophysites. One can consider those who hold the decisions of the Councils as orthodox and those who reject them as heretics. However, it must be admitted that 'the accusations of heresy do not negate the fact that all who profess faith in Jesus, no matter how they articulate this faith' 'are authentic Christians' (CWG 1, 269).

Thirdly, the Christological development took place in the horizon of a single cultural tradition which can be called the Mediterranean world and its cultural colonies or in the Hellenistic Church. Even the Christologies of the so called oriental churches were Hellenistic in their theology and 'the Christologies of Copts or the Syrians were different and opposite variants of Roman or Byzantine Christology' (CWG 1, 270). In general, Christian theology is less catholic than it imagines it to be. Only after the colonial times is there a development of Christologies in various continents and if they have to develop further they have to liberate themselves from the Hellenistic, sectarian, and politically biased Christologies of the early Church and reach their sources, namely, the New Testament.

The Christological reflection of Soares-Prabhu is, therefore, is an attempt to overcome limitations of a culturally conditioned, philosophically determined, politically biased and sectarian traditional Christologies. He has attempted to offer a New Testament-based, context-sensitive, inclusive and experience-based Christology that is relevant to the context of developing countries[1].

2. Contours of a Contextual Christology

The Christology of the New Testament is strongly contextual and it evolved under the influence of the context. It all began with the Easter-experience or the experience of the resurrection. It was the experience of Jesus as alive after his death on the cross and the burial. This foundational experience of Jesus or this originary experience is the basis of the Christian tradition and all Christological reflection in the New Testament. Soares Prabhu refers to Raymond Brown who spells out progressive articulation of this originary experience of the risen Jesus. According to Raymond Brown the progressive development of Christology in the New Testament is from *future Christology* to *present Christology* and then to *past Christology* and finally to *pre-existent Christology.* The first followers of Jesus were Palestinian Jews who expected the liberation of the Jews from foreign rule and the establishment of the Jewish kingdom with the arrival of the Messiah or Christ. Since this had not taken place even after the resurrection of Jesus they believed that when he would come in future he would be Christ and would fulfil these messianic expectations. This was the beginning of future Christology (Acts 3:19-21). The experience of risen Jesus was such that they could not but preach that he was already messiah or Christ at his resurrection. The early proclamations of Paul and Peter indicate a shift from future Christology to present Christology (Rom 3-4; Acts 2:32-36; 5:31; 13:32-33). This change of thinking from a Jewish political messiah to a spiritualized understanding of the messiah or Christ was possible because of the coming of Hellenistic Jews into the early Church. They could interpret liberation as liberation from sin and the kingdom which the messiah would establish as a 'kingdom not of this world'. "The spiritualism of Greek thinking with its dichotomy of matter and spirit has begun to infect the holistic earthy spirituality of Palestinian Christianity" (CWG 1, 272).

From the present Christology the Christological reflection was pushed back to the pre-Easter past Christology. Was Jesus already Christ before his resurrection from the dead. The gospel

according to Mark affirms it because Jesus was anointed at baptism by the Spirit as 'Son of God' (Mk 1:9-11). The same line reflection was taken further into the past before the baptism. Jesus was Messiah or Christ from the moment of his conception in his mother's womb. Matthew (1:18) and Luke (1:35) affirm this because he was invested with the Spirit from the beginning of his existence here on earth and thus he is the 'Son of God'.

The next stage of Christology was by moving backward from past Christology to pre-existent Christology. It was an answer to the question whether he was Christ even before coming into the world. Already in Paul's letters to Philippians (2:6f) and to Colossians (1:15f) there are possible references to a pre-existent Christology. In John's Prologue (1:1f.) John clearly shows Jesus as the pre-existent divine Messiah and the incarnation or the hominization of the eternal logos, "the word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).

The development of New Testament Christology with its richness and complexity provides us certain lessons for developing contextual Christologies. First of all, the New Testament Christologies are strongly *contextual Christologies.* The articulation of the Christic experience evolved from the struggle of the early Church to reconcile its monotheistic faith with the experience of the divinity of Christ. In the beginning the Palestinian Christians found it difficult to affirm the divinity of Christ but thought that he was the eschatological prophet but later the Hellenistic Judaism could see Jesus in relation to the Spirit of God as narrated in Matthew and Luke. This Spirit-Christology could explain that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Spirit. There is also a development of Pauline Christology which identified Jesus with Wisdom. In the Johannine community Jesus is believed as the incarnate Word. The contextual Christologies of the New Testament developed under the influence of their environments.

The New Testament presents also a *pluralism of Christologies.* The development of Christology from the understanding of Jesus

as the eschatological prophet to Spirit Christology and then to Wisdom Christology and finally to Logos-Christology of John is not to be understood as a progression from a simpler to complex Christology or from an imperfect to perfect Christology. The later stages of Christological development do not surpass or negate the previous ones. They all have their importance in understanding and articulating the ineffable mystery of Jesus Christ and each adds a new dimension to the Christological whole. Further, the pluralism of New Testament Christologies reveals the *christological open-ended-ness.* The New Testament does not offer us a specific model for our Christology as the models of Christology in the New Testament are historically and culturally conditioned. "Instead the New Testament gives us a model for our christologizing by mediating an encounter with Jesus, and inviting us to articulate his significance for us today in our own local language, just as the New Testament writing did in theirs." (CWG 1, 275). Therefore, the plurality of Christologies in the New Testament invites us to develop our own Christologies responding to our context.

There is an essential difference between belief *about* Jesus and belief *in* Jesus. All historical studies can only lead one to affirm that the historical reality of Jesus existed and the truth about some of his teachings and activities. But belief *in* Jesus is the consequence of an existentially transforming encounter with the Risen Jesus similar to that of Paul on the way to Damascus. Such an existential encounter with the Risen Jesus transformed the self-understanding of Saul as a righteous Pharisee to Paul "a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God " (Rom 1:1). The meaning of Paul's existence was transformed and he realized his existence in Jesus Christ (Gal 2:20). Belief *in* Jesus involves giftedness of revelation and the self-surrender of faith. Belief *about* Jesus is witness of those who had belief *in* Jesus. So at the heart of all New Testament Christologies is *the experience of Jesus.* It is the experience of Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection as mediated through the communities to the New Testament authors was the starting

point of their Christologies. The New Testament authors used metaphors and symbols like Son of God, light, life, bread etc. Though these have emerged from their particular culture as they have roots in a common human experience they can be transposed from one world-view to another. Thus they are able to communicate to us the experience *of Jesus* and *belief in* Jesus that underlies the New Testament Christologies. Thus this trans-cultural experience of Jesus interpreted in the context of our lives is the starting point of our contextual Christologies. Some of the contextual Christologies of the New Testament would give us certain insights into developing our Christologies responding to our contexts.

3. Jesus of the Gospels

The Gospels do not provide us with a biography of Jesus but they allow us to *encounter him* CWG 2, 120). In writing about the historicity of the gospels (CWG 2, 1-5-21) Soares-Prabhu says, "The starting point of the Gospel tradition is the historical Jesus of Nazareth whose words and works were seen and heard by his disciples, eye-witnesses of what he said and did" (CWG 2, 114). After the death and resurrection of Jesus narrations of what Jesus said and did were handed down by the disciples and they were used for preaching, teaching and the worship of the early Church. The memories of the words and events of Jesus' life and ministry became transfigured memories after the resurrection of Jesus as they were all interpreted in the light of the shattering impact of the transforming experience of the resurrection of Jesus. Soares Prabhu says, "The post-Easter memory of Jesus was a *transfigured memory;* so that when the first Christians spoke about Jesus they described not what they had actually seen happening exactly as it was, but what they now understood to have then happened. And they reported the words and works in such a way as to bring out this new meaning they had seen in them" (CWG 2, 115). The Gospels are the skilful compilations of these interpreted narrations of the transfigured memory of the words and deeds of Jesus which each Evangelist arranging in a particular way

touching it up wherever necessary and interpreting his tradition according to the context of his community. Therefore, it is each evangelist's own theology of the Christ-event.

Mark's is the Gospel of "secret epiphanies", proclaiming that the words and deeds of Jesus as the hidden manifestations of the 'Son of God' who is also the crucified Messiah. Matthew sees the Church as the new Israel where Jesus as the risen Lord is present and walks in the way righteousness which Jesus taught. Luke presents the salvation history in which the ministry of Jesus is *the* time of salvation. For both Matthew and Luke Jesus is Son of God invested with the Spirit from the moment of conception. For John Jesus is the pre-existent wisdom, divine Messiah, the incarnation of the logos or the word made flesh. Soares Prabhu says, "The man who reads the Gospels critically, with the freshness its first hearers brought to them, does indeed meet Jesus in all his strangeness and fascination. He finds himself face to face with this man who fits into no category and yet belongs to all, who gentle yet strong, patient yet violent, conscious of his towering authority yet spending himself in service, so tolerant yet so adamant against sin" (CWG 2, 120). Such a Jesus one finds as utterly like every human in his suffering and anguish yet awesomely remote in his consciousness of his mission and his relation to God whom he calls *Abba*. In the Gospels one meets Jesus dying on the cross, only to rise again and there one "learns to accept a life that is always threatened by death, and finds the courage to be" (CWG 2, 121).

3.1 Spirit Christology of the Synoptic Gospels

Soares-Prabhu, while affirming the conspicuous role the Spirit of God played in the birth, life and ministry of Jesus, does not call it a Spirit Christology but his development of the theme, Jesus and the Spirit, is, indeed, the Spirit Christology of the Synoptic Gospels. Roger Haight defines Spirit Christology as: "A Spirit Christology I mean one that 'explains' how God is present and active in Jesus, and thus Jesus' divinity, by using

the biblical symbol of God as Spirit, and not the symbol Logos" (Haight, 1992, 257). In both Matthew and Luke birth from the Spirit is the basis for the divine Sonship of Jesus which goes beyond the traditionally attributed Sonship of Israel or the Messiah. In Matthew it is this divine Sonship of Jesus that makes him Emmanuel or God with us (Mt 1:23; 28:20). Luke expresses the divine Sonship of Jesus by narrating the loss of Jesus in the Temple and the revelation of the unique Sonship of Jesus himself by affirming his relation with his Father (Lk 2:41-51).

The Spirit is active in the life of Jesus in the beginning of his ministry. At his baptism Jesus receives the fullness of the Spirit. The dove-like Spirit comes down on Jesus and anoints him. After his baptism the Spirit leads him to the desert to be tempted. Jesus has victory over the evil spirit during his temptation. "The Spirit thus not only identifies Jesus as the Son, the authenticity of whose sonship is revealed through his fidelity in temptation; it also invests him with power to overcome evil , a power he will exercise through his ministry to free men from the bonds of Satan, sickness and sin" (CWG 2, 132). So the Spirit animates the entire ministry of Jesus.

Not only the inaugural proclamation of Jesus presented by Luke 4:16-30 reveals Jesus as the Spirit-filled evangelizer, but the entire Synoptic tradition affirms that Jesus is filled with the Spirit and is committed to the project of liberation. He is also presented as a Spirit-filled exorcist. He teaches the disciples to rely on the Spirit who will help them to hold on to their faith when they are persecuted. "The whole of Synoptic tradition thinks of the Spirit that inspires the life and mission of Jesus along the lines of the Old Testament *ruah Yahweh,* that is, as a creative and inspiring power (Lk 1:35; Mt 12:28). This power fills up the whole existence of Jesus…"(CWG 2, 137). Therefore, the Spirit that 'rests' on Jesus is distinguished from the enthusiasm of an ecstatic prophet's inspiration. It shows itself in the authority of Jesus in his teaching, healing and exorcisms. It works in Jesus' work which is wholly redemptive. The Spirit that rests on Jesus

is creative and the Synoptic tradition sees it as the Spirit of Sonship.

3.2 Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew

The conclusion to the Gospel (28:16-20) gives the key to the Christology of Matthew according to Soares Prabhu. It provides a center around the Christological texts of Matthew's Gospel. Using this key Matthew presents the Church's understanding of the theological status of their Lord. The Christological titles like the Son of Man, the Son of David, the Son of God, which reveal his significance for the new people of God (CWG 2, 157). Matthew re-structures the miracle stories to bring out their Christological meanings. The sayings of Jesus and the narratives of events in his life are arranged in Christologically significant patterns (CWG 2, 157).

Matthew tries to present Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophesies about the coming Messiah.

> To paint this theological portrait of Jesus Matthew uses a wide variety of literary and theological devices. He has Old Testament quotations which present events in the life of Jesus as fulfilment of Scripture: figures from Old Testament history like Moses and Israel who serve as 'types' of Jesus and reveal his significance for the new people of God.; Christological titles like the Son of Man, the Son of David, the Son of God,, which formulate the early Church's understanding of the theological status of their Lord; miracle-stories which have been re-structured to bring out their Christological meaning; sayings and narratives arranged in Christologically significant patterns (CWG 2, 157).

The theological portrait of Jesus presented by Matthew must be seen from the perspective of the revelation of Jesus' life and mission as recognized and understood by the disciples through the post-Easter encounter with Jesus narrated in Matthew 18:16-20. It is from the experience of the discipleship of the risen Jesus, the Lord to whom "all

authority" is given that one encounters the reality of Jesus. From this faith-encounter with the risen Jesus, the disciples understand the significance of what Jesus taught and did during his earthly life.

Jesus as the *Teacher of Righteousness* has the authority (*exousia*) not only to cast out demons, to heal and to forgive sins but also to teach the way of righteousness leading those who follow him by his example. . According to George M Soares Prabhu, "His [Jesus'] authority, then, derives not from the traditional institutions of his society, but from his own personal charisma. …, similar to that of the Old Testament prophets. His charisma, like theirs, is based not on personal magnetism but on the possession of the 'spirit', It derives, that is, from a profound religious vocation-experience,…Jesus probably had such a call experience at his baptism by John (Mk 1: 9-11" (CWG 2, 141). Matthew organizes the teaching of Jesus into five discourses like the five books of Torah (Pentateuch): the Sermon on the Mount, the Missionary Discourse, the Parabolic Discourse, the Discourse on the Church, the Discourse on the End Times (Mt 5-7; 13; 18; 24-25). All the discourses end with a stereotyped concluding formula: "when Jesus has finished all these sayings" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Further, the miracles of Jesus are also means of teaching for Matthew. Both words and deeds of Jesus are the manifestations of God's offer of salvation.

Though the gospel according to Matthew emphasizes the ministry of Jesus as a teacher (Mt 4:23; 9:34; 11:1) the other Synoptic gospels also refer to the teachings of Jesus along with his preaching and healing ministry (Mk 2:13; 4:1; 6:34. Lk 4:14, 31; 6:6; 13:10; 19:47; 20: 1; 21: 37). Jesus had no school or any assigned place where he would offer his teaching. He taught in the synagogues, in the Temple, on the shores of the lake or wherever the people gathered to listen to him and get themselves healed of their infirmities. So his teaching was mostly in the rural countryside or in the villages rather than in the cities. Though he had a group of disciples whom he taught specifically on matters that would be important for their future mission, Jesus' teaching

was predominantly addressed to the poor, the marginalized, the so called sinners and the outcastes.

It should be clear to us that there is a distinction between his *teaching* (*didaskein*) and his *preaching* (*keryssein*). The theme of his preaching is the good news about the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Jesus "went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Mt 4:23). His teaching is about how God sees humans and their world and how God relates with his people. The observation of the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians is that Jesus teaches about the way of God. "Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men" (Mt 22:16). "'Preaching' is thus proclamation: the announcing of the good news: 'teaching' is ethical and religious instruction: an explanation of the form that the 'repentance' or 'conversion' *(metanoia*) brought about by our acceptance of the good news must take. Who is this Jesus who speaks with such authority with which he teaches, heals and casts out demons? Matthew has many Christological titles for Jesus: he is the Nazarene (1:23), the Lord (8:2; 9:28; 15:25), the Christ (11:2; 16:16), the prophet from Nazareth (21:11), the Son of David (9:27; 15:22; 21:9), the Son of Man (8:28; 9:6; 10:23) and the Son of God (4:3; 14:33; 16:16). He also presents Jesus as *the Saviour, Emmanuel, the Son of God, the Personified Wisdom* and the Revealer of the Father and the Son of David.

Jesus the Saviour

An important element of the portrait of Jesus is his authority to forgive sins. In the infancy narrative of Matthew itself Jesus is presented as the one who "will save his people from their sins" (1:21). At the Last Supper, the symbolic pouring out of his blood as the sacramental anticipation of his death is explained that it is "for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). Jesus proclaims the

Kingdom which calls for repentance and conversion. Matthew affirms that Jesus alone can forgive sins and save his people.

Jesus the Emmanuel

In the key text of the gospel of Matthew (28:16-20) the risen Jesus promises his presence till the end of the age. This presence is not a cultic presence or a place-linked presence like the *shekina Yahweh* or the glory of God on the tent in the Old Testament. It will be like the supporting presence of Yahweh, a personal presence, given to the charismatic leaders of Israel whom Yahweh had called for a special mission (Ex 3:12; Josh 1:5; Judg 6:16; Jer 1:3). This active presence of God himself with the disciples till the end of the ages promised at the close of the gospel has its beginning in the first chapter of the gospel itself (Mt 1:23) as Matthew presents Jesus as *Emmanuel* (God with us). Jesus is Emmanuel as he is the mediating presence of God among people because is the Son of God and at the same time he is also Son of David.

Jesus the Son of David

It is the Jewish tradition that the expected messiah comes as a descendent of David (Is 9:6f; Mic 5:2) following the prophesy of Nathan (Sam 7:12). Therefore, the title Son of David is a messianic title. Matthew applies this title to Jesus in his Genealogy (1:1). In the Annunciation story Jesus is Son of David as he is adopted by Joseph into David's family. Jesus is addressed as 'Son of David' by some who pleaded with him to heal them (9:27; 15:22; 20:30f). Jesus' life and mission as the Messiah is presented by Matthew by means of the familiar Jewish technique of *typology.* He is the type of Moses and Israel. Jesus is the new Moses, the true Suffering Servant and the Servant of Yahweh. Jesus as the Messiah is Son of David but for Matthew the messiahnism of Jesus can be more appropriately expressed by the title, 'Son of God'

Jesus the Son of God

Matthew presents the confession of Simon Peter acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah or Christ and the Son of the living God. "You are Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:17). The revelation of Jesus as the Son of God is affirmed also at the baptism scene, (Mt 3:13-17), at the time of temptation (Mt 4:1-11) at the transfiguration (Mt 17:1-8) and in other narratives like the invocation of the demoniacs cast out by Jesus (Mt 8:29) and the answer to the question of the High Priest at the trial of Jesus (Mt 26:4). On four significant occasions of Jesus' life he is referred to as Son of God by Matthew. In the infancy narrative we find that Matthew identifies Jesus as Son of God in the context of the flight into Egypt (Mt 2:15): "Out of Egypt I called my Son" (ref Hos 11:1). Both here and in Mt 1:23 Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is also acknowledged as Son of God by the disciples when they experienced him as walking on the water (Mt 14:33) and finally by Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi acknowledging Jesus as "the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). Matthew's affirmation about the identity of Jesus as the Son of God is not in the sense of the Old Testament understanding of the messianic king who is also termed as God's son or in the Hellenistic sense of the miracle working 'divine man'. In Matthew the title 'Son of God' refers to his being.

> So Jesus appears in Matthew's Gospel as the Son of God, related to God in an altogether unique and intimate way, so that he can regularly address God as 'my Father' (7:21:11:27, 20:23; 26:29, 26:53) , 'my heavenly Father' (15 13: 18:35), or 'my Father who is in the heavens' (10:32; 12:50, 16:17; 18: 10-19. Such Sonship certainly transcends any that we find among the charismatic leaders of the Old Testament or the divine men or the Hellenistic world, though Matthew has not spelled out its metaphysics (through, for instance, a doctrine of pre-existence) in any systematic way (CWG 2, 1664-65).

Though the theological reflection on the pre-existence of the Son of God later unfolded in the Logos theology of John

or the Cosmic Christology of Colossians, it may be discerned in a related Matthean theme: the identification of Jesus with the personified Wisdom of God.

Jesus as Personified Wisdom

In articulating the Christian experience of Jesus as the Son of God Matthew alludes to the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament more than other evangelists. He identifies Jesus with the personified Wisdom. Both in the Wisdom literature and in the writings of the intra-testamental period the wisdom of God is a feminine personification. In the Old Testament "she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore …. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness" (Wis 7:25-26). She pre-exists creation and takes part in the shaping of it. (Prov 8:22-31). This personified wisdom is identified with Jesus by Matthew. Therefore, in Matthew's gospel Jesus' makes Wisdom's invitation to "those who labour and are heavy laden' his own (11:28-30) as in Sirach 51:26.

Jesus the Son Who Reveals the Father

Jesus as the personified Wisdom is intimately united with God, his Father. Therefore, only he can reveal the Father to all humans (Mt 11:27). Only the Son knows the Father. This knowledge is not an intellectual knowledge but a personal communion. This mutual relationship of communion or the knowledge of the Father and the Son is proclaimed by Jesus. "Father and Son, then are united by bonds of deep personal communion, and it is this personal relation which the Son extends to those to whom he chooses to reveal the Father" (CWG 2, 167-168). Jesus reveals the Father as Father and shares his Sonship with all humans revealing the Father's love inviting them to experience his gracious and forgiving love. Jesus' Person and mission are rooted in this Sonship. Soares Prabhu affirms: "It is this revelation of Jesus as the Son who makes known the Father which gives

Mathew's portrait of Jesus its unity and depth. For if Jesus is indeed personified wisdom, if he is the Teacher of Righteousness and the Saviour from Sin, he is all these because he is the Son of the living God, or more simply the Son" (CWG 2, 168).

According to Soares-Prabhu, in the context, especially if one looks at the reality of Jesus from the *bhakti* traditions Jesus is the divine *Sadguru,* the incarnate deity who can be mystically encountered by his followers. Matthew's presentation of the reality of Jesus is this *Sadguru* in the absolute sense of this word. Jesus is the authoritative Lord, the teacher of righteousness, the Saviour from Sin and as the Son he perfectly reveals the Father. "Jesus is indeed *the Sadguru*, infinite in his greatness and grace, infinite too in the perspective he opens and the revelation he gives", Soares Prabhu affirms.

4. Jesus of Faith for Contextual Christologies

Soares Prabhu argues that our task is not to repeat or elaborate the formulae of traditional Christology but to create new Christologies by confronting the cry for life in our contexts with our own experience of Jesus. His critique of the traditional Christological formulae is that they are formulated in metaphysical categories of thought which would not make any sense today especially in the situation of the developing World which has many poor and many religions. In this situation it is also not relevant to adopt or adapt the New Testament models of Christologies which are expressly tied to specific communities living in concrete historical situations.

The contextual Christologies we need to create must take into account two important aspects of life and faith-life: the cry for life and our Christian experience of Jesus as Jesus of Faith. The cry for life involves the economic dimension which grounds our physical existence, the affective dimension which grounds our psychic life and the meaning-giving or symbolic dimension of our life which finds expression in religious quest (CWG 4, 276). Both bread and the word are needed in all contexts of life

especially where massive economic poverty, the racist, sexist, caste and gender discriminations dehumanize and oppress human beings and there are many religions which throw up competing worlds of meaning. In these contexts of life Soares Prabhu says that the "cry for life is a cry for survival, for recognition and for meaning. It is a cry for liberation (economic and cultural) and for dialogue. It is within these parameters that Jesus must be interpreted…" (CWG 4, 276).

In interpreting Jesus in the context of the cry for life it is not 'the historical Jesus' discovered by means of historical criticism. It is also not 'the Christ of faith' presented through the dogmatic and liturgical formulae but the *Jesus of faith*. Who is this Jesus of faith? It is the Jesus presented to us in the confessional history of the New Testament. Soares Prabhu further explains; "The Jesus of faith is the Jesus of history as experienced by his faithful followers (and not, for example, as experienced by the religious and political leaders who opposed him). It is a category that lies between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, taking off from the Jesus of history and moving towards the interpretative explicitness of the Christ of faith" (CWG 4, 277). It emerges, according to him, in the *dialectic interaction of the critic's Jesus of history and communities' Christ of faith* (CWG 4, 277). Jesus of faith is the Jesus of our personal encounter, a Jesus we *know* or experience and not just a Jesus we *know about*. However, it is not just a personal experience alone but a community's experience of the living Jesus. "The Jesus of faith is the community's Jesus, of which scripture and tradition are constitutive parts, and where faith meets scholarship in a mutually corrective tension." Therefore, the contextual Christologies in the developing nations (formerly called the Third World) have their loci or places in the communities which are shaped by their experience of Jesus and give expression to it in the totality of their lives, their worship and their studies and their praxis. A relevant contextual Christology pre-supposes christological faith and praxis.

The contextual Christologies need to enter into dialogue with religions and movements which stand for human values like

freedom, equality, love, justice etc. The Christological insights can be gathered from the sufferings of people all over the world especially in the developing countries. Such a dialogue needs to focus on the mystery of Jesus and not on the 'mechanisms' that have been put forward to explain the mystery of Jesus. Traditional Christology moved from mystery to mechanism. Contextual Christologies must focus on the mystery of Jesus and follow 'the hermeneutic circle' which moves from experience/ praxis to mystery and back to experience.

Jesus experienced God as unconditional love and as his *Abba.* This God-experience was the source of his authority and freedom. With authority he confronted the religious, social and political establishment of his people with sovereign freedom. Jesus challenged the oppressive system of his society and all its rules of discrimination and the exclusion of the poor, the sick and women. He transcended all religious laws which dehumanize humans. He taught and practiced the spirit of law embodied in love (*agape*). The love commandment of Jesus is that we love God by loving our neighbour. To love God means, concretely, to love one's neighbour. Love involves justice. Therefore, love as exercised by Jesus led him into conflict with forces that oppose justice and love. Soares Prabhu says: "In an unequal world where class, caste, race and gender conflicts exist, love must take sides. For nothing is more unjust (or more unloving) than to divide equally among unequals, or treat the oppressor and oppressed alike. The love of Jesus leads him to make (as the God of Bible makes) an unambiguous option for the poor and the outcast, because they are as the Bible sees them, always victims of oppression" (CWG 4, 288).

Jesus lives out this *solidarity* and *conflict* throughout his life. It finds its christological symbol in the *incarnation.* This solidarity of Jesus with the victims of economic, social and political oppressionis not merely a passive solidarity but leads to confrontation with the oppressors and finally to his crucifixion. But the death and burial of Jesus was not the end of everything. He was encountered alive. Indeed, the mystery of Jesus experienced

as alive is the answer to the cry of life. Jesus experienced alive by individual persons and communities must live out that experience by *Christo-praxis*. From such experience and praxis contextual Christologies will emerge.

In the Indian context Christological reflection that is relevant can be developed only by those who are graced to have an experience of the Person of Jesus and actualize that transforming experience in solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, the discriminated against and all who are oppressed in some way or other. It is by actualizing the *dharma of Jesus* which involves experiencing God as *Abba* and God's unconditional love that makes every human being a son or a daughter without any discrimination. It lets one to be truly free to be oneself and give oneself up in self-emptying love or *agapeic concern* for others living out the values of the Sermon on the Mount. It is all inclusive and it establishes solidarity and table-fellowship with those who are excluded from the main-stream of the society especially the Dalits. A relevant contextual Christology gets into serious dialogue various religions and world-views in order to establish the reign of God where all humans are brothers and sisters and everyone is concerned about the welfare of all. The contextual Christology in the Indian context needs to articulate the demands of continuing the prophetic tradition of Jesus who challenged all oppressive and dehumanizing systems. In solidarity with those who cry for life contextual Christology or Christologies need to have concern for the welfare of nature, protecting and caring for it as it manifests God's goodness, graciousness and grandeur as well as it is necessary for humans' survival as humans.

Conclusion

Among the important contributions of George M. Soares Prabhu to the development of biblical theological reflections is his presentation of the Jesus of Faith. He overcomes the unnecessary controversies created by biblical scholars in the last century on the distinction between the historical Jesus

and the Christ of faith by introducing his well-researched and insightful articulation of Jesus of Faith. Soares Prabhu affirmed that unlike the Jesus of history which is the result of historical critical search for information, the Jesus of Faith is the one who can be experienced by personal encounter and in the community by one who follows Jesus as his disciple. It is the Jesus of faith encountered by the early community of the disciples that is articulated in the gospels conditioned by the specific context of the communities in which they were formed. The traditional Christologies further expressed it through dogmas and doctrines using the metaphysical categories. Contextual Christologies of all generations cannot adopt or adapt the traditional Christologies or the specific New Testament Christologies. They need to be evolved from the personal and communitarian experience of the Jesus of faith who continues to be with the disciples till the end of time.

George M. Soares Prabhu's critique of the traditional Christologies and the limitations of the contextual Christologies of the gospels seem to be valid only to the extent that they have limitations of the categories of thought and specificity of the context in which they were articulated. But he has not explained how one would reach the Jesus of faith without them. In spite of it, the challenging insights of George M. Soares Prabhu on the Jesus of faith are important for the development of contextual Christologies especially in dialogue with many religions and in solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized and the discriminated in the Indian context.

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Integration in Integrity: George M. Soares Prabhu's Vision for a contemporary Society and Humanity

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Abstract: In this article we are exploring Soares-Prabhus' all-inclusive vision of reality in the biblical context and cultural and religious traditions in a bird's eye view from different perspectives. It is a humble exploration of the multi–dimensional and inter-cultural vision of Soares-Prabhu. His vision opens up new horizons to see reality without fragmentation. His vision shows us rather the hidden thread of unity that interconnects each and every diverse notion in the abyss of existence. He is broad enough to respect the values in other religious traditions and tries to combine them with the gospel-values especially with kingdom-values. He provides us with a world-view that cuts through the sacred-secular, faith-justice, and contemplation-action divide.

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Keywords: Fusion of Horizons, Integration, Integrity, Antigreed and Antipride, Pluriformity.

Introduction

George M. Soares-Prabhu puts forward a uniquely Indian approach to the Bible that would unite an Indian social reading in socio-economic terms with an Indian religious reading, in which Christian scriptural texts would be better interpreted in India's rich religious traditional context. Soares-Prabhu's Jesus is the Lord of unconditional love who radically transformed the understanding of ethics from being a law-based to a love-based norm of life. Jesus' teachings on the "Abba experience" dwell on God's unconditional love. Love and social justice are the crux of his manifesto. The theme social justice connected with the liberation for the poor and the downtrodden is a key concept in Soares-Prabhu's works. His copious writings pass through a variety of biblical themes that find their culmination in the love of God and love of neighbour. For Soares-Prabhu the term *poor* (*anawim*) should be understood in a comprehensive sense that includes the destitute, the illiterate, the social outcast, the physically handicapped and mentally ill. For Jesus, liberation of poor means liberating them from all dehumanizing oppressive structures and powers that make them on bondage.

While analysing the historical, political and socio-cultural context in the past, Soares- Prabhu proposes a new hermeneutical vision for the contemporary Christian world. He meticulously draws parallels between the Indian and Palestinian contexts and shows us that we should raise our voice against the political, socio-cultural structures and liberate the poor and the oppressed by not only helping them spiritually but also by uplifting them materially, for he believes that liberation is not mere an other-worldly affair but of very much this worldly. Oppression, for him is not merely a sociological problem, but rather as a socio-spiritual and theological problem. Soares-Prabhu proposes a vision of Christian faith and mission for the contemporary world.

In this article we just look at Soares-Prabhu's comprehensive vision in a bird's eye view from diverse perspectives. I just touched a few dimensions of his visions as I could not be able to exhaust its depth, vastness and richness in quantity and quality. I am just trying to explore how Soares-Prabhu's vision is multi–dimensional and inter-cultural. His openness to different religious traditions makes him to see the thread that interconnects them in the abyss of existence. He is broad enough to respect the values in other religious traditions and tries to combine them with gospel-values especially with kingdom-values. He provides us with a world-view that cuts through the sacred-secular, faith-justice, and contemplation-action divide. He puts forward a world-view that pays attention to the material, intellectual, psychic and spiritual dimensions of our collective human experience. Soares-Prabhu's sense of mission goes beyond the petty circles of recruiting new members for the Christian community and he calls for a life of radical detachment and fundamental trust in God and a thorough fidelity to Jesus. He tries to make a fusion of different horizons that are globally appealing with an accommodative broad-mindedness. He is in a way a prophet who stands for social righteousness and establishment of a society based kingdom-values.

1. Fusion of Horizons

Soares-Prabhu through his writings opens up new horizons of understanding that extends to all levels of life. It touches every core of reality and enhances a basic confidence in reality. Dynamic with playfulness and filled with insights his vision covers an astounding variety, encompassing many disciplines, the entire globe, and the sweep of history. His writings have subsumed Scripture, natural science, philosophy, theology, history of religions, hermeneutics, sociology and many other allied disciplines. He is at once a Bible Scholar, theologian and a mystic. However, even with these terms we cannot capture the heart of Soares-Prabhu's vision, which is an eye opener to all those who look at reality with their coloured eyeglasses of partial

worldviews. Being well versed in oriental and occidental cultural visions, he could easily compare them with great precision in the light of the gospels. In his book *Inculturation, Liberation, Dialogue* he meticulously compares the western and eastern cultural background in various levels (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 2).

The crisis we face today is threefold, the ecological predicament, the humanistic crisis and the theological dilemma. The one-sided anthropocentric worldview, which is controlled and carried by reason, made us forget the interconnectedness of reality (*CWG* 2, 274). We fail to make a synthesis among the different spheres of life because of our lack of patience and overconfidence that originates from the sensory knowledge. What is at stake, then, is a satisfactory and sufficient account of social reality, an integrated understanding of Jesus' *manifesto* (*CWG* 3: 274). We see this division in all areas of life, the body-soul split, the sacred secular bifurcation, the God-world–human separation, the past-present-future partition, and rich-poor distancing, etc (*CWG* 3, 150). He provides us with a holistic biblical perspective as he underscores the metaphysical oneness. The biblical tradition avoids sharp distinctions of duality (soul-body, matter-spirit, word-deed, divine grace and human freedom). All these, according to him are correlative and he tries to make a convergence of all that seem to be peripherally divergent (*CWG* 4, 102). He urges us to make a complete transformation by establishing the biblical social justice, which removes the dichotomy and fragmentation and helps us view reality as an 'integrated whole' that accommodates all human beings in fellowship (*CWG* 3, 156). Soares-Prabhus's vision attempts to overcome injustice of every form to uplift the downtrodden globally. His vision seems to stretch beyond the Indian reality and tends towards the global realm that gives us the mystical orientation and insight. His words are evocative in the realm of the spirit. He criticizes thoroughly the biased mentality that does not accommodate other cultures and social traditions (*CWG* 2, 290).

2. Global and Holistic Perspective

Soares-Prabhu opens up new horizons of wholeness and inter-mingling. His views represent a holistic approach and he advocates for a Christian theology that has to produce a theology of religions to accommodate them. Citing different incidents from the history, he vehemently opposes a mono-cultural approach (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 16-17). He observes, "This is not to lapse into 'relativism'. Rather it is to suggest that Christian theology has yet to produce a theology of religions that is adequate to the much improved understanding of non-Christian religions that we have today" (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 16-17). Humans can no longer live in splendid isolation without having contact and communication with one another. To live in geographical boxes, closeted in the neat compartments, segregated into economical capsules, cultural areas, racial ghettoes, separated by the citadels of cast-superiority have become the things of the past. One example may support this: over a century ago, only a very few percent of people moved more than a hundred miles from their birthplaces. The modern technologies have made travel easier, and in a matter of hours we can travel across the seas in and around the world. This has made possible not only the intermingling of peoples, but also the coming together of cultures and values. He shows examples of other religious traditions that got incuturated into the local cultures like Buddhism (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 3).

Soares-Prabhu analyses the present day situation with factual evidences. In his writings, the contemporary situation is very well pictured. He strongly believes that "the time for one-way traffic in the meeting of cultures and religions is, at least theoretically over" (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 18). For him, each culture has a proper place in the globe and has something to offer for the other. In this way, Prabhu's vision accommodates everything globally and interconnects everything. His idea of inter-textual reading would certainly contribute a lot to understand other religions better and is a catalyst to promote harmony globally. It would act a joining factor of different scriptural perspectives that would certainly unite people to work together for a better global

society established in social justice and kingdom values (*CWG* 3, 149). Soares-Prabhu's vision provides a unified and integrated perception of social reality. His idea of an Indian reading of the gospels urges us to take into account of the rich pluriformity of religious India (*CWG* 3, 149).

3. Vision of Social Justice

Soares-Prabhu is a prophet of the poor (*anawim*). Throughout his writing his concern for the poor is a recurring theme. The Biblical history, for him, begins with the liberation of the poor (Exodus event) (*CWG* 4, 100). He analyses the present social reality form various perspectives – historical, economical, sociological etc. For him, poor are always the victims of injustice, victims of social aristocracy. Poor are deprived of their share (which they deserve) and struggle to fulfil their basic needs because of the concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny minority (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 6). His vision on poor stands as a vision of life, which results from his urge to encompass, become, and to live reality to the fullest by establishing Jesus' kingdom values (*CWG* 4, 242). The manifesto of Jesus for the liberation of poor receives greater precision in the Beatitudes (Lk 6:20-26) (*CWG* 3, 145). Based himself on the scriptural texts he tries to show us that everyone has a right to the 'land' that stands as a symbol of territory, freedom, peace, prosperity, in a word, for all that is needed to achieve the fullness of a truly human existence (*CWG* 3, 151). For him, an interpretation of Bible "which fails to discover the profound social concerns which lies at the heart of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom will not be a Christian reading" (*CWG* 2, 34). Jesus took up a stance for all the marginalized, that means for those who are economically marginalized (the destitute) or culturally downtrodden ones (outcaste) (*CWG* 3, 147). Such a stance made Jesus an enemy of the so called elites in Palestine symbolized by the Temple, the economic, political and religious power (*CWG* 4, 174). He attributes the same to the third world countries including India. His concern was always to have communion with the social

reality without losing the gospel values as he states, "A 'social' reading which eliminated the religious concerns rooted in India's religiosity from its vision of a new humanity will not be truly Indian" (*CWG* 2. 34).

For Soares-Prabhu, poverty is the result of social injustice and inequality. Cultural and religious factors accentuates to this tragic situation (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 6 and CWG 3, 150). He elaborates the situation in India and third world countries with statistics. The unequal distribution of food and other resources leads to this appalling situation. The exploitation of the poor by rich minority is the root cause of massive poverty (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 6). He assumes that this massive poverty is because of two processes-historical and dialectical. It is historical because of colonialism. Economical motives are always behind colonialism and oppression. He writes: "Economical exploitation is the inevitable feature of colonial rule for no country occupies another for altruistic motives" (*CWG* 4, 138). It is dialectical, because the wealth of rich is directly proportional to the poverty of the poor (*CWG* 3, 150). His comparison between situation in India and situation in Palestine during the time of Jesus is noteworthy as he elaborates solid reasons to establish that these two situations are almost the same (*CWG* 3, 150). In India the official statistics may not be factual. There's the problem of huge segments of the population that are not included in the official poverty count, namely the Dalits (the untouchables), women and minority ethnic tribes. They're groups that are marginalized in the society and it's more convenient for politicians to announce massive reductions in poverty by simply not including them in census (*CWG* 2, 256). It is easier to pretend they do not exist at all. However, it is obviously difficult to change the way an entire country and its society functions. "History doesn't repeat itself," Mark Twain supposedly observed, "but it often rhymes." Poverty in Palestine during the time of Jesus and in India today, according to Soares-Prabhu, is the result of exploitation by local elite and high caste rich (*CWG* 3, 151). Jesus stood for the poor (oppressed) and his proclamation was against the riches (not

against the rich). Jesus' uncompromised stand against riches is balanced by his intransigent commitment to the poor (but not to poverty) (*CWG* 2, 260). Prabhu highlights in his writings the manifesto of Jesus to fight against social injustice and inequality and stand firmly with the oppressed (*CWG* 4, 157).

Soares-Prabhu affirmingly states that a thrust towards a fraternal community is the crux of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom. It is a revolutionary thrust against all kinds of injustices and oppression that hinders the community of fraternity (*CWG* 1, 200). He criticizes the stagnant social and religious institutions in India (like the caste-system) that promotes the social and economic inequality (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 6). Jesus' miracles also must be seen in this context. They were saving events continuing, bringing into fulfillment, the process of human liberation begun at the Exodus (*CWG* 3, 25). Jesus, for Soares-Prabhu did not come to rescue a few from an oppressed system, but to open up a new future for humans that would lead humankind to a community of love, freedom fellowship and justice. His sermon on the mount is the radicalization of the law embracing human life in its entirety that finds its expression in love (*CWG* 4, 163-163). Such a community (New Israel) is possible only when the oppressive powers are overthrown (*CWG* 3, 30). He calls such egalitarian as Jesus community where all are equal before God (*CWG* 4, 147). So, salvation is not purely an otherworldly affair. It is the total liberation of the whole human person from the oppressive power structures (*CWG* 3, 27). His notion of "God as Abba" further elaborates the ideal of equality and social justice (*CWG* 4, 121-23). So, he advocates for a theology of social justice that takes into account the material and spiritual needs of the oppressed rather than an otherworldly ideology. Analysing the Indian and Asian context, he predicts that "An exegesis which is not fully liberative and that doesn't transforms the individual, society and cosmos cannot be truly Indian" (*CWG* 4, 40-41).

4. Vision of Accommodative Character

Soares Prabhu's attempt to fuse the eastern and the western religious and social ideas indicates the accommodative character of his vision which surpasses the 'either/or' question of reality. He presents a balanced view without extremes, and blends the basic dimensions of social and religious structures in an appealing manner. He holds the view that an all-inclusive worldview is needed in interpreting the Scriptural texts especially Bible in the Indian context (*CWG* 4. 36). He explains the need for harmonious blending of the ideas in the light of gospels because he believes that Jesus' proclamation is valid universally. For him, being is essentially a relation. The very structure of reality reveals a relation. Living in fraternal communion and fellowship is a relation (*CWG* 3, 155-58). While basing himself on Scripture, especially on Gospels, Prabhu was broad enough to accept other religious worldviews and social notions. In his copious writings he draws parallels between Christian concepts and other religious ideologies (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 6-7). In his writings, he wholeheartedly shows the goodness of other religious and cultural ideologies that complement the kingdom values in the gospels (*CWG* 4, 38). In his article, "Antigreed and Antipride", he eulogizes the goodness of tribal worldview and explains it in the light of the biblical concepts (*CWG* 1, 244). He even compares the tribal community with Israelites: "Basic ethos of the Bible is that of a tribe. 'Israel' began as a tribe..." (*CWG* 1, 244). He believes that tribal values underlie the ethical teachings of Jesus. The Hinduistic vision of the cosmos as the body of God is profoundly stressed by Soares- Prabhu while he speaks of the India reading of the Bible (*CWG* 4, 40). In his interpretation of Mission command, he shows how Buddhist's notion of '*Dhamma'* coincides with Mathew's gospel text (*CWG* 4, 63). His confession about the missing "holistic understanding in the Bible about the cosmos" is noteworthy. He States: "The anthropocentric tradition of the Bible allows little room for reverence for life, or respect for nature to flourish" (*CWG* 2, 211). He observes that this anthropocentric attitude has led to

the Christian west to exploit nature ruthlessly. So, he sincerely and courageously shows that the other religious traditions like Jainism, Buddism and Hinduism as a cosmocentric corrective to the anthropocentric worldview of the Bible (*CWG* 2, 211).

Soares-Prabhu's vast knowledge of the other religious Scriptures and ideologies has found its profound expression in his vision. Whenever he interprets a biblical word or concept he has always enthusiastically tries to find its equivalent in other religious traditions, especially in Indian religions (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 7-8). He vehemently opposes the exclusivism of Christianity and argues for an inclusive approach that accommodates all (from Karl Barth's exclusivism of true religion to John Hick's 'universe of faiths') (*CWG* 1, 57-58). He has great appreciation for Asian way of thinking that is guided by the principle of identity rather than by the principle of contradiction (Soares-Prabhu, 1983: 16). He accommodates the non-Christian worldviews as he says that Christian Word should need a double translation (original hermeneutics and new hermeneutics) for a proper understanding when we apply it to the context of other religious and social cultures (*CWG* 1, 61). Quoting Vatican II documents at different occasions, he shows that Christian church should not close itself to the signs of the time but should become a "world church" rather than an "export religion" (*CWG* 1, 61). He raises his prophetic voice in many of his writings to call for an Asian Christian theology that accommodates people of Asia to understand Jesus and his teachings better. Many of his articles are of an Indian reading of the gospels that shows how he takes into account the good elements in them to interpret biblical concepts (*CWG* 4, 217). Jesus may have many names unknown to us: "These names will be revealed only if we have the courage and creativity to break with routinized patterns of thinking and learn to read the gospels with Asian eye" (*CWG* 1, 68). He observes that Jesus is not a stranger to the socially oriented religious ideologies of India. Hinduism, from Ram Mohan Roy to Rajneesh has acknowledged Jesus in their writings. In Jesus both God-experience (religious concern) and human concern (social)

meet. Therefore, he urges us to have a genuine dialogue with religious and social traditions of India so that Jesus of Nazareth would become Christ of liberation (*CWG* 1, 201).

5. Innovative Anthropology

Soares-Prabhu holds human beings in high esteem. For him, human being is a conscious agent in the very destiny of the universe. He vehemently opposes the traditional concept of human person as a soul (a non-material entity) temporarily housed in a material body *(CWG* 3, 86). The biblical understanding of human person is very different from this concept. A human person is not a soul living in a body but an animated body, perfectly integrated *(CWG* 3, 86). Therefore, it is the body rooted in the cosmos and related to other human persons that gives identity to the person. So, human person is essentially material and communitarian: "His or her ultimate destiny cannot consist in his/her abandoning the body for a spiritual heaven and the purely intellectual delight of endless vision of God" *(CWG* 3, 86). So he asserts, "What the Bible looks forward to therefore, is not the salvation of the 'soul', but the resurrection of the body" (*CWG* 3, 86). Bible is thoroughly holistic in the understanding of human person who is depicted not as a soul in the body like charioteer in the chariot but as an integrated whole (body and soul) (*CWG* 2, 201).

Soares-Prabhus' anthropology provides us with a new biblical insight that extends to the realm of the cosmic dimensions. He even uses the notion of humans as a reflection, an image of the whole reality. The overall development of human beings goes hand in hand with the transformation of the cosmos because of the intrinsic ontological connection between human beings and reality. His idea of salvation too is very much connected with his anthropology. He writes: "That is salvation for the Bible is not eternal life lived out in a spiritual heaven 'up there', to which we go after a provisional time of testing on earth. It is the transformation of the cosmos into 'the new heavens and the new earth' and of humankind into the new and definitive 'family of

God'" (*CWG* 3, 86) Therefore, the enhancing of human beings also entails the enhancing of reality. This view is certainly a guideline and incentive to all those who work for the betterment of the human society. Soares-Prabhu's holistic understanding of human person paves way to a new understanding of spirituality that is of this-worldly and communitarian. "It (spirituality) is concerned not with any one area of life (the spiritual) but the whole of life and the way in which this is lived out" (*CWG* 3, 87).

Soares-Prabhu points out that genuine spirituality should descend to the concrete realities of everyday life. It should take care not only of the spiritual needs but it is directed to the human person in the totality of his or her needs *(CWG* 3, 156). He observes that talk on spirituality becomes talk about prayer, contemplation, inner freedom, detachment, indifference to pairs of opposites, and so on. It doesn't usually come down to the realm of material living–to the price of bread, the scarcity of edible oil, the exaction of the money lender, the problems of finding job and so on. These are not seen as part of spirituality, he laments" *(CWG* 3, 86). The full humanization of one takes place only when the material and spiritual are realized (*CWG* 1, 200). Spirituality in which people are preoccupied with the salvation of immortal souls at the expense of mortal bodies cannot lead to liberation. A genuine biblical spirituality therefore provides the inspiration and empowerment to uplift the whole human person (not only one's soul) (*CWG* 3, 88). Interpreting the biblical concepts, he establishes comprehensively the dignity of human person as he or she is created in the image and likeness of God. By insisting on the inviolable sacredness of every human person, Prabhu reminds us of the greatness of a human being and thereby the responsibility toward the other (*CWG* 4, 82). He elevates human dignity to the divine realm by saying that right relation with God depends on the right relation with neighbour (*CWG* 4, 80). Love in the New Testament is primarily is love of concern for the other. How will we return God's unconditional love towards us? His answer is "to do good to someone." Quoting 1 Jn 4:12, he establishes the fact that the process which begins with God's

abundant love for us reaches its full circle only when we return this love to God as we encounter Him our neighbour (*CWG* 3, 69-70). So, his anthropology finds its innovative expression in love-love for God is crystallized in love for neighbour. The love commandment of Jesus elevates the worth of a human person by placing him/her at a higher level of existential value. The love of neighbour (horizontal) is placed almost in the same level of love of God (vertical) (*CWG* 4, 112-113). Such *horizontantlistic anthropology* was shocking to many during Jesus' time. Soares Prabhu, all the way through his writings underlines this '*horizontalism*' as he spells out his idea of social justice. In fact, God is loved when the neighbour is loved (*CWG* 4, 115-116).

Another evocative notion, Soares-Prabhu proposes, is the sacredness of the secular as he interprets the *Johnnine sutra* (Jn 1:14). The "Word" was made flesh and dwelt among us. The "Word" which is wholly in the realm of the divine enters wholly into the realm of matter. The wholly sacred becomes wholly secular (*CWG* 2, 203). By this entering of the "Word" humankind is blessed and divinized. This becoming of the "Word" into flesh is not a simple appearance of the divine in the flesh, but it is a permanent dwelling. It is not a simple *avatara* of God like in Hinduism. Spirit is not the negation of matter but its integrating and vivifying principle (Gen.1:2, Ezek.37:1-14) (*CWG* 2, 203). It is the process of deification of humanness and humanization of the divineness. Sacred and secular are not two distinct realities but two dimensions of one reality or two levels of the same world. This is the real presence of God in material reality-*Secularization of the Sacred.* (*CWG* 2, 203). So, everything is sacred and everything is secular at the same time (*CWG* 2, 211). This is the revolutionary message that he puts forward by interpreting the *Johannine* text. As Irenaeus says, *Son of God became son of man in order to make sons of men sons of God.* Jesus' was a concrete human life, lived out in a radical self-giving, service and obedience. The "Word" has so graced the human race and added a new meaning to humanity (*CWG* 2, 208). He writes: We do not separate the sacred and the secular" (*CWG* 2, 211). We reach

God through our secular activity, through our involvement in the world by taking care of our fellow beings and the cosmos. The "Word" continues to dwell among us (*Immanuel*) and empowers us to fulfil our life (*CWG* 2, 203).

Conclusion: Integration in Integrity

An integral approach to life always enhances the integrity of human existence. An integral vision promotes respect for all beings which are the manifestation of one and the same. The romance of inter-connectedness embraces everything. The same Divine sleeps in minerals, awakens in plants, walks in animals, dwells and thinks in human beings. In this article, we have been analysing Soares-Prabhu's vision of reality on the basis of the Biblical texts and traditions. We have seen that it is multi-dimensional and integral. It tries to integrate the whole reality and gives meaning to it. Soares-Prabhu's great contribution is this hermeneutical integration of rather scattered biblical notions to string together in the thread of the theological openness. It promotes harmony with the cosmos, communion among all humans and confidence in the Divine. His vision therefore, helps us understand better that we are knots in a network of relationships in which, from electromagnetic to Divine, and from angelic to human, are interrelated and intertwined. The sacred is encountered in and through the secularity of the world. In fact, it is the awareness that we need right away to lead an authentic life of harmony, communion, justice and love.

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"The radical commitment to the poor which is the starting point of any genuine Indian hermeneutic in India must be made within the distinctive under¬standing of humankind and its world, which constitutes the Indian world-view, and gives particular shape and colour to its Third Worldness. An Indian hermeneutic will respect the specific sensibility shaped by the Indian world-view - or, more accurately perhaps, world-views." (Soares-Prabhu, "Commitment and Conversion: A Biblical Hermeneutic for India Today," CWG 4, 35.)

"In the universe of Indian exegesis there is room for a wide variety of methods - historical criticism to determine the origin and the transmission of a text, literary criticism to analyse its literary and linguistic structures, canonical criticism to find out what function the text had in successive believing communities. But all these must be completed, if the interpretation is not to remain barren, with a hermeneutical reading which will determine the significance of the text for the reader here and how, by engaging text and reader in a critical conversation, that respects not only the meaning trajectory of the text but the new Indian context in which the text is now read."(Soares-Prabhu, "Interpreting the Bible in India Today," CWG 4, 6.)

"A growing awareness of the massive social evils that plague our land (in which eighty percent of the people are below, on, or just above the poverty line, and fully seventy percent are totally illiterate; where just ten percent of the rural rich own more than sixty percent of all the cultivable land, and ninety percent of private-owned industry is producing consumer goods for less than fifteen percent of the population) is having its impact on Indian theology - particularly among Indian theologians who have been exposed to a social analysis which points, correctly, to institutional structures rather than personal ill will as the source of social ills." (Soares-Prabhu, "Towards an Indian Interpretation of the Bible," CWG 1, 217.)

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Religious Communities *of* and *for* the Kingdom of God: George M. Soares-Prabhu's Vision of Priesthood and Religious Life

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Abstract: George M. Soares-Prabhu's Christological Vision becomes the motivation for the Priests and Religious in India to be the true witnesses of the Gospel of Christ. The central theme of Jesus' ministry is the Kingdom of God which is based on His Abba Experience. This same experience calls for the Indian Church in general and the Priests and Religious in particular to be the Prophetic Communities *of* and *for* the Kingdom of God, that radiate the light of Christ to India to build a Nation based on Freedom, Fellowship, Justice. Imbibing the Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus, the mission of Christ can be carried out in the context of the divided nation by being the 'Contrast Community' and thereby bring about the Kingdom of God that Jesus envisaged.

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Keywords: Kingdom of God, Abba Experience, Agape Marga, Table Fellowship, Liberative Pedagogy, Family of God, Prophetic and Contrast Community.

Introduction

George M. Soares-Prabhu's Christology is a dialogue between the Text that emerged from a particular situation of a thirst for liberation (Biblical) and the Context (of Indian Third World) that too thirsts for liberation. He was a scholarly person with the "concern for the poor and fascination for the person of Jesus" (CWG 4, xi). The Christology of Soares-Prabhu is a story that "explicates the central symbol 'Jesus of Faith' in terms of his ministry, death and resurrection" (Lobo, 2005: 346). Soares-Prabhu asserts that this story is to be re-narrated in the context of cry-for-life situation of Indian Third World. According to Soares-Prabhu India's cry for life is a cry for survival, a cry for dignity and affirmation, and a cry for recognition and meaning. It is a cry for liberation and dialogue (*CWG* 4, 276). India shares the massive economic poverty of the Third World, pluriform religiosity of life in Asia, but the caste discrimination is specific to India alone. Poverty-Religiosity-Caste constitute India's *samsara*, its cycle of bondage (*CWG* 4, 173). The Caste-ridden Church in India and particularly the consecrated persons have to respond to the challenges of abject poverty and pluriform religiosity. Soares-Prabhu points to the central theme of Jesus' ministry, namely, the Kingdom of God as a roadmap for the Church in India in general, and in particular for the consecrated, to respond to these challenges and create a New Society based on the Kingdom values, namely Freedom, Fellowship and Justice.

Soares-Prabhu points out that though Jesus did not provide a blueprint for the Church, he had a vision of a new society (*CWG* 4, 223) – based on Freedom, Fellowship and Justice. This vision was drawn from his own experience of the unconditionally loving God as Abba. It is this revelation of God as Abba that is the true content of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom (*CWG* 4, 223).

In his various writings, Soares-Prabhu would point out that Jesus' mission of realizing the Kingdom of God has been handed over to the religious in India. In this article we shall explore Soares-Prabhu's pointers to the Priests and Religious to carry out effectively Jesus' Mission of the Kingdom of God. We shall first look at Jesus' Vision and Mission of the Kingdom of God the Abba as articulated by Soares-Prabhu. Jesus the Prophet, Priest and Pastor shows us the Agape Marga through His method of Liberative Pedagogy. We shall also show that Jesus invites us to follow His Liberative Pedagogy to carry out His project Kingdom of God. The Church in India in general and the Priests and Religious in particular could follow the Agape Marga of Jesus in order to carry out the Kingdom Mission, through an integrated response that entails living out their identity as the 'Contrast Community' and their profession as 'Prophetic Communities' *of* and *for* the Kingdom of God.

1. God as Abba: The Foundation of Jesus' Vision and Mission of the Kingdom of God

The starting point of the Christology of Soares-Prabhu is the Abba experience of Jesus that he translated in his way of Agape. His Christology can be summarized in terms of the questions that he asks and the answers he seeks to give to these questions from the perspective of the cry for life situation in the Indian Third World. All throughout his writings he poses questions such as: What does Jesus Christ mean to India in its cultural diversity, its massive poverty and its flourishing religiosity? What is the role of Jesus Christ in Christian theology that will respond effectively to India's cry for life? What is Jesus' Abba experience? How did Jesus perceive the Kingdom? Did Jesus have a vision of a new society? Did his eschatological consciousness, dominated by the expectation of an imminent irruption of God's reign, envisage a new society at all? What was the teaching of Jesus like? What sort of educational model did he follow? (*CWG* 4, 252).

Soares-Prabhu claims that 'Kingdom of God' is an expression characteristic of Jesus, expressing his own particular consciousness of mission and his own personal experience of God. The expression 'Kingdom of God' or its equivalent 'Kingdom of the Heavens' appears about 90 times in the synoptic Gospels as against to be found rarely in the OT literature and only a few times in other NT writings and that too almost always in the sayings of Jesus (*CWG* 4, 226). According to the Christological vision of Soares-Prabhu the ultimate truth that Jesus came to teach us is the Kingdom of God based on Jesus' Abba experience.

> The basic religious experience of Jesus, that which empowers his whole life and mission and calls into being and sustains the Jesus movement, is his experience of God as unconditional love. Jesus experiences God as a loving Father and dares to address him as *abba* (Mt 14:36). ... In no Jewish prayer is God ever addressed as *abba*. The usage of Jesus is therefore unique and points to a new and unique experience of God as unutterably intimate and close (*CWG* 4, 181).

By virtue of his Abba experience, Jesus insists on establishing the Truth of the Kingdom of God. God as the unconditionally loving Abba is the foundational experience of Jesus (*CWG* 1, 11). Basing himself on his Abba experience, Jesus practiced and taught others to experience every human being as our loving brother and sister. The reason of Jesus' radical openness towards all humankind, and relationship with all humans as brothers and sisters, "is rooted in his radical experience of God as Abba, because to experience God as 'Father' implies that we experience all human beings as brothers and sisters who have a claim on our acceptance and our love. The dharma of Jesus – his understanding of existence and his way of life – is a dharma of unconditional and therefore of absolutely universal love" (*CWG* 3, 167). The Kingdom of God derived from his core experience of God as Abba is the authentic Dharma of Jesus (*CWG* 4, 258), which announces freedom, fellowship and justice as its values (*CWG* 4, 224). The parameters of the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed are freedom, fellowship and justice that lead to Agape, the ultimate

Love (*CWG* 4, 238-44). Jesus' foundational experience of God as Abba mediated by him "brings freedom or personal liberation because it sets a person free from the compulsions and fears that inhibit him or her" (*CWG* 3, 154). This freedom in turn "leads to a fellowship of mutual concern. Born of an experience of unconditional love, the freedom of the Kingdom empowers and impels the free man to surrender his freedom in love" (*CWG* 4, 154). It is because of this freedom, there is genuine fellowship and as a result "justice will flourish" (*CWG* 3, 155).

2. Jesus' Marga is Agape Marga

The Dharma of Jesus is the Dharma of Sonship which implies a fraternity of humankind, and gives rise to Dharma of concern (Agape) (*CWG* 4, 167). Jesus' Marga is Agape Marga (*CWG* 4, 217-18). that is characterized by loving relationship with fellow human beings. Jesus' communion with the untouchables of his society was a proclamation in action, powerfully announcing the wholly unconditional character of the Father's love (*CWG* 4, 255). Jesus came to lead us to the reality of the Kingdom of God based on his Abba experience. Jesus takes the Agape Marga to lead us to that truth. By virtue of his Abba experience, Jesus insists on establishing the Truth of the Kingdom of God. He experienced God as the unconditionally loving Abba. Basing himself on the Abba experience, he practiced and taught others to experience every human being as our loving brother and sister based on the authentic Dharma of Sonship that Jesus followed (*CWG* 4, 258). The Dharma of Jesus – his Agape Marga – gives a strong revolutionary thrust to the vision of the family of humankind, which calls for the commitment to build a genuinely fraternal community with its own inner dynamism to oppose all social, economic, political or religious structures which hinder the emergence of such a community (*CWG* 4, 169).

According to Soares-Prabhu the Marga Jesus follows is "not the way of spiritual insight (*jnana-marga*), not the way of ritual observance (*karma marga*), nor even the way of mystical

devotion (*bhakti marga*); it is way of concern (agape)" (*CWG* 3, 65). The uniqueness of Jesus Christ consists of the fact that he is the incarnation of Love. Jesus sums up his ethic in a love commandment according to which, to love God means, concretely, to love neighbour. Jesus' Agape is effective love that responds to the needs of people (*CWG* 3, 8). Jesus subordinates both law and cult to love. The way of Jesus is not the way of ritual observance in the cultic sense, but it is the way of concern (Agape). The scribes in Jesus' time believed that an action was meritorious only when it was commanded by law (*CWG* 3, 65). Jesus on the other hand taught his love commandment: Love of God *is* Love of Neighbour (see Mt 22:37-39). Jesus' way is not ritual centred like in Hinduism or in the Jewish tradition, neither is it exclusively God centred. It is rather Self-Neighbour-God ex-centred. It is not conventional love of God expressed through rituals and sacrifices and following meticulously the letter of the law. Loving God means for Jesus loving the neighbour with concern and doing good to the neighbour. That is Agape. It is precisely by loving one's neighbour as oneself that one truly loves God with all one's heart. It is the meeting of the three loves, namely Self-Neighbour-God. The true form of the love commandment of Jesus is that we 'love God *in* the neighbour' (*CWG* 3, 65-71).

3. Jesus as the Priest, Prophet and Pastor

The Agape Marga of Jesus – the Dharma of concern – inspires one to respond to the cry of the exploited and oppressed by engaging in action for the removal of structures of untruth that are responsible for exploitation and oppression. In an unjust, unfree and untrue society Agape inevitably becomes a struggle for justice, freedom and truth and strives to set free the oppressed (*CWG* 4, 119). The Agape Marga has been trodden by Jesus in threefold ways: He lives in 'Solidarity with God's People', 'Challenges the unjust Structures of the Society', and 'Teaches with Gentleness and Compassion.' Jesus lives out this mission of Agape as the Priest, Prophet and Pastor.

3.1. Jesus the Priest in Solidarity with God's People

Soares-Prabhu shows that "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" (*CWG* 2, 222). But at the same time we see in Jesus the priestly characteristics in the New Testament. The NT proclaims Jesus as the one mediator between God and humankind (1 Tim 2:5), someone like a son of man dressed in priestly vestments (Rev 1:13), the Paschal Lamb (Jn 1:29; 19:36; 1 Cor 5:7; Rev 5:9), offering sacrifice of his blood for expiation for many for the new covenant (Mk 14:24; Rom 3:25) (*CWG* 2, 223).

Soares-Prabhu speaks of Jesus as the priest in solidarity with God's people, the poor and the oppressed. The oppressed are not just a pitiable group of unfortunates; they are the key axis upon which the history of the Bible unfolds itself, both in the Old Testament (Exodus experience) and in the New Testament (Jesus' option for the oppressed). Thus the oppressed are not the passive victims of history but those through whom God shapes the history (*CWG* 2, 264-67). Soares-Prabhu states that in response to oppression Jesus identifies himself with the poor, in order to show them an active and effective concern. Such a concern looks to the ending of their social poverty, while calling for a spiritual poverty that will set them and their rich exploiters free from mammon, the compulsive urge to possess. Jesus identified with the poor by being poor himself, by allowing poor among his followers and by choosing his mission field where there were the poor (*CWG* 4, 254).

Jesus' solidarity with the poor and his unique divine Sonship constituted him a perfect priest; and his compassion for humankind and his perfect obedience to God's will existentially lived out in his life and ministry and radically manifested in his passion, death and exaltation constituted a perfect once for all sacrifice by which humankind is definitively reconciled with God

on the one hand and all other sacrifices reddened obsolete on the other (*CWG* 2, 223-25). As against the holiness code of the Old Testament which defined holiness in terms of 'separation' from the world and the 'otherness' of God (*CWG* 1, 229), for Jesus 'holiness' meant not 'separation' but 'mercy'. He demonstrates this definition in his table fellowship with the polluted tax collectors and sinners, lepers and unclean woman etc. This characteristic of Jesus makes him a Priest different from the OT priests (*CWG* 1, 231).

3.2. Jesus the Prophet Proclaiming the Kingdom of God

The Jesus image that the gospels portray is of a Jesus who was more Prophet than Priest or King. But as Soares-Prabhu shows, Jesus was different from other Biblical prophets in the sense that while the power of the Spirit enthused the prophets in a functional way, it enthused Jesus in an ontological manner. His teaching was the communication of an experience of love – His Abba experience. This profound experience of the love of God transformed Jesus into an extraordinary free person; he was not greedy, ambitious or possessive; he was not afraid of the Law or the religious authorities of his time; he seemed to care little for the public opinion; associated freely with the outcastes and seemed to be free even of family ties. Jesus radically transformed the understanding of ethics, from being a law based to a love based form of life (*CWG* 3, 3-12).

The spirituality of Jesus is derived from his experience of God's unconditional love "the love which drives him to identification with the poor and the freedom which allows him to confront the rich both derive from this foundational experience of God as Abba" (*CWG* 3, 98). The Abba experience of Jesus makes the person take a prophetic stand as it happened in the case of Jesus as "this experience cannot tolerate any form of discrimination based on race, religion, community or gender; nor can it remain passive in the face of the unjust structures that deprive people

of what they need to lead a fully human life, for it is always a brother or sister who is hurt by such discrimination or injustice" (*CWG* 3, 98). Jesus takes sides "in his sharply polarised society, clearly, divided into economic and social classes with conflicting interests" by identifying with "the poor and the outcast, and he confronts the 'establishment' which impoverishes and rejects them" (*CWG* 3, 93). Jesus' "proclamation of humankind as the 'family of God' wholly excludes all forms of racist, sexist, ethnic or caste discrimination. His demand for a radical concern for the 'neighbour' calls for a rejection of any system which creates or enhances an unjust distribution of wealth, status or power" (*CWG* 3, 96).

3.3. The Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus the Pastor

In the writings of Soares-Prabhu, we also come across the image of Jesus as Pastor. Soares-Prabhu speaks of the liberative pedagogy of Jesus (*CWG* 4, 252-66). The pedagogy of Jesus was liberative in a double way, making people "conscious of their worth as children of one Father in heaven" and "freeing them from the manipulative myths which legitimized their oppressive and alienating society" (*CWG* 4, 263). His teaching is open to the little ones, unlearned in the law and the tax collectors and sinners who have no moral or religious standing whatever. He speaks to them the language they would easily understand because "the teaching of Jesus is not the imparting of doctrine but the communication of love" (*CWG* 4, 255). With many parables Jesus "spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything" (*CWG* 4, 261). Jesus taught the poor and the rejected of the society. The mission field of Jesus with the only exception of the holy land of Jerusalem was the Palestinian country side with its poor, backward villages and its primitive townships, not the Hellenized urban centres to which the rich flocked (*CWG* 4, 254).

Soares-Prabhu affirms that at the heart of Jesus' mission there is the intention of the creation of a new humanity. His idea of liberation avoids two simplistic extremes. He is against a spirituality which tolerates injustice and exploitation in the name of an eschatological reward – a pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die; (*CWG* 4, 184-85). on the other hand, a materialistic reduction of social forces is not acceptable to him either. Thus liberation according to Soares-Prabhu is this worldly, contemporary affair, a new social order where there will be neither poor nor rich. It will be the movement "through a *change of heart* (freedom from fear and greed, freedom for fellowship and universal concern) and a *change of structures* (the removal of social, economic and political systems of exploitation) to a fraternal, non-exploitative social order" (*CWG* 3, 161). This is because Jesus himself intends to bring about "both *a change of heart* (freedom from attachment to riches) and a *change of structures* (liberation from oppressive social systems); for it is this combination alone that can lead to the new humanity which is the ultimate goal of the long process of total liberation that Jesus has begun" (*CWG* 2, 267).

4. The Table Fellowship of Jesus

The table fellowship of Jesus with the tax collectors and sinners was a revolutionary praxis (*CWG* 1, 223). of Jesus who "presents a new experience of God and a new understanding of community, in which there can be no 'outcasts' – for God is experienced as a loving Parent, and every fellow Christian as a brother or a sister" (*CWG* 1, 234). Jesus demonstrates without doubt through his teachings and ministry that there are no outcasts before God and all belong to 'the family of God' (*CWG* 3, 9-10). Soares-Prabhu makes a scathing attack on the caste system that is prevalent in the Indian Church and reprimands us of our corporate sinfulness. The fact that there are Dalit Christians in India and they have to suffer by the Christians themselves is a sign of our sinfulness. In fact, the expression 'Christian Dalit' is a contradiction in terms, because there can be no 'Dalit' in a Christian community, for in Christ there is neither clean caste nor Dalit (*CWG* 1, 237). Jesus

has shown it by his 'acted parable' of his table fellowship with the tax collectors and sinners, through which he brings home to listeners his experience of God as Abba the loving parent, and the 'good news' of liberation (*CWG* 1, 233).

The paradigm of the table fellowship of Jesus in our context of India where the other and the no-one are the strong elements in our relationships is the right method to establish Dharma that Jesus envisaged. The consequence of the table fellowship of Jesus is his exaltation on the Cross (*CWG* 1, 223). They are mutually inseparable. It involves the breaking of bread and the breaking of our own selves with the other and the no-ones just as Jesus did. Jesus' table fellowship beckons us to include all in the Reign of God that he envisaged and that we want to proclaim and establish. We need to bind together all the divided people in one Eucharistic fellowship beyond the ethnic, linguistic and caste boundaries. It is also our task to make the no-ones as the loved ones of God. This needs to begin first with the Christians themselves as we Christians are divided among ourselves on the basis of caste, language and ethnicity. The next step would be to enter into the lives of the other and include them too in the table fellowship of Jesus with the single goal of giving to all the foretaste of the Reign of God.

5. Jesus' Invitation to be Prophetic Communities *of* and *for* the Kingdom of God

From the writings of Soares-Prabhu, we the Priests and Religious in India could take the following lessons for our Mission in India. The Mission of Jesus, namely the Kingdom of God becomes the responsibility of the Priests and Religious in India. In order to make Jesus' Mission become a reality, we are called to 'Follow the Agape Marga of Jesus the Way', in order to 'Build God's Family in India', 'Follow the Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus the Shepherd' and 'Be the Priests and Religious in Solidarity with the People of God', 'Be the Prophetic

Communities *of* and *for* the Kingdom as Salt and Light', and 'Be the Contrast Community living our Identity as the Little Flock.'

5.1. Follow the Agape Marga of Jesus the Way

Soares-Prabhu shows the Agape Marga of Jesus as the Roadmap for Indian Religious. According to him the Marga Jesus follows is Agape – the Way of concern (*CWG* 3, 65). Agape means effective love that responds "to the needs of the exploited and oppressed neighbour by engaging in action for the removal of structures that are responsible for such exploitation and oppression. In an unjust society *agape* inevitably becomes a struggle for justice: it strives to set free the oppressed" (*CWG* 4, 29119). Soares-Prabhu envisages such an Indian community of religious and priests that would engage in the Agape Marga by responding to the needs of the Indian masses suffering because of the unjust structures. Only way out of this rut is Agape – effective love, which "then, will respond to the needs of the exploited and oppressed neighbour by engaging in action for the removal of the structures that are responsible for such exploitation and oppression. In an unjust society *agape* inevitably becomes a struggle for justice" (*CWG* 4, 119). At the basis of this Marga is Jesus' experience of God as Abba which is passed on to his followers in India: "Ultimately then our *agape* is rooted in our experience of God as *Abba*; for to experience God as Father is to experience every human being as brother or sister. Our love for neighbour is a consequence of our experience of God's love for us" (*CWG* 4, 122).

The Jesus community which emerged from and embodied the Abba experience of Jesus was characterized by the salient features such as, 'Radical Freedom', 'Radical Universalism', 'Radical Sharing', 'Radical Service' and 'Radical Equality'. This should become the archetypal community for all Christian communities (*CWG* 4, 143-48).

The Abba experience would help us religious to act with 'Radical Freedom' to commit ourselves to the cause of the

Kingdom because this radical freedom is a freedom from our multiple alienation and "freedom for universal commitment. The experience of God as *abba* implies experiencing all human beings as brothers and sisters, and so rules out all discrimination on any ground whatsoever" (*CWG* 4, 145). This freedom comes from the experience of God's unconditional love which frees us from our bondage to Mammon (greed, consumerism, 'the concupiscence of the eyes'), and thereby we are able to form a community of 'Radical Sharing'. Because this unconditional love frees us from the craving for power, (ambition, the need to dominate, 'the pride of life'), we can form a community of 'Radical Service'. (*CWG* 4, 146). Following the Agape Marga is a prophetic act challenging the structures of injustice, inequality and hatred and would make us a radically egalitarian community of 'Radical Universalism'. Differences of race, class, and sex would not affect our basic relationship with Jesus nor our basic worth as human beings who are children of the one Father in heaven. We would become an authentic Jesus community of 'Radical Equality', which would not tolerate any form of stratification (racist or caste) which touches the intrinsic worth of a person (*CWG* 4, 147).

5.2. Priests as the Builders of God's Family

Soares-Prabhu's method involves concerns such as the option for the poor, integral liberation of the individuals as well as the social structures and dialogue with religious traditions that would help evolve a more inclusive Christology and a more open theology of religions and a much less militant understanding of mission. It is with this concern and openness that Soares-Prabhu invites the priests and religious to get involved in the Indian reality. The priest/ religious in India cannot limit themselves to build "closed and self-satisfied Christian communities, but must reach out to the creation of the eschatological human community (the new heaven and the new earth) which lies on the horizons of human and cosmic history (Rev 21:1-4)" (*CWG* 2, 238).

Soares-Prabhu insists that the "new understanding of priesthood" presented in the NT "must determine the shape of the Christian priesthood in India today" (*CWG* 2, 215). The main task of the priest in India should be to work as "a community builder, whose concerns reach beyond the minuscule Christian community to which he belongs. He is called to represent, that is, to make present here and now, the one priesthood of Jesus through which all things have been reconciled to the Father. His concerns must be as large as the concerns of Jesus himself" who came to "establish the reign of God" by living out "a priesthood of self-giving into and in history, which reconciles all things to the Father and leads human and cosmic history to fulfillment" (*CWG* 2, 238).

Jesus' Sonship is the source of his Dharma (*CWG* 4, 165). The Dharma of Sonship implies a fraternity of humankind, and gives rise to Dharma of concern (Agape) (*CWG* 4, 165). The Lord's Prayer is the crystallized form of his Dharma (Lobo, 2005: 396). This prayer invites us to reconciliation and sharing of bread, making us one family, encouraging us to work for *Lokasamgraha*, which is in fact the Dharma of Jesus. The Dharma of Jesus looks forward to building up of a universal and fraternal community of sharing and love (*CWG* 4, 169). Imitating Jesus, the priest today must enter into Jesus' movement of the kingdom which continually subverts a world structured by relationships of oppression, violence, and exploitation; and replaces it by a new world structured on relationships of respect, freedom and love. Building such communities of the Kingdom (which in India will not be just narrowly institutionally Christian communities) is the primary task of the Christian priests who represent the saving priesthood of Jesus (*CWG* 2, 238-39).

Soares-Prabhu calls upon the priests today to make a shift from cultic priesthood to be the builders of the family of God. The cultic role of the priest, even though reaffirmed in the Council (LG 10) is not to be taken as his primary role. It is part of his mission to gather together "God's family as a brotherhood of unity" (*CWG* 2, 238). The family of God which the priest builds

is not a closed, communal family. It is a family that is open to the world. Citing *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 6, Soares-Prabhu says that priests as the builders of the community are to be 'Alter Christus' who "exercise the office of Christ, the Head and Shepherd. Thus they gather God's family together as a brotherhood (and sisterhood) of living unity, and lead it through Christ and in the Spirit to God the Father" (*CWG* 2, 238).

Soares-Prabhu is clear that the Catholic Priest should follow his call for service and not to exhibit his power, to build up the Christian and human community and not merely carrying out cultic function. He says

> The Christian priest is not a cultic functionary (a *hiereus*, a *pujari*) that is, a sacral person who has been consecrated to preside over the Eucharist or administer the sacraments. He is a pastor, that is, someone who has been officially charged with the building up of the Christian (and eventually the human) community, by making the saving work of Jesus effectively present to us through word, sign and style of life. Any cultic function that the priest exercises is at the service of his pastoral office. This pastoral function the Christian priest exercises as a 'ministry', that is an act of service, not a manifestation of skill, of status or of power (*CWG* 2, 234).

5.3. Follow the Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus

Soares-Prabhu speaks of the Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus and invites the priests and religious in India to follow the same Pedagogy to teach the message of the Kingdom. He stresses the need for integral liberation but especially for liberation from social oppression. This is possible only if we follow the Pedagogy of Jesus. Jesus identified himself with the poor in order to show them an active and effective concern – namely His Agape experience. Such an approach will enable the priests and religious in India to reach out to the peripheries and thus include all in the project Kingdom of God.

Jesus' vision of a new society is an unfinished task handed over to his followers in pursuit of establishing the Kingdom of God. It is not the goal but the way that invites us to realize the values of the Kingdom. It is a ceaseless struggle against the demonic structures of injustice, unfreedom and untruth erected by mammon. It is a task left by Jesus for us his followers to involve ourselves in the permanent revolution of establishing the Kingdom of Truth as envisioned by Jesus. It is a task to strive for genuine fellowship, for justice and for freedom. The radical concern for the Kingdom, inspired by the revolutionary Christ, will not tolerate passivity in the face of social, economic and political structures which oppress and dehumanize (*CWG* 4, 241-45). The vision of Jesus summons us, "to a ceaseless creativity that will produce in every age new blueprints for a society ever more consonant with Gospel vision of man. Lying on the horizons of human history and yet part of it, offered to us as a gift yet confronting us as a challenge, Jesus' vision of a new society stands before us as an unfinished task, summoning us to permanent revolution" (*CWG* 4, 244). Our task therefore, in India is to develop a theology of liberation "which will be concerned with both societal change and personal self-realization." (*CWG* 1, 56).

In our country, where millions of Indians are struggling to get their rights and longing for the fulfilment of the needs of their bodies and souls, the priests and religious have to follow the way of Jesus. Jesus' way of selfless love and service is the real, natural and easily accessible way to fulfilment. India is a '*kurukshetra*' rather the '*dharmakshetra*' where the forces of unfreedom, hatred and injustice are becoming more powerful. It is in such a situation the Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus will give us the direction to go the way of the Kingdom of God ruled by *Nishkama Karma* to establish Dharma characterized by freedom, fellowship and justice. Soares-Prabhu shows that such a response would usher in "a mighty movement of personal and societal liberation which sweeps through human history. The movement brings *freedom* inasmuch it liberates each individual from the inadequacies and obsessions that shackle him. It fosters

fellowship, because it empowers free individuals to exercise their concern for each other in genuine community. And it leads on to *justice*, because it impels every true community to adopt the just societal structures which alone make freedom and fellowship possible" (*CWG* 4, 238-39). Such pedagogy would automatically demand our solidarity with the poor of God.

5.4. Be the Priests and Religious in Solidarity with the People of God

In his various writings, Soares-Prabhu points out to the westernized way of theologizing which does not emerge from grass root communities "but is the work of Western educated scholars, living in the seclusion of culturally isolated academic institutions, and theologizing in a foreign language" (*CWG* 4, 34). Drawing our attention especially to the seminary theology, he says that Christian theology in India is "an imitative and an imported theology, less concerned with local issues (poverty, religions, caste – which rarely figure in our theological treatises)" (*CWG* 4, 34).

It is because of this type of westernized theology with the "knife and fork culture", "the sahib culture", "colonial fortresses" (*CWG* 1, 87-91). that we have become mediocre in mission, numb to injustice, insensitive to the cry of the poor and comfortable in our mansions. Soares-Prabhu asks therefore: "Where among us is the passion of Jesus? His sharp compassion? His blazing anger at injustice? His identification with the poor? Are we not too well-liked by the rich, too comfortably adjusted to an unjust society, too much at home with the powerful...? Has not our religious witness lost its bite? Are we not in danger of losing the sharp invigorating savour that the followers of Jesus are to communicate to the world?" (*CWG* 3, 222).

His challenge to the Indian priests, religious and theologians is to play the role of a pilgrim who "must always go a little further" (*CWG* 1, 80), and produce the 'Third World Theology' by raising issues related to two massive closely interrelated realities, namely

'overwhelming poverty' and 'multifaceted religiosity' (*CWG* 1, 54). He is convinced that Christian spirituality cannot be authentic "without an active concern for the poor, who are experienced not merely as objects of charity but as brothers and sisters in need" (*CWG* 1, 192). The most significant traits of the spirituality of Jesus, namely "Freedom and love, leading to identification with the powerless and confrontation with those in power" should be the basis of the "spirituality suitable for those who are engaged in the struggle for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed" (*CWG* 3, 89). Because of Jesus' self defining option for the poor, "the life of Jesus is lived out in the twin dimensions of *solidarity and conflict*. These are the complementary expressions of his God-experience. The gospels show Jesus living a life of progressive identification with the poor and of growing conflict with those who oppress them" (*CWG* 4, 288).

In order to effectively carry out our Kingdom mission in India, Soares-Prabhu proposes that we need to approach our mission on three levels. 1) Institutional service to the needy through its health and education ministry; 2) Working not just for the poor but with the poor, in solidarity, mobilising them to confront "the principalities and powers" and 3) Involvement at 'tree-tops' to influence the policy makers and politicians in order to translate the values of the Kingdom into economic and political strategies (*CWG* 1, 154-55).

The inevitable outcome of this way of life is the Cross, which "exemplifies and vindicates with absolute assurance the spirituality and the praxis of Jesus, who 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" (*CWG* 3, 101). The Cross is the natural outcome of a life of solidarity with the poor and the outcasts but conflict with the rich and the powerful which leads "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. Identification and confrontation have here reached their furthest possible limits. Jesus is one with the marginalized and all the martyred victims of the earth" (*CWG* 4, 290). It was a journey from the centre to the periphery. This was the journey of the Prophet. This too is the journey of myriads of prophets present today in India and is the way we are called to tread – to be the prophetic communities *of* and *for* the Kingdom of God.

5.5. Be the Prophetic Communities *of* and *for* the Kingdom

Soares-Prabhu calls upon the priests and religious to form prophetic communities *of* and *for* the Kingdom. As prophetic communities they become a symbol and sacrament of the Kingdom, thereby pointing to the reality they themselves are. Soares-Prabhu writes: "Religious life, then, is meant to be a visible communitarian sign. It "symbolizes on behalf of all Christians" and "testifies in an exemplary fashion" to the radical gospel values by which all Christians are invited to live. It does this by institutionalizing these values. ... *Religious then, live out institutionally, in a socially structured and therefore public and visible way, the radical demands of following Jesus*" (*CWG* 3, 209-10). As religious we are followers of Jesus by profession. Religious life is "a living out publicly, professionally, institutionally (and therefore in community) of the "following of Christ as proposed by the gospel," and so of the gospel values that are implicit in all Christian life. It is in this sense that religious life is a sign. It makes visible officially, institutionally, what is implicit in all true Christian existence" (*CWG* 3, 210).

In the midst of our broken society scourged by consumerism on the one hand and destitution on the other, religious communities are called to take a stand on the side of the poor, lest we become godless. "For ultimately our greed is a sign of our godlessness; and the presence of the destitute in our midst is the mark of our infidelity to Jesus ... Our consumerism, then, is an option against

God; our neglect of the poor is a neglect of Jesus" (*CWG* 2, 267). In order that religious life becomes a symbol of the prophetic communities of and for the Kingdom, "religious communities must share with and so share in the lot of the poor; must reach out to the rejected and the outcast; and must show themselves wholly committed to the cause of the Kingdom. Sharing poverty, affirming love and committed obedience in community shape the prophetic 'being' of religious life" (*CWG* 3, 219).

In India, to be religious is to be a witness of Christ. That is the most effective way of professing our faith in Christ and proclaiming the message of the Kingdom. We as religious are called to be "*ex officio* 'followers of Christ'" as "communities *of* and *for* the Kingdom" and that is how our life would be an authentic way of following Jesus (*CWG* 3, 205-06). Light and salt are the two images proposed by Soares-Prabhu for the disciples of Christ – "as light which illumines the darkness, when it is not hidden under the bushel; or as salt which gives savour, as long as it has not lost its saltiness" (*CWG* 1, 42). This is why we are called to be salt and light, and because we are salt of the earth and the light of the world, we must let our light shine before others. We as salt and light in the Indian context of consumerism and destitution could become the messengers of Christ and the sacrament of God's Kingdom. Salt and light are the two symbols that point to the religious communities as prophetic communities of and for the Kingdom of God that exercise their prophetic role through both their action and their being (*CWG* 3, 236). They become the sacrament of the Kingdom because as they show forth through "the quality of their lives (their 'being') the values of the Kingdom, they are equally communities for the Kingdom striving through their commitment to the total liberation of humankind to bring about the full realization of the Kingdom of God" (*CWG* 3, 236).

5.6. Be the Contrast Community living our Identity as the Little Flock

With our presence less than 2% of the entire population of India, we are an insignificant minority as far as the numbers are concerned. But we are the 'Little Flock', the image given to us by Jesus himself. As the little flock we are called to give up our possessions, and give alms, not to make purses for ourselves and to place our heart where our treasure is (Lk 12:32-34). Unfortunately, as Soares-Prabhu points out, "with the stifling ritualism of our worship and the unbridled legalism of our canon law, with all our ecclesiastical careerism, our petty tyrannies, our delight in tinsel titles, and our unceasing clamour for our 'minority' rights, with our large neglect of the poor, our shoddy compromises with the powerful, our connivance at injustice and our worship of wealth, we are, surely, far indeed from the dream that Jesus dreamed" (*CWG* 3, 133).

Here in this context, Soares-Prabhu summons us to be the 'Contrast Communities'. That requires "a change of hearts and a change of structures." The change should begin with us and with our structures, in order to become the contrast community projected by the Bible a reality. "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 or oppression intact. Attitudinal and structural change are both necessary, because ultimately attitudes and structures are dialectically related" (*CWG* 4, 192-93).

The Church in India and the Religious communities in particular are to be 'communities of being' and 'communities of action'. As communities of being religious communities are to be "contrast communities which show that it is possible to live fruitful and fulfilled lives based on values which are the opposite of those proposed by the power and possession hungry consumer society in which we live. ... Religious communities are therefore communities of the Kingdom making visible in an anticipatory and provisional way the values of the end-time community

(its freedom, its love, its justice) in the concrete historical circumstances of our time" (*CWG* 3, 211). This is a call given to God's people whom God will fashion "into a community that will give concrete shape to his concern of the poor, and will function as a 'contrast community', a free, just, non-exploitative society that will provide an alternative societal model to the violent and oppressive city states" among whom are to live God's people (*CWG* 4, 188).

What Soares-Prabhu says about the 'contrast community' is in fact happening in India, if we consider the contribution of myriads of Indian Christians who in their radical, public living out of the following of Jesus "inevitably exercise the same prophetic impact on the Church as the Church in its faithfulness to the values of Jesus is expected to exercise towards the world" (*CWG* 3, 234). This necessarily entails the twin dimensions of the life of Jesus, namely solidarity and conflict. Do we have prophets today who live such a spirituality? Two examples can be showcased here as representatives of the Religious in India who pave the way for the Church in India to be a 'contrast community': Samuel Rayan and Stan Swamy. Speaking about Samuel Rayan, Soares-Prabhu writes:

> In Rayan's theology the academic resources of the West and the spiritual resources of the East come together to give something that is quite distinctively his own. His theology is unmistakably itself. It is marked by a steadfast commitment to the poor, a profound sensitivity to the religious traditions of India, and a rootedness in the Bible, read not as academic text but a religious book. It is expressed in a language that is lucid and moving, because it is the outflow of the intelligence and passion that informs his thinking. ... It succeeds admirably in bringing the prophetic, revolutionary message of Jesus to bear on the concrete situations that his readers live in (*CWG* 1, 102-03).

A lot has been happening to Stan Swamy these days because of the stand he has taken for the Tribals. Stan Swamy (83) an Indian Jesuit, has been working for the integral development

of the *Adivasis*, empowering them and helping them assert their dignity and rights and activate their agency, and stands with them as they oppose the 'developmental' processes that eventually would destroy their culture and life. Stan Swamy raises questions that make those who hold authority, power and wealth uncomfortable and annoys them. In order to suppress his prophetic voice, the Indian government goes all guns at him. That is why, falsely alleging Stan of the links with the Bhima-Koregaon incident and links with the Maoists aka Naxalites, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested him on 8th October 2020. Rejecting all the allegations, Stan stated clearly: "Over the last two decades, I have identified myself with the adivasi people and their struggle for a life of dignity and self-respect. As a writer, I have tried to analyze the different issues they face. In this process, I have clearly expressed my dissent over several policies and laws enacted by the government in the light of the Indian constitution. I have questioned the validity, legality and justness of several steps taken by the government and the ruling class" (Alla 2020).

Referring to the arrests of activists, intellectuals and student leaders all over the country and speaking about the broader process that is taking place all over the country, Stan says in a video message: "We are part of the process. In a way, I am happy, to be part of this process because I am not a silent spectator but a part of it, part of the game and ready to pay the price whatever it be" (Swamy 2020). Here is another example in Stan Swamy of the 'contrast community' that we are called to be and not to be a mere silent spectator. It is the Kairos moment of the Indian Church as Alla Stanislaus says: "Even though all Christians by vocation are called to be prophets, when they and especially clergy and religious, consciously 'grow-up' into prophets the Church can gladly recognize it as a Kairos moment" (Alla 2020).

Conclusion

Already in Vat II, more than 55 years ago, the Church had declared that the "joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well" (GS 1). Ever since, there have been many theologians all over the world, who are beaconing the Church to be in solidarity with the poor and afflicted. One striking example of such theologians in India is George M. Soares-Prabhu who gives the clergy and religious in India the roadmap to be the prophetic communities *of* and *for* the Kingdom of God by being a 'contrast community' in order to live out our identity as the Church in solidarity with the poor and afflicted. The circumstances then and the circumstances now are similar, in fact, they are starker now.

Pope Francis invites us to show that solidarity with the poor and afflicted as he writes in his social encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* 33: "The pain, uncertainty and fear, and the realization of our own limitations, brought on by the pandemic have only made it all the more urgent that we rethink our styles of life, our relationships, the organization of our societies and, above all, the meaning of our existence." The mission of the Church becomes more urgent and challenging today, in the time of the pandemic but also because of the abject poverty, the fanatic religiosity and the corrupt political structures.

In order to live as the true followers of Christ in India, we need to personalize the vision of Jesus Christ. God is the Abba of all, loving us unconditionally, and hence we relate to the others as brothers and sisters on the Marga shown by Jesus, namely that of Agape – of loving concern. Many have lived the way of Jesus and many continue to live it in the present difficult times. The way is that of Agape, concern, praxis, as Soares-Prabhu asserts "the mystery of Jesus can be grasped only through praxis, because Jesus is essentially the way" (*CWG* 4, 291). Walking on the path of Jesus – the path of unconditional love, we could

become the true witnesses of the Gospel of Christ. The Kingdom of God has been handed over to us as a gift, but it is not a finished product. It is also a task. It is already and not yet. The battle is on, the process continues, the call is to become part of the process. The mission of Christ can be fulfilled if we become the Prophetic Communities *of* and *for* the Kingdom of God, that radiate the light of Christ to India to build a Nation based on Freedom, Fellowship, Justice. Imbibing His Liberative Pedagogy, the mission of Christ can be carried out in the context of the divided nation by being the 'Contrast Community' and thereby bring about the Kingdom of God that Jesus envisaged. Let us take up our Cross and follow Him on His Agape Marga.

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Towards an Inclusive and Dialogical Theology of Religions and Inculturation: An Exploration into the Theological Outlook of George M. Soares-Prabhu

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Abstract: This article tries to understand the theological approach of Soares-Prabhu, the best known Indian biblical scholar as being both dialogical and inclusive. The author tries to show that his approach was basically one of openness and receptivity to the East and West, to Religions and Cultures of Asia and Europe. Such an approach to Catholicism will make it both a World-Church and an Inclusive One, which accepts good tidings from all sides. In order to achieve this goal, he starts with the Indian/Asian context of religiosity and poverty and moves on to a deeper dialogue. The imagery he uses is "Marriage between East and West." Then he indicates the need for the Catholic Church to become a truly world Church, where she is always open to creative dialogue.

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Keywords: Soares-Prabhu as Liberation Theologian, Soares-Prabhu as Theologian of Dialogue; Marriage between East and West; World Catholic Church.

Introduction

George M. Soares-Prabhu SJ (1929-1995) has been widely recognised as the best known scripture scholar from India. He has also been regarded as a liberation theologian, who had a passion for the poor and compassion for the marginalised. In this article, I want to study him as a man of dialogue and a scholar of encounter.

In 1980s and 1990s, two strong movements have been emerging in the Indian Church. One represented by inculturation or indigenisation, as opposed to alienation (Soares-Prabhu, 1999c: 79-111), was powered by eminent stalwarts like Duraiswami Simon Amalorpavadass (1932 –1990), Vandana Mataji (1921-2013), Jules Monchanin (Swami Paramarubyananda 1895-1957) Bede Griffiths ("Dayananda," "bliss of compassion," rarely used, 1906-1993) and Abhishekananda (Henri Le Saux OSB). They were also pioneers in Ashram movements and Indian Christian philosophy/theology (Griffiths). The other strong movement emphasized the liberation theology and were inspired by the Latin American theologians, for whom justice was not an option but integral part of the promotion of faith. They were pioneered by theologians like Sebastian Kappen (1924-1993), Samuel Rayan (1920–2019, Cyril Desbruslais (1940-) and the like.

In this article I like to indicate the essential dialogical approach that Soares-Prabhu attempted in his theological journey, though he himself was a committed liberation theologian (Padinjarekuttu, 1999: xxviii). I shall begin with my personal encounter with Soares-Prabhu and elaborate the dialogical dimension of his theology.

1. Personal Encounters and Experiences

Before entering into the dialogical dimension of his life, I like to share some of my experiences as a student of Jnana Deepa, Pune, from 1983-1991.

Attending the class of Soares-Prabhu was itself a privileged experience. Usually he comes a few minutes earlier and writes down the main headings on the black board. As the class proceeds, he will be highlighting the inputs on the boards, drawing connection between the various elements indicating a perfectly woven plot. At the end of the class, the board will give a perfect summary of his class linking the main points. In this way, each class was weaving a story and connecting the various aspects of his biblical theology. The class was deeply insightful. That is why students usually come to his class at least 10 minutes earlier to get a seat. If the student comes on time, he will be forced to sit on the floor. As such his normal classes are not only full-packed, but sometimes about 15 students would be sitting on the floor listening with rapt attention! That was an edifying experience.

At least twice he come to the class and informed us that he is not able to take the class because he did not get time to prepare for it. Though he has been teaching at JDV for more than 30 years, still he spends about one to two hours preparing for every lecture, so that he can come up with a well-linked plot and present it creatively before the class. His faithfulness to his lecture and fidelity to the students showed themselves in the meticulous way he planned for each of the classes.

As theology students we used to look forward to his Eucharistic celebrations where he used to give pointed and insightful homilies of three minutes. For many of his students, these pointed homilies will give enough food for thought for the whole day.

At a personal level, when I had the Comprehensive Exam, I had the first examination with Francis Pereira. Then it was Soares' turn to take over. He started the exams with the

remarks, “I want to learn further from you and so I ask…” Then the eventful dialogue went on for twenty minutes! A dialogue that was intellectually nourishing with a sense of serenity and humility (Pandikattu, 2001)! When George Lobo took over from Soares, he was so impressed by the exam presided over Soares that he began the exam by complimenting Soares!

When I returned from my higher studies and met him just a few months before his death in 1995, internet was not sufficiently developed in Pune. None at JDV had an email-id. At that time he called me personally and opined that the future of theology and of JDV lies with the internet. He encouraged me to initiate steps to make JDV connected through the net so that both the students and staff of JDV will profit.

After this personal encounter I like to refer to the Indian context in terms of abject poverty and intense religiosity, as Soares-Prabhu himself indicates.

2. Indian/Asian Context: Poverty and Religiosity

Again let me be personal. It was in 1987, when I was a student of JDV that I read a small booklet written by Soares. That book has shaped me so much that even after 33 years I remember both the shape and the name of the book. So I requested the librarian of JDV, Fr Biju Joseph, to trace that book from the library and hand it over to me. He could find three copies of the same in the library! And this article will be based primarily on this short and booklet written by Soares, which had been in my unconscious mind for more than three decades and which was originally published in Spanish (Neufeld, 1983). I shall be using this booklet to argue for the dialogical approach of Soares-Prabhu.

The book begins by locating itself in the context of India/Asia. Soares-Prabhu acknowledges that with less than 2.5 percent of its people Christian, Asia is the least Christian of the continents of the world. But it is the world’s most populous continent, housing nearly three-fifths of the human race. At the same time he notes

that the vast aggregate of humankind in Asia live in conditions of great cultural and religious diversity. For Asia spans seven major linguistic zones and each of these is a separate cultural complex, for languages are not "alternative codes each consisting of a different set of labels for the same reality" but every language is the expression of a specific world-view which structures reality in its own distinctive way (Soares-Prabhu, 1984:1). Asia thus nurtures a variety of cultures and civilizations, in every possible state of human and technological development. It has been the cradle of every one of the world's scriptural religions; and it is the only continent where all these religions are fully at home, 'flourishing vigorously amid an immense number of primal religions and modern 'oriental' cults, including the New Age Religions. So he lists as the first feature of the Critical Asian Principle "Plurality, diversity in races, cultures, social institutions, religions, ideologies" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 1). He focusses on the "distinctively Asian" and uses "this distinctiveness as a critical principle of judgement on matters dealing with the life and mission of the Christian community, theology and theological education in Asia." Thus, Soares-Prabhu acknowledges that Asia's primary challenge to Christian theology is thus the challenge of its diversity and pluralism (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 1), which he has further elaborated elsewhere (Soares-Prabhu, 1999a: 157-162).

This pluralism remains not mono-cultural, unlike the Western understanding of pluralism. For Soares-Prabhu, "it is the pluralism of a theology which has developed within the confines of a single cultural tradition. It may indeed have experienced a 'future shock' because of the extraordinarily rapid development of Western Society in the wake of the Enlightenment and of the technological revolution which followed it; but it has yet to face (or perhaps is just beginning to face) the sort of ' culture shock ' (which traumatized the cultures of Asia, Africa and pre-Columban America, when they clashed with the aggressive culture of the expanding West" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 2) he adds that the privileged position enjoyed by Western culture during the last

three hundred years, when it was politically and technologically the dominant culture of the world, and the prestige it continues to enjoy today because of the enormous economic, technological and Military resources it commands, has accentuated its aloofness. Non-Western cultures have not been taken seriously by the West-particularly by Western Christianity. So a "theology elaborated in the West, in response to Western concerns, in a Western idiom, has been exported to every corner of the globe by generations of Western churchmen, who have too easily identified their own well-equipped but narrowly constructed theological well with the ocean," complains Soares-Prabhu (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 2).

He quotes approvingly Thomas Merton, who is a genuinely wise man from the West, to the Asian eyes:

> The preachers of the Gospel to newly discovered continents became preachers and disseminators of European culture and power. They did not enter into dialogue with ancient civilization: they imposed their own monologue and in preaching Christ they also preached themselves. The very ardour of their self-sacrifice and of their humility enabled them to do this with a clean conscience. But they had omitted to listen to the voice of Christ in the unfamiliar accents of the Indian, as Clement had listened for it in the pre-Socratics. Whatever India may have had to say to the West she was forced to remain silent (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 3).

The well- known Hindu convert to Christianity, Sadhu Sunder Singh, points out that "the waters of life were handed out in European vessels (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 3). Soares would earnestly appeal to the theologians to provide the living water in the Asian vessels so that the people can drink from it abundantly.

Poverty and Religiosity

Soares-Prabhu acknowledges that the Asian situation is a complex one. Following Aloysius Pieris, the Sri Lankan theologian, Soares-Prabhu argues that dominating its vastness and complexity are two massive, closely inter-related realities,

which spell out Asia's third-worldness and its specifically Asian character: "overwhelming poverty and its "multifaceted religiosity." He quotes Pieris approvingly: "the common denominator between Asia and the rest of the Third World is its overwhelming poverty; the specific character which defines Asia within the other poor countries is its multifaceted religiosity. These are two inseparable realities which in their interpenetration constitute what might be designated as the Asian Context and which is the matrix of any theology that is truly Asian" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 5).

So, his theology is basically a liberative one (Soares-Prabhu, 1999b: 124-140). Quoting the final statement of the Asian Theological Conference held at Wennappuwa in Sri Lanka Soares-Prabhu affirms, "in the context of the poverty of the teeming millions of Asia and their situation of domination and exploitation, our theology must have a very definite liberational thrust" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 6). Immediately he adds that liberation' for the Asian psyche is not only liberation from poverty, but equally the liberation which leads to that 'poverty' which is freedom from illusion, attachment and greed. Soares also acknowledges that this poverty and religiosity is tied with the caste system in India and is detrimental to Jesus' mission (Soares-Prabhu 1999: 141-157).

Challenge to Asian Theology

The challenge to Asian theology, in this context, is to "sink new shafts into the inexhaustible mine of Christian tradition, and tap hitherto undiscovered lodes of theological understanding. The challenge is an urgent one. For a genuine indigenization of the Church and a true contextualization of its theology is needed, not just as a missionary tactic for the post-colonial age (Mukherjee, 2020; Cronshaw, 2016), but as a necessary affirmation of the rich 'catholicity' of true Christianity" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 4). Soares-Prabhu is fully convinced that "it is only by means of effective indigenization that the Christian religion is able to fulfill

its claim to be a universal religion" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 4).

After familiarising ourselves with the context in terms of poverty and religiosity, in the next section I explore his deeper dialogical approach to religions.

3. Towards a Deeper and Dialogical Theology of Religions

In this context Soares-Prabhu pleads for a deeper and dialogical approach to other living religions. He critiques that old mentality of looking at other religions as wrong as a thing of the past. He notes that in the Roman Catholic Church at least, Vatican II has explicitly and officially acknowledged the existence of ''what is true and holy in these religions,'' has found in them' a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" *(Nostra aetate,* 2), and has even recognized them, implicitly, as 'ways of salvation' (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 9).

So he notes, already in 1990s, that theologians everywhere are beginning to breach even these outer limits of traditional orthodoxy by responding with growing enthusiasm to John Hick's call for a 'Copernican revolution' in Christian theology. This would lead to "a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realization that is *God* who is at the centre, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, revolve round him" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 10).

This demands a creative interpretation of dogmas and moving away from rigid *a priori* dogmatisms. He acknowledges that *a priori* dogmatism carries little conviction in the hermeneutically sophisticated world of theology today (Mathew & Matthew 2004). Christian attitudes towards non-Christian religions must, indeed, be grounded on Christian revelation, but this revelation is not a "timeless truth" which can be read directly out of Scripture and Tradition and applied immediately to the contemporary situation. Rather like every other word, God's Word too is speaking into history. History and historical situation are very significant in

our experience of God's revelation. He adds that it "is historical not merely in the sense of being founded in history, but also as it is addressed to historical situations" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 4). Thus the Christian Word on non-Christian religions is thus historically conditioned both in its speaking and in its hearing. It needs therefore a double translation - translation out of its original context and translation into its new one - if it is to be correctly understood and properly lived out. This leads to religious tolerance leading to the co-existence of different religions side-by-side.

Not Indifferent to Truth

Such religious tolerance is not the result of an indifference to the truth, asserts Soares-Prabhu. He argues that "Asia's long and impassioned quest for the Absolute is proof enough of this. Asian religions do indeed relativize 'beliefs', but that is only because their awareness of, indeed their experiential insight into the Absolute has led them to the conviction that every religious experience, and much more so every attempt at conceptualizing or verbalizing this experience, is necessarily inadequate" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 16). Here he reminds the readers of the Ancient Chinese wisdom by *Tao te Ching* "The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao; the name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 16)

Collective and Inclusive Search for Truth

So Soares-Prabhu pleads for a never-ending and collective search for the Truth that all religions seek. At the same time he is convinced that religious search and thinking in Asia thus follows a logic of its own. "It defines truth not by exclusion (A is A, because it is not B), but by identity (A is A, whether or not it is also B). Asian thinking is thus inclusive, not exclusive; it is guided by the principle of identity rather than by the principle of contradiction (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 6). Asian search for

Truth follows the 'ying-yang' way of complementarity (both/and), rather than the Aristotelian exclusion principle (either/or). The Asian approach to religious truth is "intuitive rather than discursive, symbolic rather than conceptual, more practical than academic. For all their considerable metaphysical sophistication, all Asian 'theologies' are primarily *sadhanas* - ways of "realizing (and not merely knowing) the highest end of life." (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 16).

Thus, in our inclusive and collective search there is no to lapse into 'relativism'. Rather it is to suggest that Christian theology has yet to produce a theology of religions that is adequate to the much improved understanding of non-Christian religions. The elaboration of such a theology Soares-Prabhu suggests, be the special contribution of Asian theology which is particularly favourably placed to enter , into an intimate 'dialogical' dialogue with these religions, according to the "rules of the game" formulated by Raimundo Panikkar, whose own astonishingly creative work is a fine example of such theologizing (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 17). Soares-Prabhu suggests that such a dialogue, (which, if it is Asian' will go beyond an exchange of ideas to a shared religious experience - a genuine *communicatio m sacris)* will lead to a 'paradigm shift' - for there is a growing consensus among theologians that the old ecclesiocentric and Christocentric paradigms, which either reject non-Christian religions as a sinful, or patronize them as 'unfulfilled' forms of Christianity**,** are no longer adequate for contemporary situation (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 17).

Types of Religiosity and Experiences

Soares-Prabhu contends that there is an emerging consensus that the immense variety of religious experience mediated by the religions of humankind (or at least by its scriptural religions) can be reduced to two basic types, variously described as the 'messianic' and the 'unitive' (Thomas Aquinas), the 'prophetic' and the 'mystical' (Friedrich Heiler), the religion of

'confrontation with the divine' and that of the 'inferiority of the divine' (Peter Berger). The first of these types (the messianic, the prophetic, the religion of confrontation with the divine) experiences a 'personal' God, who is grasped as the 'wholly other', in an l-Thou relationship grounded in right belief and sustained by proper ethical conduct responsive to 'the will of God'. It is characteristic of the 'Semitic' group of religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam The second type (the unitive, the mystical, the religion of the interiority of the divine) experiences the divine as an impersonal absolute, 'the One without another', which is apprehended in a gnostic experience of the total identity of the self with the Absolute, for which correct beliefs are less important than an effective spiritual discipline which will lead to transrational insight. This is characteristic of the properly Asian religions: Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 18-19).

In this background particularism of any kind would be unthinkable for the Asian theologian with his inbuilt inclination to tolerance. Such a tolerance is not, as Radhakrishnan has finely remarked, a cover for shallowness of conviction, but is "the homage which the finite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the infinite" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 19; Pandikattu, 2020). Such a holistic, 'ying-yang' approach to reality is both inclusive and dialogical. For truth is "two-eyed"! No one-eyed vision, blinkered to sight along a single 'traditional' perspective (be it mystical or prophetic), will do justice to the truth. For the reality that the truth attempts to understand is, we are beginning to realize, 'elliptical' - made up of contradictory facets which cannot be apprehended adequately from any single point of view, like the centre of a circle; but only from two (or more) distanced points, like the foci of an ellipse (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 20). Soares-Prabhu brings out the findings of modern physics to illustrate this aspect of reality. It now proposes a wholly non-mechanistic model of the universe, in which the world is "experienced as a dynamic, inseparable whole, which always includes the observer in an essential way" - that is, as a world which is every similar

to that projected by Eastern mysticism. Indeed the wave-particle alternation of Quantum mechanics, in which the ultimate units of matter (the sub-atomic particles) and of energy (light quanta) are treated as both 'waves' and 'particles' (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 20). Thus contemporary world needs diverse types of religiosity and religious encounters, which enrich or complement each other.

In this deeper dialogical context it is significant that he borrows the imagery of Marriage from Bede Griffiths, as we shall see in the next section.

4. Marriage between East and West

Recognizing the diversity and plurality of religious experiences, Soares-Prabhu pleads for a constructive dialogue based on the model of a fruitful marriage. Soares-Prabhu refers to the work of Bede Griffiths and points to "the title of his immensely satisfying book, 'The Marriage of East and West' (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 21; Griffiths, 2003).). This book draws on a life-time of religious experience in Europe and Asia and refers to a far richer complementarity of East and West. The encounter of Christianity with the religions of Asia should lead to a profound and indissoluble union into one flesh of the "masculine, rational, active, dominating" mentality of the West and the "feminine, intuitive, passive and receptive" mind of the East (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 21). Reason is thus to be married to intuition; the scientific observation of nature to the existential awareness of the self; western technology to eastern contemplation. Only such a marriage can lead to the reconciliation of the two great complementary 'revelations' that have leavened the consciousness of humankind; Asia's cosmic revelation of "the infinite, timeless being manifesting [itself] in this world of time and change, but ultimately unaffected by it," (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 21) and Christianity's revelation of "God's action in history, of the one, eternal Being acting in time and history and bringing this world of time and change into union with himself" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 21). Soares-Prabhu is convinced that

oonly through such a reconciliation, marriage and dialogue shall we reach the non-duality that transcends all dualities and find wholeness for ourselves and for humankind.

Soares-Prabhu refers to the writings of Asian Christian theologians, particularly in those of theologians in India - both pioneers like Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907), Aiyadurai Jesudasen Appasamy (1891-1975), Pandipedi Chenchiah (1886-1959), Vengal Chakkarai (1880-1958), and contemporaries like Swami Abhishiktananda, M.M. Thomas, Raimundo Panikkar and Bede Griffiths. We may further add the names of his contemporaries and companions here: Samuel Rayan (to whom Soares-Prabhu has dedicated his book), Kurien Kunnumpuram, Francis D'Sa, Aloysius Pieris and Sebastian Kappen. These Christian visionaries have attempted to formulate a theology that is better suited to Asia and rooted in Asian soil. This demands a re-reading of the Bible rooted in the Asian culture (Soares-Prabhu, 1999d: 112-123).

Such an Asian reading of the Gospels that will, I believe, mediate to Christian theology the results of the comparative study of religions, "just as historical critical exegesis has mediated the critical mentality of the Enlightenment, transcendental theology the insights of phenomenology and existentialism, and Latin American Liberation Theology the sociological analyses of Marx. That such an impact will lead to radically new Christological and theological formulations - including very new ways of understanding the role of Jesus in the salvation of humankind - is to be expected (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 23). Soares-Prabhu understands that such formulations may "appear disconcerting to the traditional Western theologian, accustomed to viewing reality from a very different perspective - as disconcerting as the description of the electron as a 'wave function' would have appeared to a physicist brought up in the traditional belief that it was some sort of ultimate –particle" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 23). So he pleads with the traditional theologians to be patient, remembering that new formulations are not necessarily heterodox formulations, as a little reflection on the history of

Christian theology (and specifically on the history of Christian opinion on the salvation of non-Christians!) will show. He assures: "the formulations of a genuinely Asian theology will not be syncretistic borrowings from alien traditions, nor creations or the perfervid imaginations of Asian theologians thirsting after originality - a disease, in any case, more endemic to the lush competitive theological jungles of the West than to the torpid backwaters of Asian theology! Instead, they will, hopefully, be the result of a new interpretation of the received Christian tradition, made indeed from an Asian point of view, but finding its ultimate authentication in the acceptance it receives from the world-wide Christian community (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 23). So the next section deals with Soares' hope for a truly world Church

5. Towards a World Catholic Church

Such a move to receive the acceptance of the larger Christian community presupposes that we move collectively beyond any kind of cultural imperialism. Asian theology must be allowed to develop in its own distinctive way. Such a development is quite essential if the Christian church is to be true to its catholicity, its role as a world religion. In the Roman Catholic communion, the German theologian, Karl Rahner, sees an emerging awareness this as the distinctive feature of Vatican 11. For the theological significance of Vatican II for Rahner lies precisely in the fact that it heralds "the beginning of a tentative approach by the Church to the discovery and official realization of itself as world Church" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 24). Soares-Prabhu is convinced that Vatican II has truly made the Church both catholic in its widest sense and world-wide both geographically and theologically. "If we look at the macroscopic and official action of the Church and at the same time become more clearly aware that the concrete, real activity of the Church – in spite of the contradiction to its own nature involved in its attitude to the world outside Europe – was what we might venture to describe as that of an export firm, exploiting to the whole world a European religion along with other elements of this supposedly superior culture and

civilization, and not really attempting to change the commodity, then it seems appropriate and justified to regard Vatican II as the first great official event in which the Church came to be realized as world –Church (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 24).

Soares-Prabhu is optimistic that Vatican II would then be ushering in the last of the three great periods which make up the church's history. The *Judaeo- Christian church,* which was born in and remained attached to Palestinian Judaism, was followed by the *Hellenistic church,* which, though it broke free from Judaism remained from the first century until ours tied to "a particular cultural group, that of Hellenism and European culture and civilization;" and this is now giving place to the *world church* in which "the Church's living space is from the every outset the whole world" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 24). Along with Rahner, Soares-Prabhu makes a fervent pea that "Vatican II does indeed mark the beginning of a new age for the church that will spell "the end of an export religion" (Soares-Prabhu, 1984: 24).

As a world Church, she is open to dialogue with different streams and cultures. So too is the liberation theologian Soares-Prabhu who is ready to listen to the different voices from various sides. A theologian of dialogue indeed!

6. Soares-Prabhu as a Theologian of Dialogue

Though he is himself one of the frontline Indian liberation theologians, this article makes it abundantly clear that he has been keenly in dialogue with the Asian reality: its diverse culture, abject poverty and immense religiosity. Thus the title of this booklet: *Inculturation, Liberation, Dialogue!* (Soares-Prabhu, 1984).

He has elaborately written on dialogue as a way of life for the Indian Church (Padinjarekuttu, 1999). The dialogical approach for him is a necessary part of an inclusive and world church that takes poverty and religiosity of the Asian nations seriously. The openness to receive various sources of wisdom, the readiness to

accept other ways of thinking (without being eclectic or shallow) and the courage to point out the mistakes in the approaches of others (and oneself) without being judgmental are necessary part of this dialogue.

Elsewhere I have shown that he had been appreciating dialogue between science and religion (Pandikattu, 2014). Here I have been focussing on the fact that he has been dialoguing between the two major streams of Indian Christian theology in the 1980s: Liberation (Soares-Prabhu, 1999b: 124-140) and Inculturation (Padinjarekuttu, 1999: xxiv).

Other elements of dialogue that we can see in his life are between:

- Colonialism and Post-Colonialism
- Historical Criticism and Hermeneutical Phenomenology
- Reason and Faith
- Incluturation and Liberation
- Institutional Religion and Charismatic Religiosity
- Ashram Perspective vs Liberation perspective
- Mystic Orientation vs Prophetic Orientation
- Tradition and Modernity

As one who seeks the via media, Soares-Prabhu has been able to forge a dialogical relationship between his Jesus of History and Christ of Faith, which is actually his Dharma of Jesus in the Indian/Asian context (D'Sa, 2003).

This dialogue he pursues with meticulous honesty and methodological rigour. Just one illustration: The booklet we are exploring has 25 pages of main text followed by 15 pages of footnotes. He tries to substantiate almost every insight he has with rigorous methodological research! This is true not only of this book, but of his life and vision. Thus his theological approach is truly a dialogical approach to different religions, cultures and

world (including sciences), which implies an inclusive openness!

A gentile and humble person that he is, he goes about doing his work without disturbing anyone or cleating a flamboyant ambience. Sincerely and seriously he seeks to bring about rapprochement between various schools, disciplines and world-views. He listens patiently and intensely. He radiates a sense of serenity and calm, which is characteristic of academic vigour and depth. He is truly a partner in dialogue, a genuine seeker after truth and a partner and a passionate lover of the poor.

Conclusion

In this article I have been trying to understand the theological approach of Soares-Prabhu, the best known Indian biblical scholar and most significant theologian from Jnana Deepa, Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Pune, as being both dialogical and inclusive. I have been able to argue that his approach was basically one of openness and receptivity to the East and West, to Religions and Cultures of Asia and Europe. Such an approach to Catholicism will make it both a World-Church and an Inclusive One, which accepts good tidings from all sides.

This was the life and message of Soares-Prabhu himself. As a humble seeker and sincere believer in the goodness of Jesus Christ and fellow-human beings, he has been a messenger of Christian love to the people of Asia. This is true of his personal life and professional outreach. His personal commitment and academic writings show a keen sense of empathy and compassion. He is a person of sensitiveness and humility, and a man of dialogue, which is all-inclusive and open-ended. I am happy to have encountered him personally.

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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 in1984 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 spiritualties 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 though 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).

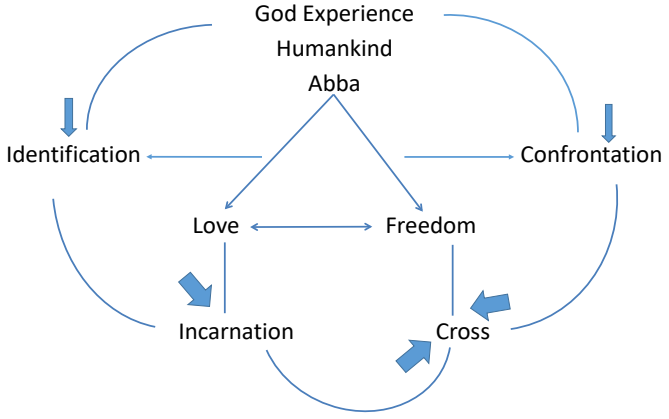

Fig 1. Elements of the Spirituality of Jesus (CWG 3, 101)

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 ad 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 tern 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

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 loves 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	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.	God gives unconditional approval. There is no responsibility here.
H u m a n response	Formal obedience to the law. Do what is told in the law	Radical obedience	No need of obedience
Aim of spirituality	To accumulate merit To avoid sin	Be perfect. Become children of the father. We become like God by loving.	Self-fulfillment

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	There is no happiness except in loving.

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-Prahu, "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 or oppression intact. Attitudinal and structural change are both necessary, because ultimately attitudes and structures are dialectically related." (Soares-Prahu, "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.)

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Revolutionary Option for the Poor and Marginalised: George M. Soares-Prabhu's Understanding of the Poor and Marginalised

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Abstract: In this article the author tries to bring out the biblical understanding of the Poor and Marginalised by George M. Soares-Prabhu and how he has hermeneutically interpreted the word of God meaningfully and relevantly for their salvation/liberation in the Indian context. Soares-Prabhu expounds that the thinking, feeling, and acting of Jesus, his radical option and revolutionary mission for the poor and marginalised are all based on his God experience as *Abba* in the first immersion of the river Jordan. That is the foundation of the life and spirituality of Jesus that leads him to the way of the Cross and death at Calvary where he had his second immersion in blood. Every disciple is expected to have these two immersions to follow Jesus in one's own context and bear witness to him by liberating the poor and marginalised. Soares-Prabhu explicates the *Decalogue* (OT), the sermon on the mount and the table fellowship of Jesus (NT), to bring

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equality, justice, peace and revolution, (change of heart and transformation of oppressive and sinful structures) to the poor, marginalised and the most suffering and oppressed Dalit Christians in India, all over Asia and the World.

Keywords: Poor in spirit, Marginalized, God experience, Baptism, *Dalits*, Caste, Oppressive poverty, Discipleship, Table fellowship.

Introduction

It was in the academic year 1990-91, when Fr. Rui de Menezes was the Rector of De Nobili College, Pune, I stayed there doing my Master's in Theology at Jnana Deepa (Pontifical Athenaeum). I think that it was the end of August, I had an appointment with George M. Soares-Prabhu to talk with him on a theme for an M.Th paper and write it under his direction. He accepted my request gladly. I told him that I wanted to write a paper on Indian Caste System and criticize its ill-effects and to promote equality among Indians. He suggested to me to study the story of Rantideva in Bhagavata Purana. When I finished writing the paper, I realised that the story has its social, religious, theological and political relevance for us in India today, especially to the Dalits in India who long and work for equality, justice and human dignity.[1]

The day on which I met Soares-Prabhu was also the day of enlightenment to me. Soares-Prabhu did not stop with the theme. He posed to me many other questions: How many papers have you finished writing till now? Who are the professors? How many pages have you written for a paper? I answered him it was 3 months since I had finished writing only one paper with 85 pages. Immediately he told me, 'how long are you planning to stay here? M.Th is only a two year programme, so try to write each paper only about 25 pages under a professor and you have to finish writing all the 7 papers in three semesters and the dissertation in the fourth semester'. Even today I gratefully remember Soares-Prabhu who put me on the right track with right orientation that helped me to finish my M. Th on time. It is

a privilege and honour to me, I think, that this year (2020) being the 25th death anniversary of Soares-Prabhu, to read all the four volumes of the collected writings of his and to write an article on "*his understanding of the poor and marginalised.*"

1. How does Soares-Prabhu understand Biblically the Poor and Marginalised

Who is poor? What is poverty? How God and Jesus are concerned about the poor and marginalised? These are the questions often raised not only by the students of theology but by certain groups of provincials, Father and Mother Generals of congregations today? To them all, Soares gives the following answers from the perspective of the Bible.

Who is Poor?

Soares-Prabhu has thoroughly studied the original Hebrew words (OT) such as '*ānī* or '*ānāw* (plural: '*anīyyīm* or *'anāwīm* (to be bent, bowed down, afflicted), '*ebiôn*' (a person in need), '*dal*' (to be weak, to be little, to languish), '*rāsh'* (to be in want, to be poor), '*miskēn*' (beggar) and Greek words (NT) such as *penēs* (poor), *ptōchos* (destitute) for the poor. And the enlightment he comes out with is something marvellous: Of all these words, Soares-Prabhu says that '*ānī* or '*ānāw* is the significant word that gives the accurate meaning of the biblical understanding of the poor: "It suggests a person who is afflicted and bent, that is, dehumanized, reduced by oppression to a condition of diminished capacity or worth" (*CWG* 1, 262).

The poor are "those who are deprived of the material and social goods needed for an authentically human life … (and) a study of the two texts, (Lk 4:16:30 and 6:20-26), then that we shall come to know Jesus' attitude towards poverty and the poor" (*CWG* 2, 260). Further "The 'poor' in Jesus' beatitude it would seem, then, are those who are utterly needy, desperately in want, so that one would be tempted to formulate the Jesus

beatitude as "Blessed are the *destitute*, for theirs is the Kingdom of God" (*CWG* 2, 260). He explains in addition that the poor are those who are 'victims of injustice', 'socially marginalised', untouchables (they were impure because of their professions (like tax collectors, tanners, shepherds), lepers (because of some disfiguring illness), possessed (because of some mental disturbance), little ones (because of their ignorance of the law), sinners (because of their violation of accepted ethical or ritual codes). All these are called in the Bible as *anawim* (the afflicted, humbled, deprived), a word which is primarily sociological and not spiritual (*CWG* 2, 265).

While explaining the situation of the poor in India he makes a thorough study and analysis of Indian society giving us all a list of statistics (*CWG* 2, 256). Even today the situation has not improved. If we read the global hunger index – 2020, published recently India ranks 94 compared to Nepal 73, Bangladesh 75, and Pakistan 88 among 107 nations where the study is made recently (Malaimalar, 2020). While commenting on the beatitude of Jesus as the beatitude of the oppressed, he thinks of the *Dalits* in India and writes that they are "daily victims of inhuman atrocities and of an utterly dehumanizing discrimination practiced against them (incredibly!) even in allegedly Christian communities (*CWG* 2, 265).

Reflecting on the question, 'why are the poor blessed?' he declares that they "are blessed because they are to be the beneficiaries of *total revolution ...*" (*CWG* 2, 266). In the history of humankind, how do we look at the poor as subjects or objects? If we look at them as objects, then, we will try to always help them and allow them to continue to be poor. Such an outlook will not propose any structural change on behalf of the poor. But at the same time when we look at them as subjects then they are the ones to change all the oppressive structures to transform society in human history: "… the poor in the Bible are a dynamic group who are not the passive victims of history but those through whom God shapes his history" (*CWG* 1, 264) and "For the Kingdom is, after all, God's intervention into history" (*CWG* 2, 267).

What is Poverty?

What is poverty? There are many definitions depending on our world views (the way in which we look at poverty). However in a straightforward definition (without spiritualising the term poverty) the Asian Bishops mean, "to be deprived of access to a full sharing in human brotherhood" (Rosales and Arévalo, 1992: 143). The mind of Soares-Prabhu reflects almost the same when he defines poverty, "to be deprived of the material and social goods needed for an authentically human life" (*CWG* 2, 260). He further observes that the poverty in which that the poor (*ptōchos = 'destitute'*) live, "designates one who lacks even the necessities of life and must beg in order to live" (*CWG* 2, 264). Such a poverty of the destitude is an oppressive poverty (*CWG* 2, 267), opposed to spiritual poverty (anti consumerism). That "*oppressive poverty*, which is ultimately dehumanizing, is a religious value may be doubted. Jesus certainly never proclaims it as such. Rather, he proclaims the poor 'blessed', not because their poverty is a good thing, but precisely because it is an evil which he is about to bring to an end" (*CWG* 2, 266). Poverty in the teaching and preaching of Jesus is not a natural condition but always the result of oppression (economic destitution or social ostracism). Such a poverty is a violent poverty, and it is imposed on the poor who are oppressed and dehumanised. Thus, "the Jesus beatitude is the beatitude of *the oppressed*" (*CWG* 1, 265). Moreover, "as a state of economic or social deprivation brought about by exploitation, it is an evil" (*CWG* 1, 272).

How God and Jesus Are Concerned about the Poor and Marginalised?

The poor in the Old Testament are known as the '*victims of unjust oppression*, 'who cry to God for help and liberation (Ex 2:23-3:15). Hearing the cry of the Israelites, God Yahweh liberates them (Ex 6:2-9), sends innumerable prophets to guide, guard and support them and defend them with serious warning to the oppressors (Ezek 22:1-16; Is 10: 1-4; Mic 6:9-15; Am

8:4-12). Yahweh as a warrior and defender of the marginalized Israel was the foundational spiritual experience of Israelites who build their other aspects of human life in and around it. In the context Asia and India where the poor are the majority (80% in Asia, more than 65% in India), who belong to different religions, Soares-Prabhu discovers something unique in 'the biblical God-Poor relationship': "No other religious tradition I know gives such importance to the poor or assigns to them so significant a role" (*CWG* 1, 272).

In the New Testament, Soares-Prabhu explains that right from the beginning of his ministry Jesus opts to work for the salvation/liberation of the poor and marginalised. To the poor he gifts God's Reign first and makes them the blessed and the rich cursed. Whenever he actualises his plan for the poor, he encounters oppositions and blocks from the socio-political and socio-religious power structures (Mk 3:1-6). Many times, his enemies take stones to attack him but Jesus escapes from them. He has confrontation with his foes not for one or two days but throughout his life. Its climax is in the garden of Gethsemane where he is finally arrested and is crucified at Calvary which is the second baptism which he foretells during his ministry (Lk 12:50).

2. The Baptism, God Experience of Jesus and His Option for the Poor and Marginalised

Soares-Prabhu writes that the foundational experience of Jesus in his baptism is his God experience as *Abba*, a unique experience indeed (*CWG* 3, 3). "The Christian tradition begins with Jesus's experience of God. This is the starting point of the dharma of Jesus understood both as the dharma which he practised (Jesus's dharma) and the dharma he preached (Christian dharma)" (*CWG* 3, 3). In his reflection, Soares-Prabhu comments that both of them are seen from the perspective of the poor, marginalised and suffering humanity.

While reflecting on the God experience of Jesus, Soares-Prabhu traces it in the baptism of Jesus where Jesus identifies himself in solidarity with the tax-collectors and sinners. The moment he identifies with them is the moment of many revelations (Mk 1:9-11): 1. Jesus reveals his option and mission. 2. God reveals that Jesus is God's beloved Son in whom God is well pleased, and 3. God's will is being fulfilled and Jesus is the God's Reign bearer and God's Reign maker. It is possible for him as he is the bearer and giver of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who makes it possible for every disciple of Jesus to follow Jesus in accepting poverty in one's own personal life and opting to work for the poor and the marginalized who are the centre of God's Reign.

In baptism, Jesus totally identifies himself with the poor, marginalised and outcaste. One can see it throughout the Gospels. It is also seen in the lifestyle of Jesus, the type of persons he chooses as his disciples and the places and villages where he was busy in doing his ministries: "The mission field of Jesus was the Palestine Countryside, with its poor, backward villages and its primitive townships, not the Hellenized (or as we might say today 'westernised') urban centers to which the rich flocked" (*CWG* 2, 260). It is also an observation, and teaching of Jesus that riches are "an insuperable obstacle to the Kingdom, because they make a man godless and heartless" (Mk 10:17-22) (*CWG* 2, 257-59).

The God experience of Jesus enables him to have a clear cut vision and mission. It is the same experience inspires the disciples to have the same vision and mission in one´s own context. The vision of Jesus was: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." The Reign of God is established, wherever and whenever God is accepted as a common Parent to all, whenever and wherever Jesus realizes by bringing the option people from the periphery to the centre and slavery to salvation/liberation: "There is here a radical de-sacralisation of the cosmos, a

radical de-hierarchisation of society (that is, a radical affirmation of the equality of humankind) and a radical shift from an ethics of observance (ritual or legal) to an ethics of love ('the heart')" (*CWG* 3, 6).

3. God Experience of Jesus is the qualification for discipleship

God experience of Jesus is the qualification for discipleship says, Soares-Prabhu: "What makes a person a Christian is not professing certain beliefs, nor practising particular rituals, nor undergoing an initiation rite, nor belonging to a recognizable social group, nor even confessing the name Jesus, though these are inevitable stages in the evolution of a religious tradition. To be disciple of Jesus means to experience God the way that Jesus experienced God" (*CWG* 3, 4). From the perspective of the exploited world (understood as third World), following Jesus means following him in one's own context (social, political, economic, cultural and religious, education and health). According to the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences there are 80% of the people in Asia who are poor and they belong to different religions and cultures (Rosales and Arevalo, 1992: 157). Therefore the Christian service to people, in order that the Reign of God may come in Asia, has to have as main goal the salvation/ liberation of the 80% Asian poor. To achieve this the Church in Asia has to inculturate in the midst of the poor and their cultures and enter into dialogue with their religions.

4. Radical Option of Jesus to Accept Women as Helpers and Disciples

Soares-Prabhu observes how women were considered and treated as unequal in a patriarchal society (Alangaram, 2001: 103-04). In the time of Jesus, women in the Jewish world were considered as non-persons. Against such socio-cultural situation, he creates counter culture and liberates them. Such new thoughts, feelings and action programs of liberation have their origin in

the *Abba* experience of Jesus. Jesus broke all the oppressive structures against women, talking to a Samaritan woman (Jn 4:5-42), protecting and defending women in public (Lk 7:37-50; Mk 14:3-9; 12, 40; Jn 8:3-11), sharing in their ritual impurity, when he draws attention to the haemorrhaging woman who touched him (Lk 8:43-48) healing women (Mk 1:31), welcoming them (Mk 10, 13) and appreciating and rewarding them (Mk 7-29) (Alangaram, 2001: 103-04). The radical option and attitude of Jesus is both a call and a challenge to all his followers in the world. Soares-Prabhu understands that the radical option of Jesus demands from us to opt for structural change: "Love implies an effective response to the whole spectrum of needs that we observe around us. Because it is increasingly evident that the effective response to many of our most urgent needs is necessarily a structural one, justice understood as a change of structures is an inescapable dimension of love" (*CWG* 3, 8).

The reflection of Soares-Prabhu on women liberation is contextual and relevant to Asia and India where women are oppressed, ill-treated, dehumanised and "… cry out to the Lord for liberation" (Rosales and Arévalo, 1992: 183). It is in this context of oppression and dehumanization, the Asian Bishops remind us all to pay serious attention on liberating women without which the liberation in Asia is incomplete and impossible. That is why they remind us: "Mary is the Mother of God, that she, a woman, uniquely co-operated with Jesus so that the Reign of the Father may come. It is not just a human necessity but a Gospel imperative that the feminine half of the world's population be recognised and their dignity restored, and that they be allowed to play their rightful role in the world and in the Church" (Rosales and Arévalo, 1992: 183).

5. Spirituality of Jesus and His Revolutionary Option for the Poor and Marginalised

While reflecting on the spirituality of Jesus, Soares begins with the baptismal experience of Jesus where he understands

God as our Parent and humans are sisters and brothers. Though he has committed no sin (1 Pet 2:22), he identifies himself with the sinners and tax collectors (Mt 3:14-15), the poor and outcaste of his time. Jesus reveals his readiness to be with such people and suffers with them in order to save them. Jesus makes it clear from the beginning of his public life (mission) who are his ministry-people to whom he promises the Reign of God first. His life style is the life style of the marginalised and poor, which he mentions that "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8: 20).

On the one hand Jesus continues his identity with the poor and marginalised, on the other hand he encounters the growing enmity and hatred of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians. Mark points out already in the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, when he decides to be on the side of a marginalised person and to heal him on the Sabbath day, the Pharisees (religious leaders) join with the Herodians (political leaders) and plotted against Jesus how to destroy him (Mk 1: 1-6). The Gospels present us a continuous confrontation with the establishment or powers of evil. For Jesus, the enemies were local and not international.

In apocalyptic thinking, writes Soares, Satan is considered to be ruler of the world and he rules it with the demonic men and women who dehumanize the poor and the marginalized. But the Abba experience of Jesus "cannot tolerate any form of discrimination based on race, religion, community or gender; nor can it remain passive in the face of unjust structures that deprive people of what they need to lead a fully human life, for it is always a brother or sister who is hurt by such discrimination or injustice" (*CWG* 3, 97). Soares distinguishes between religion and spirituality. Religion he says may lead humans to worship Jesus but spirituality lead us to follow Jesus, siding with the poor and marginalised defending and liberating them as Jesus did.

All the miracles of Jesus according to Soares-Prabhu are not merely actions of compassion to heal the poor but also actions of subversion of a 'demonic' power structure that dehumanize

the poor. Thus they explain the vision and mission of Jesus and the struggle he undergoes to establish societal justice, which is the justice of God and God's Reign: "This is formulated with unusual force and clarity in two passages of Luke's Gospel in the inaugural sermon of the synagogue of Nazareth with which Luke prefaces his account of the ministry of Jesus (Lk 4:16-21); and in the series of beatitudes and woes with which he opens his Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:20-27) (*CWG* 3, 97).

Jesus's revolutionary option for the poor and marginalised and his continuous confrontation of the rich and the powerful, comes from the foundational experience of baptism in the water that leads finally into another immersion, immersion in the blood at Calvary, which he foretold to the disciples during his ministry of establishing the Reign of God. His revolutionary option for the poor and marginalised demanded a price which was his own life. In the words of Soares-Prabhu: "The Cross is not an arbitrary irruption into the life of Jesus. It is the natural outcome of his spirituality. A spirituality of identification with the poor and of confrontation with the rich and the powerful leads inevitably to the conflict that culminates in the Cross" (*CWG* 3, 100). Further he points out that "… on the Cross Jesus is wholly poor and totally outcast. … Here he is one with all the marginalized and all the martyred victims of the earth" (*CWG* 3, 100-01). The followers of Jesus cannot have any other spirituality except the spirituality of solidarity with the poor and marginalized for their salvation/liberation and confrontation with all evil powers that may be men, women and oppressive-sinful structures to dethrone them and send them away empty.

6. The Enlightment from the Decalogue for the Liberation of the Dalits

We need to congratulate Soares-Prabhu that he has dealt on an important topic – *Dalit* equality and liberation in the Indian context drawing enlightment from the Decalogue. Being well aware of the living conditions of the *Dalits*, Soares-Prabhu declares that

'they are the poorest of the poor', and they are not treated as human being with respect and dignity. This is because they are ritually polluted and forced to do works that are linked with dirt and death. Further Soares-Prabhu observes that when the *Dalits* become Christians, the oppressions and ill-treatment continues even in the churches, and the authorities in the churches are indifferent to socio-economic and socio-political injustices, as they belong to high castes. Keeping this as the background, Soares-Prabhu advocates that we need a theology that will read the Bible from the perspective of the Dalit's suffering and liberation and he makes an attempt to do this taking the Decalogue in Ex 20:1-17 (*CWG* 1, 2-8-09).

Soares-Prabhu perceives and analyses first the scope and characteristics of the Decalogue and recognises that it covers all areas of human life (political, social, economic, cultural and religious, health and education) "-relationship to God (vv. 1-11), to human community (vv. 12-16) and to material possessions (v. 17)" (*CWG* 1, 209). For him the Decalogue has its origin in God: "It is wholly universal in its scope, valid always, everywhere and for all" (*CWG* 1, 209). When a *Dalit* reads the Decalogue he/she is happy and joyful as it is applicable to all making everyone equal. Where as in Indian caste context, the laws of Manu are different for different castes, favouring the upper castes, dehumanising the lower castes and totally, mercilessly and inhumanly oppressing the *Dalits* as the outcastes. Therefore Soares-Prabhu points out that the Decalogue is 'quite unlike' *Manu* (*CWG* 1, 210). The Decalogue is universally applicable and promotes justice for all, while the Manu is partial, hierarchical, oppressive and dehumanising from the perspective of *Dalits*. Further Soares-Prabhu takes cognizance of the Creation story of Genesis (Gen 1:26-27), where all humankind has been created in the image of God. Such biblical revelations are not only juxtaposed with *Manu* but also being questioned on its origin, its authenticity and its relevance from the perspective of *Dalits* who are made poor and oppressed, kept illiterate for centuries in India. Soares-Prabhu concludes: "With its implicit proclamation of the equality of all human be-

ings, the Decalogue is one way of drawing the broad outlines of this liberative community, towards which all *Dalits* everywhere, aspire" (*CWG* 3, 210).

7. The Lessons from Jesus for the Liberation of the Dalits in India

We also value and acknowledge the contribution of Soares-Prabhu who draws lessons from Jesus and his table fellowship for the liberation of *Dalit* Christians in India (CWG 1, 223-240). He thought and wrote about the liberation of *Dalit* Christians (in 1992), much before the statement of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India presenting its Policy of Dalit empowerment in the Catholic Church in India, Dec. 8, 2016.

Though the untouchability is removed in the constitution, it exists in every village and town in India. The *Dalits* have rejected the name given to them by Mahatma Gandhi as 'Harijans' and they have accepted the word *Dalit* (which means broken and oppressed) first coined by Jyotiba Phule. The *Dalits* are ill-treated, humiliated and dehumanized every day and everywhere in India. The *Dalits* are the most oppressed people: "*Dalits* occupy the very lowest strata in the caste system, which is an intricate, all pervasive and incredibly tenacious structure of institutionalised inequality, unparalleled in the world for the damage it does to people" (*CWG* 1, 146). Politically they are zero, economically poor, socially outcaste, culturally and religiously they are ostracised, health and education are not available to them. It is in this context, Soares raises two questions which are (both exegetical (1) and hermeneutical (2)) very relevant from the perspective of Dalit liberation/salvation: "(1) what this revolutionary praxis of Jesus (his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners) meant in the social world in which he lived; and (2) what it has to tell us about our own attitudes towards *Dalit* Christians in the caste-ridden communities we live in" (*CWG* 1, 223).

The act of table fellowship of Jesus exegetically is one of the counter cultural ways to reveal God's unfathomable love and

mercy to the least and last in the Jewish society where the society was built hierarchically based on the holy and profane and ritually pure and impure. In the social world of Jesus, his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners is an "… expression of a radically new (and therefore thoroughly disturbing) theological vision, rooted in a new experience of God, calling for a new kind of society" (*CWG* 1, 226). Further it signifies the intimacy, communion and fellowship, and the shape and destiny of the end time community (The Reign of God in its fullness – Is 25:6; Mt 8:1; Lk 23: 30). It is in contrast to those communities of Pharisees and Essenes of Qumran who considered themselves pure and kept themselves away from the impure (the tax collectors and sinners). So, the separation from all that is socially and ritually unclean. In the community of Jesus, the so-called impure and unclean people (the tax collectors and sinners take the central stage), and the reason is that "the 'mercy code' of Q (Lk 6: 27-36) replaces the 'holiness code' of Leviticus (Lev 19: 17-26)" which is a revolution based on his God experience. God is 'Father' (*Abba*) and all humans are sisters and brothers in the Reign of God, and in this way Jesus eradicates the traditional understanding of holy and profane (*CWG* 1, 227-233).

Secondly, Soares-Prabhu prophetically points his finger straight away to every Christian in India, raising a question about our attitudes towards the *Dalit* Christians in caste-communities. In his hermeneutical explanation, he observes and analyses the existing Christian community and he says that we have missed the point in our understanding of the table-fellowship of Jesus. We the Indian Catholics believe in the Caste system and practise it in our day today life, in celebrations, in churches and during the time of seeking marriage alliances. Thus we are Christians only in name but in practice we are totally Hindus following the caste culture in our thinking, feeling and acting. Already in 1982, Catholic Bishops Conferences of India declared that caste is sin, caste discrimination is inhuman and "it violates the God-given dignity and equality of the human person" (CBCI, 1982: 149).

It is also "an outright denial of the Fatherhood of God which, in practice, renders meaningless the brotherhood of man" (*CWG* 1, 223). Keeping the same spirit of CBCI, Soares-Prabhu states convincingly, "Caste discrimination in any form whatever is wholly incompatible with Christianity" (*CWG* 1, 234).

Therefore he calls us all to reflect seriously on the diabolic and inhuman practice of caste discrimination both within the Church and in the society, raising the following questions: How is it that Christians behave exactly like the Hindus? Have they been really baptized and converted at all? How can one be a Christian without accepting the basic principles of Christianity? Have they really become members of the one community called Church where all are brothers and sisters, as the children of the same Father who is in heaven (Mt 7:21)?

Having reflected on the above questions, he himself gives us the various reasons for such a situation in the Indian Church: 1. In the teaching and preaching of the Church, it has totally failed because many Christians look at the *Dalits* with a condescending attitude without accepting their sins. 2. We celebrate Eucharist (a symbol of unity), but at the same time we follow caste system in allotting separate places for the *Dalits* to sit in the Church and separate places in a communion queue, humiliating Jesus in our brothers and sisters. "Christian *Dalit* is (like 'square circle') a contradiction in terms" (*CWG* 1, 223). 3. To bring the caste discrimination into the Eucharistic celebration, is truly to "'despise the Church of God and humiliate those who have nothing' (1 Cor 11:22), and so 'sin against the body and the blood of the Lord' (1 Cor 11: 27)" (*CWG* 1, 223). In the midst of all these, there is soteriological potential in the suffering and humiliation of the *Dalits*: "In the powerlessness and brokenness of Jesus what is hidden is the power and wisdom of God. So too in the powerlessness and brokenness of the *Dalits* will break forth liberation/salvation through the power of the Spirit of the living God. The Spirit of the Lord is upon the *Dalits* to release them from their captivities and to set them at liberty (Lk 4: 18)" (Alangaram, 2019: 41).

Conclusion

When I read the 4 volumes of the *Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J*¸ I understand that these collections are like an ocean and its depth is unfathomable. I wish every professor, and student of theology reads all the 4 volumes that give us right direction and orientation on the method of theologizing in the Indian context today. During his life time, Soares was one of the five well known theologians in the world. His writings reveal the in-depth study of the original works and interpretations of the Bible.

His personal readings and references of the world famous scripture scholars and the renowned theologians like Joachim Jeremias, Karl Rahner, Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Walter Brueggemann, Rudolf Bultmann, Raymond E. Brown, Juan Luis Segundo, Gustavo Gutierrez, Edward Schillebeeckx, J. Severino Croatto, Raimundo Panikkar, Paul Ricoeur, Hans-Georg Gadamer, John Dominic Crossan, Aloysius Pieris and others, astound me. He is a model for us the theologians in India, using the Indian sources and referring to the Indian theologians like Michael Amaladoss, S. Kappen, Francis X. D'Sa, M. M. Thomas, Amalorpavadass, Stan Lourdusamy, Mataji Vandana, Mathew Vellanickal, Gorge V. Lobo and many others.

He is a prophet for our times, because he has preached and taught the *Dharma* of Jesus and written many articles not only from the perspective of the poor and marginalised but also from the perspective of *Dalits* who are 65% of the Catholic Church, and also the most oppressed people in India today. If we want to be thankful to Soares-Prabhu, we need to plan, continue to theologize on behalf of the poor, marginalised and the *Dalits* and direct all our ministries towards their salvation/liberation in India, Asia and the whole world.

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Notes

1. In 2011, I reworked the story of Rantideva and published it in the Journal of Indian Theology, Vol. IV, No. 2, May-August, 2011, with the new title: Another India Possible, The Story of Rantideva: It's Socio-Religious, Theological and Political Relevance for us Today.

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Blending 'the Sacred and the Secular:' The Sacred and the Secular in the Writings of George Soares-Prabhu

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Abstract: The sacred and the secular was envisioned by George Soares-Prabhu from an integrative point of view. He explained the gospel message through the specificities in cultural contexts, especially that of Third-World countries, and India in particular. He used examples from society, to show the presence of God and God's action in the world. He addresses how Jesus explained a lot of what had become aberrations, taking people away from God. The writings of George Soares-Prabhu have two strong slants, liberation and poverty, which he linked. He firmly believed that liberation is the answer to oppressive situations that exist throughout India and Third-World countries and that the gospel is not the gospel if it cannot proclaim a liberating message. What is needed is an active concern, expressing itself not only in spiritual attitudes of patience, forbearance, acceptance,

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and benevolence but also in concrete ways of caring for the material needs of the 'neighbour.'

Keywords: Sacred and secular, Liberation and freedom, Indian Culture, Mission of the Church

Introduction

George M. Soares-Prabhu (henceforth GSP) visioned the sacred and the secular from an integrative point of view. He envisioned Jesus' preaching, teachings, and healing using different social lenses and drew from various disciplines to explain this integrative idea. He explained the gospel message through the specificities in cultural contexts, especially that of Third World countries, and India in particular. Jesus was a teacher, a preacher, and a healer. His examples were from society, to show the presence of God and God's action in the world.

The gospels allow us to encounter Jesus as a 'teacher'; in the Synoptic tradition where he 'went about among the villages (of Galilee) teaching'; that he 'taught them as one who had authority', and that 'he taught everything in parables' (*CWG* 4, 253). Similarly, there are numerous instances in the Synoptics about his healings or miracles and preaching, of which the Sermon on the Mount is his most famous. Jesus brought in understandings of the sacred while addressing structures, people, and rituals.

Jesus' way of addressing a lot of what had become aberrations, taking people away from God, has been addressed by GSP in his writings. The writings of GSP had two strong slants, liberation and poverty, and he linked both. "Liberation for him meant two things: Liberation from poverty arising out of material want and liberation from oppression and social ostracism suffered by the untouchables and the tribals." He firmly believed that liberation is the answer to an oppressive situation that exists throughout India and that the gospel is not the gospel if it cannot proclaim a liberating message.

This article draws from the writings of GSP, especially those from the 4 volume, Collected Works of GSP edited by Fr. Issac Padinjarekuttu and Fr. Francis X. D'Sa SJ. To understand GSP's lens of how the secular and sacred intersect; I have discussed the topic of this article through the following lenses - disciplines GSP used to articulate Jesus' life and ministry, culture, understandings of the poor and poverty, understandings of miracles, and his explanations for Jesus' Mission and Reign of God.

1. Various Disciplines

GSP, in his writings, used data from fields as varied as economics, hermeneutics, history, Indology, literature, politics, science, and sociology. He felt that anyone who wanted to theologize should first do studies in a nontheological field, especially in the field of the social sciences. He said that when looked at from a nontheological base, things theological are bound to look different. His approach and interpretation of scripture especially the New Testament had a clear Indian and Third-World slant.

Any verse or pericope or text that he studied was seen in its setting and context, in its immediate and mediate context. For him, a text was a complex of code-systems and every age discovers new forms of and new approaches to the code-systems that go into the making of a particular text. Also, another strong characteristic of his approach to a Third-World Theology was pluralism, seen in the basic fact of life in India. There is not only religious but also ecclesial, cultural, linguistic, and racial pluralism in India. He made sure that the questions he tackled were contemporary questions, thus situating every text in the present context. He believed that the Indian theologian should do a social reading of the Bible, in the light of liberating praxis, among the socially oppressed, without succumbing to the reductionism of a strictly Marxist approach.

1.1 Culture

God is encountered in biblical tradition in the world of matter; and, also the empirical and contingent world of human history. History is the process in and through which the liberation of humankind takes place (CWG 4, 201). Asia nurtures a variety of cultures and civilizations and spans seven major linguistic zones, each of which has its ways of describing the same reality in its distinctive way (CWG 1, 51). Therefore there are different ways of understanding and meeting God, depending on different cultures or civilizations. Despite its linguistic pluralism, many regional differences, political fragmentation, confusing cultural and technological paradoxes, India exhibits a massive and resilient unity. Therefore, for a country like India, reality should be perceived in a context-sensitive rather than in a context free-way (CWG 1, 82). There should necessarily be solidarity of the individual with the community.

In Jn 1:14 GSP opines that there is solidarity of the individual with the community to which he or she belongs. A nation is thought of as an organic whole in which parts are knit together without losing their individuality, the implication being that God creates humankind as one (CWG 2, 207). The anthropological implications of this verse are the enduring concern that the Christian churches have for the poor, the outcast, and the sick, shown in their works of social service and health care showing (CWG 2, 209). He says…

> In places like India Jesus brings something radically new. A new experience of God, which allows him to rename Yhwh as ABBA. God is experienced not so much as 'holy' but as gracious and compassionate; and people are not just members of an exclusive tribe or a separated 'clean' caste, but as members of an open family, marked by freedom from consumerism and an attitude of radical service (CWG 1, 246).

GSP says that it is necessary to understand the poor and poverty from the standpoint of Jesus. This is particularly necessary when reading the bible in third-world countries, and India in particular.

Parables on poverty that cover the Synoptic gospels are examples of building the Reign of God.

2. The Poor and Poverty

The 'poor' for Jesus comprised the 'peoples of the land' that included the poor, the unschooled, the socially unacceptable, the religiously defiled, the sick. They are 'poor' not because they are in need, but because they have made themselves humbly dependent on God; they hunger not for bread but salvation; they are weak not on account of the deprivations and indignities they suffer but because they long for the Kingdom, especially in a country like India where there is so much discrimination (CWG 4, 92). He constantly reiterates that the word of God has to be heard in a concrete historical situation, to build the reign of God.

Jesus becomes poor like the poor; an outcast by associating with outcasts, he ate with tax collectors and sinners, and put aside the laws of ritual cleanliness to which the Pharisees attached so much importance. These casual gestures on the part of Jesus express his consistent and radical identification with the poor and the marginalized of society, announcing their liberation, by protesting on their behalf, and sharing their life and their shame (CWG 3, 94).

> Jesus' uncompromising stand against riches (but not against the rich!) – that is, against an attachment to or even the possession of the superfluous wealth as a source of comfort and power - is balanced by his equally intransigent commitment to the poor (but not to poverty!) – that is, to all those who are deprived of the material and social goods needed for an authentic human life. Such a commitment to the poor is proclaimed by Jesus as the essence of his mission in the inaugural sermon with which (in Luke's Gospel) he begins his public ministry (Lk 4: 16-30); and its significance is spelled out with great force and clarity in the set of beatitudes with which (again in Luke's Gospel) he opens his great public discourse, the Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6: 20-26) (CWG 2, 260).

Jesus came to bring about freedom from attachment to riches and liberation from oppressive social systems. This leads to the new humanity which is the ultimate goal of the long process of total liberation that Jesus has begun (CWG 2, 267). This stance of Jesus in favor of the poor is rooted in the biblical understanding of poverty as injustice. Poverty in the Bible is seen as injustice because every Israelite had a right to the land. If he lacked land, he is unjustly deprived and oppressed. God, therefore, intervenes to right his wrongs. The action of God is always in favor of the poor. The building of the reign of God is good news to the poor, bad news to the rich (CWG 3, 148). The miracles he performed were clear indications of the options he made for the Reign of God.

3. Miracles

Jesus proclaimed his miracles as signs of the presence and the power of God, visible to those who had eyes to see. The miracles of Jesus are might works (*dynameis* in the Synoptics) or signs (*semeia* in John), which manifest, to those with eyes to see, the saving power of God (CWG 3, 26). They should be considered actions of compassion and not just healings and controversies. Through the miracles, he combats a lot of the unjust power structures prevalent at that time. They could be considered as the subversion of a power structure and so manifestations of a structural change (CWG 3, 9).

> Jesus did not come to rescue a few individuals from a condemned mass; but to open up a new future for man, thematized by him as the New Israel, this is as a universal community of love, leavened by the values of freedom fellowship, and justice. Such a community is possible only when the oppressive structures that hinder its growth are overthrown. His miracles are complemented by his controversies in which he stands up against the established structures of institutional oppression: the law, the cult, priesthood, and the Temple (CWG 3, 30).

The many miracles that Jesus performed, in many ways, were a presentation of his strong option for the poor. He made sacred many structures that were considered profane and secular, by his 'touch' and presence. Thus, taking a stand against a lot of what the society of that time stood for. This was his vision and how he wanted to present his mission.

4. Jesus' Mission and Vision

Jesus's entrepreneurial and political skills are evident from his speeches and sermons. he made it more relevant to the real-life of that time. His speeches were political like his mission manifesto in the synagogue which could be considered his inaugural speech. Jesus used analogies, parables, metaphors, symbolism, and examples from agriculture and the social conditions of that time. Where Jesus is concerned there was a genuine encounter with the scripture in all that he said (Noronha, 2018: 66-81). Jesus was a prophet and the essence of his prophetic theologizing consisted of a two-fold criticism of the religious and social fabric of the society of his time. He condemned idolatry and criticized social injustice (CWG 4, 18-19).

Prophetic theologizing is usually against the dominant assumptions of the ruling group and gives alternative visions to various aspects of living in the community and society. There are various facets to how Jesus presented his prophetic theologizing to the community. They include his authority, being unprejudiced, conflict, and radical equality.

Jesus' authority

The authority of Jesus was of a very different kind. He had no standing in his society. He did not command the power of wealth, was academically unschooled, did not belong to the priestly class, and opted out of the structures of his society by becoming a wandering preacher (CWG 1, 129). He summoned his disciples out of their parochial loyalties to family, clan, tribe, or nation and invites them to leave the security offered by wealth,

status, or achievement and to trust solely in God's providential care (CWG 1, 248).

Freedom from attachment to things, trust in the unique goodness of God, and effective concern for the poor are thus constituent elements of the calls which Jesus communicates to those who follow him (CWG 1, 251). Jesus was concerned with the transformation of society (CWG 1, 255), unfortunately, it also led to making the community of disciples into a crowd of competing churches, defining themselves in terms of doctrine, ritual, or forms of organization. In the process, they forgot the one thing necessary for Christian self-definition, which is the experience of God's love the impels every Christian to love in return and to reach out in effective compassion to those in need. Jesus' fellowship reaches out to the many (Lk 13:29) (CWG 3, 4).

The Unprejudiced Jesus

Religious group prejudices are an unwarranted generalization of particular experiences that are disseminated, and communicated to the members of the group, through its tradition. The tradition of a group is the set of shared group stereotypes, beliefs, and values that the group has made it's own and which serve to distinguish it from other similar groups (CWG 3, 164). Jesus appears in the Gospels as a person remarkably free from the individual and group prejudices of his people and his times. He shows no aversion towards 'sinners', violators of the moral or ritual code; the rural masses unschooled in the Law and he shows special concern for the 'little ones' (Mk 9:42) (CWG 3, 165). The freedom of Jesus is grounded on the experience of total love which casts out all prejudice (CWG 3, 168).

In his attitude towards the religious and ethical observances of his people, Jesus shows remarkable freedom and flexibility. He associates with religious outcasts much to the scandal of the pious. For Jesus it is…

love of God showing itself in love for neighbor which, according to Matthew, is the "basis of all the law and the prophets"; and which, according to Mark, is "much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices". Law is valid only in as much as it is an expression of God's will which is not just 'peace' but our 'wellbeing' (CWG 3, 267).

Conflict

Conflict plays a large part in the ministry of Jesus. All four of our canonical Gospels describe conflicts Jesus generated it in many ways; in conflict with Satan, with natural calamities like storms, with mental illnesses, with nature, with the religious leaders of his people, with the crowds he drew and who wanted to make him king, with his family whose preferential claims on him he firmly rejects, and with his disciples, with his own instinctive clinging to life as in the garden of Gethsemane. Conflict was an indispensable element in the ministry of Jesus (CWG 3, 136).

The 'peace' that Jesus brings is not the peace that most of his followers seem to have opted for. It meant identifying with a situation and confronting it. They are two ways which he showed to act on any situation which then resulted in an attitude of freedom and love. Freedom and love, leading to identification with the powerless and confrontation with those in power. They are the most significant traits, that set out for his followers the thrust of Jesus' vision and mission suitable for those who are engaged in the struggle for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed (CWG 3, 89).

Radical Equality

Jesus treated everyone equally irrespective of sex, race, culture, class, rank, or caste. This was radical and therefore conflict-provoking. Jesus lived out such radicalism when he dined with tax-collectors and sinners; called women to be disciples; held up a Gentile as a model of faith and a Samaritan as a model of compassion; renounced domination for service; and projected

the vision of a community that would be free of all father, and to acknowledge only one Father who is in heaven, and only one Master, the Christ (CWG 3, 138). This radicalism of Jesus, who brushed aside the letter of the Law to grasp its spirit collided head-on with the rigorism of the sects (CWG 3, 138).

> The pervasive law of purities, which so 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 at a stroke. Cleanness or uncleanness is not a matter of ritual purity, but the disposition of the heart (CWG 3, 6).

To affirm then the radical equality of all human beings beyond all differences of sex, race, culture, class, rank or caste, is a profoundly radical and therefore a conflict-provoking act. Jesus lived out such radicalism when he dined with tax-collectors and sinners, called women to be his disciples, held up a Gentile as a model of faith and a Samaritan as a model of compassion (Lk 10,29-37); renounced domination for service and projected the vision of a community that would be free of all father figures, because it would acknowledge only one Father who is in heaven, and only one Master, the Christ.

Yet it must be admitted that the Bible's affirmation of the dignity of the human person is not consistent. It affirms and acknowledges the presence of inequality and oppression in a human history colored by sin, and at times seems to condone and even encourage it (CWG 4, 76). This was contrary to human dignity and what is explicitly defined in the first creation story by its striking pronouncement that humankind has been made in the image of God (CWG 4, 76).

5. Mission and Reign of God

Jesus teaches, preaches, heals, in word and deed. The greatest of his commandments was the love commandment. The Church

must fulfill this mission in the same ways by living visibly as Church because a community only becomes 'church' when it does as Jesus did (CWG 1, 21). Jesus also wanted his followers to let their light shine before others. They should let their light shine forth living in the world so that the world will see them and be moved to glorify God (CWG 1, 20).

This would have been shocking to Jesus' enemies in a society where love was largely restricted to the confines of a tightly-knit ethnic or religious group, and where hatred of the foreign oppressor was preached with religious fervor. Jesus asks for not just the resolution of personal antagonisms within the group, but for the acceptance of members of alien and hostile groups as well. Political and religious antagonisms as well as personal ones are the objects of his command This was summarized in the love command of Jesus which is radical and comprehensive (CWG 4, 117).

Transformations in the Church and Society

In communities of Christians, the social concern does not get limited to privatized sharing but takes the form of justice which results in the transformation of social, economic, and political structures that hinder the emergence of a just and fraternal society. Church growth is a typically institutional preoccupation, which the Church, but which must not be allowed to become its primary concern. Like Jesus, the Church lives not for itself but others. It is the servant of God's Reign. The mission of the Church, therefore, is not service to the Church, but the Church's service of the Reign of God (CWG 1, 112).

> Aware of the extent to which such structures, determine the configuration of society and even the consciousness of its members, a structural understanding realizes that the situations of poverty, unfreedom, and oppression that are so much a part of our social experience in India and elsewhere, are not just the hazards of history, not the consequences of ill-will of a few 'wicked men', who need only to be

converted for all our troubles to end. They result from the working of an impersonal system so property, power, and social relationships, which operate almost independently of the people who serve them. A change of hearts is not enough. Nothing less than a change of structures is needed if exploitation and oppression are to end (CWG 4, 119).

The Indian Church therefore must develop its understanding of mission, responsive to its post-conciliar and post-colonial situation. The biblical story tells about the meaning of the world, of human history, of personal life, because the Christian mission is part of this meaningful story. The Indian Church must be committed to the building of a genuinely fraternal community and compelled by its inner dynamism to oppose all social, economic, political, or religious structures which hinder the emergence of such a community working against legitimizing the structures of society that happened to be dominant and dominating (CWG 4, 169). The mission must be an act of service, not an exercise of institutional survival, or expansion of power (CWG 1, 17).

6. The Sacred and the Secular

When we consider the sacred and the secular as described in the various sections above, it does not mean that the sacred is reduced to the secular or the secular absorbed into the sacred. Rather what needs to be considered is how and where God can be encountered. God is to be encountered as God in nature and history, without desacralizing by the Bible or establishing the autonomy of the secular (CWG 2, 211).

> The secularization of the sacred is given a special point by John's use of the word 'flesh.' Flesh (*sarx*) is used by John in a variety of ways. It defines 'plain humankind' with no negative connotation whatever in Jn 17:2, where Jesus says, He (God) has given me authority over all flesh – that is, overall human beings. It sometimes describes 'merely human nature, unenlightened by divine revelation, as in Jn 8:15, where Jesus accuses the Jews that "you judge according to the flesh" – that is, by human criteria alone (CWG 2, 203).

The Word "becomes flesh" and does not merely 'appear as' flesh; is not just a being, but a flesh and blood person. What is implied is the divine in human history and the real presence of God in material reality (CWG 2, 206). Therefore, life is seen as a history of salvation in which the saving actions of God are manifest in concrete socio-political events (CWG 3, 87). Jesus demonstrated this in every way. The prophet and consequently every follower summon his community to unconditional trust in, and an absolute commitment to God. This is demonstrated in inner uprightness and social concern that goes well beyond the formal pieties of ritual and law. It demands a real conversion of heart, has nothing to do with political prudence which refuses risk; it denounces every form of exploitation and demands a radical concern for the defenseless and the needy (CWG 3, 128).

This results in and a deeper understanding of the expression 'reign of God.' It is by exploring Jesus' understanding of this theme, that we shall discover his vision of the new society (CWG 4, 225). Where there are genuine fellowship and concern, there will be justice, no passivity in the face of social, economic, and political structures that oppress humans and dehumanize them. The follower of Jesus cannot be content with merely rescuing the victims of these structures, or attempting to convert the exploiters who maintain them but must challenge them and work towards change (CWG 4, 241). This is true liberation.

Liberation

The Bible is the Magna Carta for movements of liberation and human rights. It demonstrates clearly how the sacred and the secular blend. It deals with issues like social class, human rights, economic liberation, etc. Its understanding of the human person implies principles that are the source of human and societal rights of which two such principles are the sacredness of the human person and responsibility for the welfare of people, especially those in need.

Conclusion

Soares-Prabhu had an integrative view of the sacred and secular, and he explained them through the specificities in cultural contexts. He blended the secular into the sacred and the sacred into the secular in his writings. His writings have two strong emphases – liberation and poverty Liberation for him was the answer to an oppressive situation, of which poverty is one part, that exists throughout India and that the gospel can be the gospel only if it can proclaim a liberating message. He consistently states that what is needed is an active concern, expressing itself not only in spiritual attitudes of patience, forbearance, acceptance, and benevolence but in concrete ways of caring for the material needs of the 'neighbor'. This necessarily includes forgiveness of those who have injured us and reconciliation with those whom we have injured which is laid down as an indispensable pre-condition for Christian prayer and worship (CWG 3, 55). For him Jesus brought in understandings of the sacred while addressing structures, people, and rituals. For Jesus, the supreme goal of life is not unconditional freedom but unconditional love. The basic religious experience that shapes his life and gives form to the movement he founded is the experience of God's unconditional love which empowers his followers to love their fellow human beings as unconditionally as God does. The fully 'realized' follower of Jesus will be the person who fully loves.

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Integral Liberation: George M. Soares-Prabhu's Contribution towards a Biblical Theology of Liberation for India

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Abstract: George M. Soares-Prabhu's contribution to develop a Biblical Theology of Liberation for India is quite laudable and admirable. He devoted his whole life to develop an Indian theology of liberation from a biblical perspective that is basically Indian. He has never considered liberation as something that happens towards the end time, or an arbitrary act which ignores human history, but as something that happens in the concrete flux of human history here and now. Therefore, he has brought the issues of human rights, the poor, oppressed and exploited in the discussion of theology and envisaged their socio-economic liberation, a liberated and a liberating community in the Indian Church and society. What made him very unique in this process is his use of the Bible to give a foundational theological background. He asked us to be sensitive to the social, economic and political dimension of the Bible to interpret the issues of our time, and thus he placed the Bible as *Magna*

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Carta of movements for liberation and human Rights. Thus, the theology that he suggested for India is distinctly a Biblical Theology of Liberation seen through Indian eyes.

Keywords: Liberation Theology, Biblical Theology of Liberation, Human Rights, Poor, Oppressed, Socio-economic Liberation, Jesus Community.

Introduction

Liberation Theology has been a powerful inspiration to Indian theologians since its origin in Latin America, and has served to awaken the social consciousness of the theological reflections in India and led to an awareness of the social demands of the biblical messages. George. M Soares-Prabhu was not an exception to this and, in fact, he devoted his whole life to develop a biblical theology of liberation for India. The Indian situation of massive poverty, social discrimination based on hereditary caste, and increasingly competitive and pluriform religiosity led him to believe that an inculturated theology in the Indian context should fundamentally be a theology of liberation. His concern was to develop an Indian theology of liberation from a biblical perspective that is essentially Indian. It is theology of liberation, because it is with the help of the Kingdom values enunciated in the Scriptures, and in the early Christian communities that he attempted to interpret the Indian situations. It is biblical, because he turns to the Bible for inspiration and models, and thus the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus of the Synoptics became paradigms of liberative actions. It is Indian, because it is with the sensibility shaped by Indian culture, and provoked by questions emerging from the Indian contexts that he listened to the cry of the poor, marginalized and oppressed, and thus made them understand the 'down-side of their history.'

1. Why an Indian Biblical Theology of Liberation?

Although his inspiration was from the 'Latin American Theology of Liberation,' he distanced himself from it because he believed that "such a theology does not respond to India's [Asia's] deep-rooted need for an 'existential' liberation from personal bondage" (CWG 1, 56). Therefore, his goal was to "develop an Indian [Asian] theology of liberation which will be concerned with both societal change and personal self-realization" (CWG 1, 56). This will not be the fruit of the adaption of the Western or Latin American models but it will emerge as the spontaneous response to the Indian or Asian reality. He says:

> It will not be the result of some 'project' operated by a team of theological experts, artificially 'adapting' Western or Latin American theology to Asian situations; but will emerge as the spontaneous expression in their own cultural and religious idiom of the liberation experience of Asian Christians who allow themselves to be fully immersed in the Asian reality (CWG 1, 56).

However, he urged to integrate two essentially interrelated concerns of 'Latin American Theology of Liberation,' such as socio-economic liberation as excellently propounded in Latin American Liberation Theology and a liberative reading of the Bible from the Indian *Sitz im Leben,* i.e. to engage the individual or community in the context with the text and the reality. Therefore, he was very particular not to bring 'the so called academic irrelevance or excellence and professionalism' propagated by the Western Theology to the Indian theology of liberation (D'Sa, CWG 4, xiii).

According to him an Indian theology of liberation should be rooted in the Indian religious traditions, namely, on its insistence on the need for personal freedom because in the Indian tradition, liberation has always been understood as the liberation of the individual from the psychic sources of personal or societal bondage (CWG 1, 137). He argues: "This unwavering insistence on the need for personal freedom in any movement for social

change is, I believe, the most significant contribution that Indian religions can make to any theology of liberation. For no genuine societal change is possible without a corresponding personal conversion" (CWG 1, 137). In the Indian tradition, personal freedom is the necessary precondition for a liberated society. Moreover, liberation in the Indian traditions is a comprehensive term which also includes 'self-liberation'. He says,

> It is an experience of unconditional 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 (*sannyasin*) …. 'Liberation' for the Asian psyche is not only liberation from poverty, but equally the liberation which leads to that 'poverty' which is freedom from illusion, attachment and greed (CWG 1, 56).

Therefore, he says, in spite of the massive poverty and dehumanizing caste system, a theology of liberation, after the model of the Latin American Liberation Theology, which focuses almost exclusively on social change will not be appropriate for India (CWG 1, 56). Instead, "an Asian/Indian theology of liberation will have to be concerned both with societal change and personal self-liberation" (CWG 1, 56). As Francis D'sa says, "he was convinced that any theology of liberation that India produces will have to recognize the fact that there is no substitute for fidelity to the Indian context" (D'Sa, CWG 4, xi).

2. The Context for an Indian Biblical Theology of Liberation

Soares-Prabhu believes that if we are to understand the challenges that India poses to the Theology of Liberation, we need to understand the Indian situation in its complexity and its otherness. According to him, the Indian context is constituted by massive poverty, pluriform religiosity and apparently

immovable social structure of caste (CWG 1, 142). For him, poverty, pervasive religiosity and untouchability created by the hereditary caste are not only socio-economic issues of the Indian society but also a moral and theological one (CWG 1, 83-86). And all these factors, according to him, are closely interrelated because "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!" (CWG 4, 6). Thus, "the social immobility engendered by caste contributes to India's poverty, as does its fatalistic and other-worldly religiosity. Poverty creates a fertile field for the development of fatalistic and other-worldly forms of popular religion" (CWG 1, 142).

He says that these three factors of the Indian situation are ambiguous with a positive and a negative side:

> The massive sociological, enforced poverty of India is greatly dehumanizing; but it leaves room (as a consumer society does not) for the nurturing of a religious or voluntary poverty, that freedom from greed which is the goal of all Asian religions. Religions which foment caste and communalism are thus also sources of spiritual freedom, and provide millions of our people with the sense of meaning and the ground for hope which enables them to survive in situations of desperate need. Caste is a fearfully oppressive social system inflicting deep psychic injuries on those who are deemed outcaste. But it also provides the Indian with a sense of belonging, ….Yet, for all the liberative potential they possess, India's poverty, religiosity and caste are ultimately oppressive. They reinforce each other dialectically to form a spiral of steadily intensifying oppression (CWG 1, 86).

In short, "poverty-religiosity-caste constitute India's samsara, its cycle of bondage" (CWG 1, 86). It is in this context that he asked himself, how can we proclaim the message of the Bible where the institutionalized inequality perpetrated by the massive poverty and caste system and its consequences. He is convinced

that no Indian theology can afford to bypass the grim reality of India's poverty.

> 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 (CWG 1, 55).

According to him, among the three factors that determine the social situation of India, poverty-religiosity-caste, caste plays a significant discriminatory role. For he says, "India's religiosity is a caste religiosity; India's poverty is caste poverty. …. Caste determines the shape of India's poverty. The 'poor' in India are not just economically deprived but are socially, ostracised as well, and what determines their self-awareness is not so much their economic as their social status" (CWG 1, 143).

He also frankly confesses that the challenge of the poor to the Church in India is mostly shaped by caste, and it finds its clearest expression in the dalits, who constitute the lowest stratum of Indian society, and form a large component (an estimated 50%) of the Indian Church. The *Dalits* are the poor and the outcaste, victims of both economic exploitation and social rejection (CWG 1, 143). Sixteen per cent of India's population belongs to the so-called *Dalits* or untouchables, living at the very bottom of its social system. He observes,

> In the caste system, the *dalits* are both economically exploited and socially oppressed. … the vast majority of the *dalits* are landless labourers, earning a precarious livelihood in conditions marginally better than serfdom; or they are condemned to engage in religiously polluting and socially demeaning occupations, like scavenging, handling the

carcasses of dead animals, or working in leather. They are the poorest of the poor (CWG 1, 146).

He also perceives that more than their economic poverty, it is the social ostracism that is practised against them that demoralizes them and keeps them in their present position of subjugation (CWG 1, 141-49). Christianity is not an exception to this as it is practised by the Church too:

> Dalit Christians, who constitute about half of all the Christians in the country, frequently suffer caste discrimination within the Church - not only in their social interactions with upper caste Christians, but … their participation in Church administration and worship as well. They often live in segregated colonies even in Christian villages, are not allowed to draw water from 'clean caste' wells, are segregated in special parts of the Church (at the back or in the side aisles not in the main aisle), are forbidden to serve mass or read at Church services, have little say in the decision making bodies of their own Churches, are treated with open contempt by their clean caste fellow Christians and their priests (most of whom come from these 'upper' castes), and may even be buried in separate cemeteries (CWG 1, 150).

In short, the challenge, posed-by-the Indian-situation is the challenge of India's caste-ridden poor (CWG 1, 142). It is from within this vicious cycle of bondage that the theologians of India must proclaim the liberative message of the Bible. Therefore, he says an Indian Theology of Liberation must be attentive to these determinative factors of the Indian situation, and the theology that we develop must have a definite liberative thrust. Taking from the final statement of the Asian Theological Conference held at Wennappuwa in Sri Lanka in 1979 Jan 7-10, he categorically says that, "in the context of the poverty of the teeming millions of Asia and their situation of domination and exploitation, our theology must have a very definite Liberational thrust" (CWG 1, 55).

3. The Bible as Magna Carta of Movements for Liberation and Human Rights

According to Soares-Prabhu Liberation Theology has made at least two significant contributions to contemporary reading of the Bible. He says that "it has sensitized exegetes to the social, economic and political dimensions of the Bible; and it has made them aware of the extent to which their supposedly scientific exegesis is inevitably coloured by cultural and class prejudices" (CWG 1, 260). As he says, what Liberation Theology has done is to draw attention to the class character of the reader's perception of the biblical text (CWG 1, 260). It is an accepted fact that it is with the Liberation Theology that the social reading of the Bible begins in earnest. In order to draw the meaning of the Bible for a contemporary society, therefore, he proposes a social reading of the Bible where the real-life situation of the individual/community and the world around will come in contact with community of the author or biblical times and community of the reader.

Social Reading of the Bible

According to Soares-Prabhu, a 'social reading' will read the Bible in the light of a liberating praxis among the socially oppressed, without succumbing to the sociological reductionism of a strictly Marxist approach (CWG 4, 216). He is very much convinced that a 'social reading' of the Bible is not a socio-economic analyses of the biblical texts. Instead "it will search the biblical text for transmaterial (anti-consumer) values which could inspire the change of attitude ("the abolition of the 'mental' cause that engenders capitalism"), which alone can make a genuine social revolution possible" (CWG 1, 217). He further says,

> A growing awareness of the massive social evils that plague our land (in which eighty percent of the people are below, on, or just above the poverty line, and fully seventy percent are totally illiterate; where just ten percent of the rural rich own

more than sixty percent of all the cultivable land, and ninety percent of private-owned industry is producing consumer goods for less than fifteen percent of the population) is having its impact on Indian theology - particularly among Indian theologians who have been exposed to a social analysis which points, correctly, to institutional structures rather than personal ill will as the source of social ills (CWG 3, 73).

In his article "The Bible as Magna Carta of Movements for Liberation and Human Rights" he explores the contribution of the Bible to the development of liberation theologies (CWG 4, 73-84). He says, "In the last fifty years, biblically-based theologies of liberation have irrupted everywhere in Third World Christianity, and in the oppressed sectors of the Christian First World. The role of the Bible in these theologies of liberation is well known" (CWG 4, 73). With regard to the human rights he speaks of two-fold contributions of the Bible, such as its emphasis on the sacredness of every human person, and a radical commitment to the welfare of the powerless and the needy (CWG 4, 77). He explains the Bible's teaching on human dignity and human rights with the notion of "covenant idea of co-responsibility" because he believes that in order to ground human rights the covenant co-responsibility must be taken as a basic value. Otherwise "we may end up with a system like the caste hierarchy in India, which is justified precisely in terms of co-responsibility!" (CWG 4, 82).

"The *Dharma* of Jesus: An Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount" (CWG 4, 153-172). is basically an interpretation of Mt 5-7 keeping the Indian context in mind, and he shows that the '*dharma* of Jesus' can serve as a paradigm for Indian Christian theologizing, and building up a fraternal human society characterized by freedom, 'sonship,'and concern. The dharma of Jesus proclaims freedom from the burden of the "Law" as practiced in the Jewish community since it is grounded on an experience of God as *Abba* who loves us his children with an unconditional love. This *dharma* of Jesus demonstrates concern for the neighbour, i.e concern for any one in need, and solidarity with the oppressed and exploited.

His interpretation of the table fellowship of Jesus with a *Dalit* Christian perspective shows how Jesus' table fellowship becomes a liberative paradigm for the oppressed Dalit Christians in India today (CWG 1, 223-40). As Jesus, through his meals with the religious and social outcasts of his day, presented a new experience of God and a new understanding of community, a Dalit-reading of Jesus' table fellowship challenges everyone to see every fellow Christian as a brother or a sister. Jesus' table fellowship gives a radically new understanding of holiness, of community and of God, against the Pharisaic and Essene ideal of Israel as a holy community, whose holiness is to be maintained by preserving a state of complete separation from all that is ritually unclean (CWG 1, 228).

Through "a *Dalit* Reading of the Decalogue," he unravels the plight of the *Dalits* in Indian society, and the Decalogue with its implicit proclamation of the equality of all human beings draws the broad outlines of a liberative community, towards which all *Dalits* everywhere, can aspire (CWG 4, 208-213). He acknowledges the emerging trend of reading the Bible from a Dalit point of view, and the Church's silence to the plight of their oppressive situations. "It is only recently", he says, "that the emergence of a militant *Dalit* Christian movement claiming their rights has (hopefully) begun to make the Christian churches conscious of their sin. Part of this movement is the attempt to fashion a Dalit theology that will read the Bible from a Dalit point of view. I attempt to do this here for the Decalogue in Ex 20:1-17" (CWG 4, 209).

His interpretation of Mk 10:17-27 and 10:35-45 in the light of tribal values shows that the values which undergird the ethos of tribal society are strikingly similar to those taught in the Bible and by Jesus (CWG 1, 241-259). An egalitarian, antigreed and antipride social order preserved in the Indian tribal society is similar to the counterculture envisioned by Jesus in the Gospels. He argues that Jesus sees himself as standing within the tribal traditions of India (cf. Mk 6:4; Lk 13:33). "They [the tribal society] bring a new element to India's political and religious

consciousness: an indigenous experience of an egalitarian society" (CWG 1, 243). He further says that these values are precisely rooted in the ethos of the Bible and in the ethical teachings of Jesus.

He firmly believed that if we are to understand the challenges that India poses to the Church, we need to understand the Indian situation in its complexity and its otherness, especially the challenges posed by massive poverty and caste system. His article "The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste" urges us to begin with an analysis of the Indian situation, the diversified society both in its social structure and extreme poverty, so that the Church in India may opt for a meaningful mission in a highly polarized and divided society (CWG 1, 141-56).

In "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor a Social Class?," he further elaborates on 'the poor in the Bible' and shows that they constitute a sociological group which is both the victim of history and its maker; a dialectical group whose identity is defined not by their religious attitude but by their social situation determined by antagonistic groups standing over and against them(CWG 1, 260-282). He spells out the biblical understanding of the poor in three major propositions:

> (1) the poor in the Bible form *a sociological group* whose identity is defined not by their religious attitude but by their social situation, (2) the poor in the Bible *are a dialectical group* whose situation is determined by antagonistic groups standing over and against them; and (3) the poor in the Bible are *a dynamic group* who are not the passive victim of history but those through whom God shapes his history" (CWG 1, 264).

In the light of Liberation Theology, he says, a topic like 'Class in the Bible' poses two distinct questions. "It raises (1) the sociological question: to what extent is the biblical narrative intelligible in terms of class and class struggle? And it raises (2) the hermeneutical question: how far does one's class culture determine one's reading of the biblical text?" (CWG 1, 260-

261). According to him both questions are significant as they elicit deeper meanings of the biblical texts for a contemporary reader.

According to the biblical understanding, the 'poor' is the oppressed class as such; the oppression is caused by economic, social and religious factors. The way to eradicate poverty consists in following the path of Jesus, and this is further elaborated in his article "Jesus and the Poor" (CWG 4, 173-96). In "Jesus and the Poor" he brings out the similarity in the exploitative situation of the poor in Palestine at the time of Jesus with that of the poor in India. He shows hermeneutically that the poor in the Bible stands not merely "for the economically destitute but also for the socially marginalized groups … the illiterate, the outcast, the ritually polluted, the physically handicapped and the mentally ill" (CWG 4, 175). All these victims of oppression are the *anawim.* He analyses Jesus' attitude and response towards the poor in the land of Palestine and in the Bible, and he asks whether the response of Jesus towards the poor serve as a model for our response to the situation of the poor in India today(CWG 4, 173-96). He says that "Perhaps it can - but only if we remember to follow Jesus, not to imitate him! For Jesus gives us no concrete strategy for the ending of poverty … [and] his strategy and his blue print would surely have become obsolete in the very different world we live in today" (CWG 4, 194). However, as he says, we can surely adopt his *Abba* experience of "God as our Father and of human beings as our brothers and sisters; a set of values clustering round freedom and love which grow out of this experience; the vision of a new humanity free, fraternal, non-exploitative in which these values will be concretely expressed, and the inspiration of a life lived out in absolute commitment to the building up of this community" (CWG 4, 194).

4. Liberative Biblical Paradigms

Soares-Prabhu identifies, at least, three paradigms by which we can think of a Biblical Theology of Liberation for India.

God as the Liberator

Soares-Prabhu presents God of Israel as a biblical liberative paradigm of the oppressed. God liberated his oppressed people, and the people of Israel in turn experienced Him as the God who liberates the oppressed. He says,

> Yahweh is, by definition almost, the one who brings Israel out of Egypt. He is the God of the oppressed, profoundly concerned for the poor, who as victims of exploitation and oppression have a claim on his compassion and his love. He is thus shown in the Bible as the refuge and stronghold of the poor, who defends the poor against the powerful and responds to their needs(CWG 4, 187).

The God of Israel irrupts into history to set free a group of bonded labourers, and create a nation one in which freedom would replace oppression, justice prevent exploitation, brotherhood transcend all social stratification, and compassion be valued more than cult (CWG 4, 172). So the God of the Bible, as he says, "reveals himself progressively as the God who as *El Shaddai"* promising the Patriarchs liberation ('the land'), redeeming this promise by rescuing Israel from a series of life and death situations in their history (bonded labour in Egypt, starvation in the wilderness, the threat of annihilation at the conquest, exile in Babylon) (CWG 4, 200). Thus, the Old Testament characterization of God as hater of exploitation, lover of justice, and liberator of the oppressed fully satisfies the Indian quest for an inculturated Biblical Theology of Liberation.

Prophets as Liberators

The prophetical messages always communicate a God who sets the oppressed free, and project a free, equal, non-exploitative alternative community; their critique of society is linked to a critique of religion; they rebuked the structures of the dominant society and encouraged the dominated to build an alternative community. In his article "Socio-Cultural Analysis in Prophetic

Theologizing: a Biblical Paradigm," he shows how the prophetical messages, which are always linked to contemporary events, become the basis of theologizing in the Bible (CWG 2, 61-67 and (CWG 4, 14-23). He says that "the prophet's message always derives from a reflection, (and not just a religious or an ethical reflection but a historical and therefore ultimate social reflection) on what is going on around him" (CWG 2, 66). Thus, he argues for a prophetic theologizing for an effective transformation of Indian society and people. The prophecies of the prophets do not end in words but in effective transformation of people and society. Prophets spoke for the powerless especially the poor, needy, oppressed, refugees, widows and orphans (CWG 3, 114-15). Thus, the *dharma* of the prophet was to communicate the liberative message of God to these marginalized in the society.

Jesus as the Liberator

In his article "The Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus Lessons for an Indian Theology of Liberation," he poses the liberative pedagogy of Jesus as paradigm for a Biblical Theology of Liberation For India (CWG 1, 124-40). He says that the Church in India must go back to the 'liberative pedagogy' of Jesus which is best suited for the Indian context. He identifies this liberative pedagogy of Jesus as a pedagogy that is nonelitist, praxis oriented and dialogical, based on the equality of all before God. He says,

> Because it is a nonelitist and a dialogical teaching, it liberates people from the restless demons of unbridled competitiveness and insatiable greed by making them conscious of their worth. It teaches them that, as children of God, their value derives not from personal ability, accumulated wealth, or social status, but from the inalienable reality of God's love (Mt 6:25-34). Such a pedagogy leads toward that realm of a wholly unconditioned personal freedom (*moksha*) which is the goal of the religious traditions of India. Here all greed comes to an end; all aggression is stilled; all illusions engendered by the absolutization of finite values are dispelled (CWG 1, 136).

He further elaborates it as a pedagogy that is experience-based, action-oriented, and critical of oppressive structures. It stresses the intrinsic worth of every human being, irrespective of his or her material possessions and social status. He says,

> Because it is an action-oriented, experience-based and critical teaching that subverts the unquestioned assumptions and shocks the stereotyped expectations of its hearers, it frees them from the great manipulative myths that legitimize the oppressive structures (economic, political, social and religious) of the society, and so allows them to work for a new, nonexploitative world in which men and women will be able to live together as brothers and sisters under their one Parent in heaven, taught by their one Teacher, the Christ (Mt 23:8-10) (CWG 1, 137).

Thus, the pedagogy of Jesus shows a pedagogy of the oppressed with a strong commitment to societal liberation. In "Jesus and the Poor" he presents Jesus as the one who announces good news to the poor, and the one who inaugurates the community of the Kingdom (CWG 4, 173-96). He shows how Jesus responds to these masses of the poor who confront him in their misery and their need. He distinguishes four elements in his response:

> 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 (CWG 4, 176).

Soares-Prabhu makes a detailed account of all these factors and shows how liberative was Jesus in his life and mission:

> A carpenter by profession (Mk 6:3) … He abandons the security of family and home to become an itinerant preacher

> without shelter or means of subsistence. He breaks with his family (Mk 3:3135) to join the 'family' of all those who do the will of the Father in heaven (Mk 3:31-35), by their radical obedience to God, translated into a radical concern for their neighbour (Mk 12:28-34). … depending for support on the casual help provided by sympathising friends (Lk 8:1-2). He lives, that is, by begging. … Not only does Jesus become poor with the poor, but he makes himself an outcast with the outcasts. He touches a leper to welcome him back to human fellowship (Mk 1:41), thus incurring ritual defilement. He dines with tax-collectors and sinners (Mk 2:15; Lk 15:1) earning the reprobation of the religious elite (CWG 4, 177).

Jesus' very identification with the poor, and their life style led him to choose his close followers from the same artisan class to which he himself belonged and to preach the Kingdom in obscure places (CWG 4, 177-79). His mission field was the Palestinian country-side with its poor, backward villages and its primitive townships, and not the Hellenized urban centres to which the rich flocked (CWG 4, 179). The beneficiaries of his healing were mostly the invalids of society (CWG 3, 152). He reinstated religious and social outcasts to human fellowship by his communion with them, and he stood up against all sorts of the religious and social oppression of the poor and the needy. He considered love as the basis of all law and superior to every form of ritual (CWG 4, 179), and for him liberation comes through his revelation of God's unconditional love, God as *Abba* (CWG 3, 152).

As the one who proclaims the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:14-15) Jesus confronts the exploitative situation of his time by taking a decisive stance for the poor (the oppressed) and against the rich (the oppressor) (CWG 3, 152). With his life and mission he inaugurated a community of the Kingdom, a genuinely fraternal society characterized by freedom, fellowship and justice (CWG 3, 153). He has left us an enormous legacy of freedom, for his whole ministry was spent in bringing freedom of every kind to the unfree.

> He frees the rejected of society from the terrible isolation to which they have been condemned by social ostracism (Lk 19:1-10), ritual impurity (Mk 1:40-45) or mental illness (Mk 5:1-13). He summons his followers to freedom from the hampering weight of possessions (Mk 1:16-18; 10:17-23; Mt 6:24), or from the clinging hindrance of over-developed family ties (Lk 9:59-62). He empowers them with the freedom to love (Lk 7:36-40). That singing freedom that comes from a trust in God our Father so absolute that one needs no other security in life (Mt 6:25-34) is thus the foundation of the new social order that Jesus proclaims (CWG 3, 152).

In short, Jesus identified himself with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized to show them his active effective concern, and to liberate them from the oppressive and exploitative situations of their socio-religious life. He voiced against the economic disparity in which the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few is paralleled by the destitution of many. Such disparity is sensed by Jesus as a serious and unjust violation of human existence (CWG 4, 193). The response of Jesus to the poor, oppressed, and marginalized of his society was a response in freedom and in love.

This experience of humankind as brothers and sisters (as the 'family of God') affirms for Jesus the radical equality of all human beings whoever they are, and will not tolerate any form of racial or caste discrimination which might imply that one group is intrinsically inferior to another. It will not tolerate either the massive economic disparity in which the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few is paralleled by the destitution of many. Such disparity is sensed by Jesus as a serious and unjust violation of human existence (CWG 4, 193).

5. The Christian Liberative Response: An Integral Liberation

We cannot think of a liberation theology in abstract notions, but it should manifest in the concrete flux of human history. According to Soares-Prabhu a Christian response to the Indian

situation must be historical, incarnational, preferentially weighted response, and integral. A God who intervened in the human history calls for a concrete, radical commitment for the human needs in the history. Therefore, a liberative approach should be, he says:

> Economic problems must find economic solutions, political crises be met with political measures, structural disorders corrected by structural change. A Christian response will not provide a spiritual palliative for a historical need. This would go against the grain of biblical revelation, in which God is encountered in history, working for the transformation of history (CWG 4, 202).

A liberative response must also be an incarnational response, because the God of the Bible, who is concerned with the history of humankind, became part of this history in the person of Jesus (Jn 1:14), and thus humankind became the locus of our encounter with God (CWG 4, 202-203). An incarnational response, therefore, must identify with the neighbour: He says,

> 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 (CWG 4, 204).

He is also convinced that the Christian response to the Indian situation will necessarily be a preferentially weighted response. For he says, "Universal love for the neighbour does not imply neutrality in the struggle for justice. For the God of the Bible, though he loves all humankind, explicitly declares himself the vindicator of "the widow, the orphan and the refugee" (CWG 4, 205).

He also firmly affirms that the liberation promised by the Bible is never a merely social liberation, but an integral personal liberation. Therefore, he says:

> Such an *'integral liberation* 'must obviously be the goal of any genuinely Christian response to the Indian situation…. It will be *authentically liberative* in that it will vigorously and effectively oppose all forms of oppression and exploitation … it finds inspiration for acting in favour of brotherhood, justice, and peace; and against all forms of domination, slavery, discrimination, violence, attacks on religious liberty, and aggression against human beings and whatever attacks life (CWG 4, 206-07).

He further suggests the following salient features, which must remain normative for every Christian community, no matter what the concrete structures it may at any time adopt: a community that is free, all inclusive, open to sharing, prepared for service, and radically equal (CWG 4, 143).

- **A Community of Radical Freedom:** a freedom from both internal compulsions towards greed and ambition, and from the external constraints of a servile bondage to ritual and to law. The basis for this radical freedom is God's preferential love and providential care: "For the experience of God's caring and provident love liberates them from anxiety about their daily sustenance (Mt 6:25-34), and from the need of affirming themselves by accumulating possessions or exercising power" (CWG 4, 143).
- **A Community of Radical Universalism:** The radical freedom from both internal and external pressures leads to a universal commitment. Because he says, "the experience of God as *Abba* implies experiencing all human beings as brothers and sisters, and so rules out all discrimination on any ground whatsoever" (CWG 4, 145).

- **A Community of Radical Sharing:** such an inclusive community commits itself to a radical sharing of their 'being' and 'haves.' According to him "this is to be understood not merely as doing works of social relief such as alms-giving …but the assumption of responsibility by each member of the community for the welfare of all" (CWG 4, 146).
- **A Community of Radical Service**: an attitude of radical freedom, inclusivism and sharing will lead to the formation of a serving community: He says that "In imitation of Jesus, who came "not to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45), the Jesus community is essentially a community that serves. …There is no room in a Christian community for any desire for domination or for any ambition for power" (CWG 4, 146-47).
- **A Community of Radical Equality:** a radically free, inclusive, sharing and serving community will never assume the roles of inequality, but will always promote egalitarian virtues and values. He says,

> Differences of race, class and sex do not affect their basic relationship with Jesus nor their basic worth as human beings who are children of the one Father in heaven. The Jesus community, then, will not tolerate any form of stratification (racist or caste) which touches the intrinsic worth of a person. Differences of status within the community will be differences of function, not of being (CWG 4, 147).

Conclusion

Soares-Prabhu's contribution to develop a biblical Theology of Liberation for India is quite laudable and admirable. Frist of all, he was aware of the hermeneutical significance of the Liberation Theology to interpret the Bible in the Indian context. He has never considered liberation as something that happens towards the end time, or an arbitrary act which ignores human history, but as something that happens in the concrete flux of human

history here and now. Therefore, he has brought the issues of human rights, the poor, oppressed and exploited in the discussion of theology and envisaged their socio-economic liberation, a liberated and a liberating community in the Indian Church and society. Therefore, he emphasized on the sacredness of the human persons, especially the downtrodden, socially discriminated, the poor, oppressed, exploited and underprivileged in society and our responsibility for their welfare.

What made him very unique in this process is his use of the Bible to give a liberative theological background. He asked us to be sensitive to the social, economic and political dimension of the Bible to interpret the issues of our time, and thus he placed the Bible as *Magna Carta* of movements for liberation and human Rights. He was not speaking in abstract notions but based himself on the liberative biblical paradigms, such as the God who intervened in the history of his people and liberated them from the clutches of oppressive structures, the prophets who spoke for the powerless especially the poor, needy, oppressed, refugees, widows and orphans and finally Jesus who identified himself with the poor and oppressed in the society. Therefore, his call for a Christian response, which is historical, incarnational, preferentially weighted response, and integral liberation, finds its foundation in the Bible itself. The Community that he envisages, which is free, all inclusive, open to sharing, prepared for service, and radically equal, draws inspiration from the Jesus' community in the Scriptures. Thus, the theology that he suggested for India is distinctly a biblical theology of liberation seen through Indian eyes. In short, as Francis D'sa noted, "the watch-word of Soares-Prabhu's theology was liberation, liberation from all manner of alienation and oppression" (D'Sa, CWG 4, xxviii).

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Capability Approach of Amartya Sen: An Incentive to Humanization

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Abstract: The capability approach is on of Amartya Sen's most significant contributions to philosophy and social sciences. His writings on the capability approach are not only of theoretical interest on their own, but also provide concepts used in his work on social choice, freedoms, and development. Moreover, the capability has practical relevance for policy design and assessment. The Capability Approach attempts to address various concerns that Sen had about contemporary approaches to the evaluation of well-being, namely: Individuals can differ greatly in their abilities to convert the same resources into valuable functionings ('beings' and 'doings'). People can internalize the harshness of their circumstances so that they do not desire what they can never expect to achieve. Whether or not people take up the options they have, the fact that they do have valuable options is significant. Reality is complicated and evaluation should reflect that complexity rather than take a short-cut

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by excluding all sorts of information from consideration in advance.

Keywords: Capability, Agency, Incentive, Well-being, Self-determination, Functionings, Being and doing, Freedom

Introduction

This paper aims to provide an overview of the conceptual and normative foundations of the ideal of agency within Sen's capability approach. It is adapted from a longer, two-part essay in which Ingrid Robeyns and David A. Crocker address the Sen's concept of capability as well as that of agency (Crocker and Royeyns 2010). In the present essay, I focus on the nature, value, and role of agency in the capability approach and relating it with the incentive dimension. How the whole approach turns out to be an incentive initiation for an agent to operate in our world.

Well-Being and Agency

Sen conceives of *well-being* and *agency* as two distinguishable but equally important and interdependent aspects of human life, each of which should be taken into account in our understanding of how individuals and groups are doing and each of which calls for respect (Sen 1985a: 169-221; 1992: 39-42, 56-72; 1999: 189-91). The centrality of these two concepts in Sen's broader approach to evaluation in the field of well-being and development is suggested by the title of two essays: his 1984 Dewey Lectures on "Well-being, Agency and Freedom" (Sen 1985a) and his another essay: "Agency and Well-Being: The Development Agenda" (Sen 1995). To understand human beings, either individually or collectively, we should understand how well their lives are going and who or what controls them. Before explicating Sen's concepts of well-being and agency further, however, we must attend to a cross cutting distinction, namely, achievement and freedom:

> A person's position in a social arrangement can be judged in two different perspectives, viz. (1) the actual achievement, and (2) the freedom to achieve. Achievement is concerned with what we *manage* to accomplish, and freedom with the *real opportunity* that we have to accomplish what we value. The two need not be congruent (Sen 1992: 31).

Figure 1 shows Sen's two cross-cutting distinctions: (i) well-being and agency, and (ii) achievement and freedom. With the help of Figure 1, we explain the basic ideas:

	Well-being	Agency
Achievements	Well-being Achievements	Agency Achievements
Freedom	Well-being Freedoms (Capabilities)	Agency Freedom

As we shall see in more detail subsequently, in his initial account of agency, set forth in articles and books through 1992, Sen describes agency achievement in the following way: "a person's agency achievement refers to the realization of goals and values she has reasons to pursue, whether or not they are connected with her own well-being" (1992: 56; see also 1985a: 203-204, 207; 1999: 19). A person's well-being achievements, in contrast, concern not "the totality of her considered goals and objectives" but rather only her "wellness," "personal advantage," or "personal welfare." This state of a person, her beings and doings, may be the outcome of her own or of other people's decisions and actions or these achievements may be the result of causes internal or external to the person. Sen uses the term "functionings" to designate well-being (and ill-being) achievements: They are "the state of a person—in particular the

various things he or she manages to do or be in leading a life" (1993: 31):

A person's well-being, for Sen, consists not only of her *current* states and activities (functionings), which may include the *activity* of choosing, but also of her freedom or real opportunities to function in ways alternative to her current functioning. Sen designates these real opportunities or freedoms for functioning as "capabilities." According to the capability approach, the ends of well-being, justice, and development should be conceptualized, *inter alia*, in terms of people's *capabilities to function*, that is, their effective opportunities to undertake the actions and activities that they want to engage in, and be whom they want to be. These "activities … or states of existence or being" (Sen 1985a: 197), and the freedom to engage in them, together constitute what makes a life valuable. The distinction between functionings and capabilities is between the realized and the effectively possible, in other words, between achievements, on the one hand, and freedoms or valuable options from which one can choose, on the other. Examples of functionings, we have seen, are working, resting, being literate, being healthy, being part of a community, and so forth. What is ultimately important is that people have the freedoms or valuable opportunities (capabilities) for these functionings, hence the real freedom to lead the kinds of lives they want to lead, to do what they want to do, and to be the person they want to be. Once they effectively have these substantive opportunities, they can choose those options which they value most. For example, every person should have the opportunity to be part of a community and to practice a religion, but if someone prefers to be a hermit or an atheist, they should also have these latter options.

A person's own well-being, whether functionings or capabilities or both, are often part and even all of a person's objectives. But one's own well-being may not be a person's exclusive goal, for she may also pursue goals that reduce her well-being and even end her life. The concept of agency marks what a person does or can do to realize any of her goals and not only ones that

advance or protect her well-being. Agency, like well-being, has two dimensions, namely, agency *achievements* and the *freedom* for those achievements. As agents, persons individually and collectively decide and achieve their goals – whether altruistic or not –in the world, and as agents they have more or less freedom and power to exercise their agency: "Agency freedom is freedom to achieve whatever the person, as a responsible agent, decides he or she should achieve" (Sen 1985a: 204). Although agency "is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political, and economic opportunities available to us" (Sen 1999: xi-xii), not only do people have more or less freedom to decide, act, and make a difference in the world but social arrangements can also extend the reach of agency achievements and agency freedom.

Agency

Sen's concept of agency – although often misunderstood or neglected by followers and critics alike – has come to be crucial in his solution to the problem of the selection and weighting of capabilities and, more generally, in his social-scientific and normative outlook. It is important to ask not only what it means for an individual's life to go well or for a group to be doing well, which capabilities and functionings are most important, but also who should decide these questions, how they should do so, and who should act to effect change. If well-being freedoms and functionings were the only items with normative importance, it would not matter who decided what was important or the process by which these decisions were made or enacted. With the concept of agency, however, Sen (1999: 11, 53, 281) signals an "agent-oriented view" in which individuals and groups should decide these matters for themselves, "effectively shape their own destiny and help each other," (Sen 1999: 11) and be "active participant[s] in change, rather than … passive and docile recipient[s] of instructions or of dispensed assistance" (Sen, 1999: 281).

Self-Determination

Even though an agent gets what she wants, she has not exercised agency unless she herself decides to perform the act in question. When external circumstances or internal compulsions or addictions *cause* the agent's behavior or when other agents force or manipulate her, the person does not exercise agency even though the she gets what she wants: "There is clearly a violation of freedom [i.e., agency freedom]" when an agent "is being forced to do exactly what she would have chosen to do anyway" (Sen 2004: 331). When the agent is coerced ("Your money or your life") in contrast to being forced (being carried to the paddy wagon), there is some – but minimal – agency freedom.

Reason-Orientation and Deliberation

Not just any behavior that an agent "emits" is an agency achievement, for acting on whim (let alone impulse) is behavior not under the agent's control. Sometimes Sen says "free" or "active" agency to characterize internally-caused behavior that is freely self-determined.

Agency takes place when a person acts on purpose and for a purpose, goal, or reason. Such activity Sen and co-author Jean Drèze sometimes calls "reasoned agency" (Drèze and Sen 2002: 19) or "critical agency" (Drèze and Sen 2002: 258) because it involves more or less scrutiny of and deliberation about reasons and values: "What is needed is not merely freedom and power to act, but also freedom and power to question and reassess the prevailing norms and values" (Drèze and Sen 2002: 258). The agent's decision is not for *no* reason, based on a whim or impulse, but is for *some* reason or to achieve some goal, regardless whether that goal is self-regarding or other-regarding. The more that the agent values the options, the more is she able to exercise agency; choosing to surrender money at gunpoint rather than die is an exercise of agency but a minimal one.

The Value of Agency

Why is agency valuable and how valuable is it? Sen believes that agency is valuable in three ways. It is *intrinsically* valuable: we have reason to value agency for its own sake (although the exercise of agency may be used for trivial or nefarious actions). In defending the intrinsic value of agency, we may only be able to appeal to what Rawls (1971: section 9) calls a "considered judgment" that, all things considered, it is better to act than be acted upon either as someone else's tool or a pawn of circumstance. Isaiah Berlin captures this judgment in the following:

> I wish to be the instrument of my own, not other men's, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object . . . . I wish to be a somebody, not nobody; a doer—deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted on by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them (Berlin, 1969: 131; quoted in Reich 2002: 100).

Some agency-theorists seek additional justification by explaining agency's intrinsic value in relation to our conception of persons as morally responsible (Sen 1999: 288), worthy of respect (Berlin: "a somebody, not nobody"), or having the capacity to "have or strive for a meaningful life" (Nozick 1974: 50).

Agency is also *instrumentally* valuable as a means to good consequences. If people are involved in making their own decisions and running their own lives, their actions are more likely to result, when they so aim and act, in achievement of their well-being freedoms, such as being able to be healthy and well-nourished. Moreover, when individuals are agents in a joint enterprise rather than mere "patients" or pawns, they are more likely sustainably and loyally to contribute to the joint action.

Finally, agency is, what Sen calls, "*constructively"* valuable,[1] for in agency freedom the agent freely scrutinizes, decides on, and shapes its values. Included in the constructive value of agency

is agent's selecting, weighing, and trading-off capabilities and other values (see also Crocker 2006 and 2008: chapter 9).

The Traditional Economic Literature on Incentives

Economic theories of incentives and particularly agency theory traditionally assume that the more an individual is paid the higher his effort, even if there is decreasing returns. It is therefore possible for a principal to define his/her policy in terms of the relation he/she establishes between the wage or bonus given to the agent and the corresponding level of effort. It is also assumed that punishment (e.g. a fine) or threat of wage cuts or dismissal permits to avoid some deviant behaviors such as free-riding. Finally, even if it is costly, monitoring is considered as an efficient means to control agents' behavior and address it in the desired direction. When asymmetry of information is assumed, it is possible to build and an optimal (if not first-best) contract between the parties despite the fact that the interests of the agent (the worker) and the principal (the employer) are not aligned. But even in this case, the basic assumption is not removed. This assumption also applies if one extends the analytical framework in order to deal with teams instead of a single agent (Holmtröm, 1982), with complementary incentives or with multi-tasked agents (Holmström & Milgrom, 1991, Bai & Xu, 2001). In the case of teams, two novel features have to be introduced in the usual principal-agent setting. The first one refers to the free-rider problem, since agents may have some interest not to participate to the contribution of the group as much as he/she would do if he/she were alone. The second one is competition among agents. In broad outline, the multiagent setting implies new roles for the principal, in particular to administer incentive schemes that do not balance the budget since it is the only way to achieve efficiency in the presence of externalities (Holmström, 1982). In the case of complementary incentives, for instance, a combination of asset ownership (profit sharing), contingent rewards (pay for performance) and job design, the problem that arises is that exogenous variables can modify the co-movements

of the incentives that are endogenous to the model. In their seminal paper, Holmström & Milgrom (1994) provide a way, by using the properties of supermodular functions[2], to appraise the efficiency of the combination of those incentives. This theoretical framework is completely in lines with empirical results coming mainly from management sciences. Furthermore, it is an appropriate approach because it stresses first the fact that an organization is based on a bundle of incentives and second, that this bundle is efficient depending on the kind of combinations it supports. A similar kind of conception is applied by the Federal Acquisition Institute, which holds that the system of incentives shall include provisions that:

(A) relate pay to performance (including the extent to which the performance of personnel in such workforce contributes to achieving the cost goals, schedule goals, and performance), and

(B) provide for consideration, in personnel evaluations and promotion decisions, of the extent to which the performance of personnel in such workforce contributes to achieving such cost goals, schedule goals, and performance goals.

Direct incentives (payment) and indirect ones (promotion) are here seen as complementary.[3] Concerning the problem of multi-tasked agents, Bai and Xu (2001) use Holmström and Milgrom's framework in order to analyze the incentives system that need to be applied to CEOs in a multitask context. According to Holmström and Milgrom (1991) introducing the assumption of multi-task contexts in a principal-agent problem permits to explain why generally employment contracts do involve mute incentives and favors fixed wages even when "good, objective output measures are available and agents are highly responsive to incentive pay" and loose ownership patterns even when contracts are complete (full account of all observable variables is taken, court enforcement is perfect). The intuition is that in multi-tasks contexts, if contingent task incentives are implemented, agents might concentrate their efforts on those specific tasks at the detriment of other complementary tasks. In sum, these

more sophisticated versions of the principal-agent approach do not challenge the idea that ceteris paribus direct incentives are efficient in terms of the effort they induce. This proposition is however a two strong assumption and has been challenged by psychologists and more recently by economists.

The Importance of How Incentives are Implemented

The importance of how incentives are implemented is a recurrent conclusion of the psychological literature. From an economic perspective, Frey (1997) points out that agents' perceptions of the incentives scheme that are implemented in firms or organizations may be either controlling or informing, depending on the extent of differentiation made between agents. When differentiation is low, i.e. when all agents are treated the same, those who have above-average work morale feel that their competence is not recognized and therefore adjust their intrinsic motivation downwards. At the opposite, when differentiation is high, i.e., when the principal makes explicit effort to adjust rewards according to the agents' presumed level of work ethics, intrinsic motivation is enhanced (Frey, 1997: 433). In the same vein, Frey, Benz and Stutzer (2004) underline the importance of how rewards are implemented, by advocating for the consideration of an additional source of utility (different from the usual outcome-oriented instrumental economic notion of utility), which they call procedural utility which refers to the "noninstrumental pleasures and displeasures of processes" (Frey, Benz & Stutzer 2004: 378). In everyday parlance, this expresses the idea that people attach importance not only to the result of their actions (material rewards) but also to the processes by which it is obtained. In particular, there are two sources of procedural utility that are relevant for our discussion on incentives and motivation. The first one derives from institutions and concerns the distribution of political rights (e.g., the presence of trade unions, upward mobility) and how allocative and redistributive decisions are taken in organizations (profit-sharing devices, remuneration schemes, unemployment benefits, health care) (Ibid. pp. 382-83).

The second one is involved in the interaction between agents and refers to different kinds of pro-social behavior (norm sharing, preference for fairness or even self-reputational motives). Note that there is no obvious link between pro-social behavior and intrinsic motivation. One might work hard at a task in order to gain social approval. Such work, undertaken as a means to an end, is typically deficit motivated behavior, in which there is a reward as a consequence of effort to reach a goal where the deficit is reduced. For Deci and his co-authors, this would correspond to situations where substitute needs such as the desire for social recognition emerge as a consequence of unsatisfied basic psychological needs. By contrast, intrinsic motivation tends more to be appetitive, new information arousing a slight interest leading to an appetite for more.

Conclusion

In the longer essay, from which this paper is adapted, I have provided an overview of Sen's notions of capability and agency. Both agency and those capabilities (and functionings) that we have reason to value are intrinsically good as well as instrumentally good in relation to each other. When the incentive attached with is more people put in more effort to enrich their capabilities. If people exercise their own agency in deciding on and realizing their well-being freedoms (capabilities), they are more likely to realize well-being achievements (functionings), such as a reduction of deprivation, than if they depend on luck or on the development programs that others provide. Moreover, when people make their own decisions, run their own lives, and make a mark on the world, this exercise of agency is often accompanied by a sense of satisfaction – a component of well-being achievement (Alkire forthcoming: 5; Sen 1985a: 187).

If people have and realize capabilities, they have reason to value, such as health, nutritional well-being, education, and valuable employment, they are more likely to have the ability to decide on and the power to achieve what they want. It is difficult

if not impossible for people suffering from severe deprivation to be able to run their own lives and help decide the direction of their communities. The more people are responsible for their own lives, the more they can and should "be in charge of their own well-being; it is for them to decide how to use their capabilities" (Sen 1999: 288).

Without agency freedom, without "the liberty of acting as citizens who matter and whose voices counts," people run the risk of "living as well-fed, well-clothed, and well-entertained vassals" (Drèze and Sen 2002: 288). Without an adequate level of well-being freedom and achievement, people are unable to realize their potential as agents. Because of the important linkages between well-being and agency, there is good reason to advocate an "agency-focused capability approach."

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Technology and Truth in Post-Modern Age: A Phenomenological Analysis

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Abstract: The present paper explores the notion of Truth in the digital era. The notion of truth in philosophy is generally interpreted in the transcednetal sense where it becomes the ultimate reference for judging the things. However, with the advent of digital technology, the notion of truth has come under crisis. Overwhelming information, social media posts and fake news has now blurred the distinction between truth and falsehood. The present paper will try to show that the crisis in Truth is the result of the enframing nature of technology as proposed by Martin Heidegger. The enframing tendency of the technology converts every aspect of existence into calculation and control. The way out of the calculative thinking is through return to poetic thinking. Poetic thinking restores the essence of humans and helps them to overcome the obsession with calculative thinking. This Heidegger proposes through the notion of Truth as unconcealment. The existential notion of Truth establishes the relation of man

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with Being.

Keywords: Truth, Technology, Post-Truth, Enframing, Alethia

Introduction

The question of Truth has become the contested issue as we have moved from the 'hard technology' of the modern age to the 'soft technologies' of the postmodern age (See See Scharff and Val Dusek (2003). While the earlier technologies of communication maintained clear cut differences between the personal and the social spaces, the new technologies have almost erased the distance between the personal/public, sacred/profane, real/virtual. In postmodern age, any private or intimate moment could become the public spectacle thanks to the ubiquitous presence of social media. As there is no gatekeeper or authority to differentiate between the fake or real, truth or falsehood, the force of truth is being replaced by the rhetoric of propaganda. Rapidity of news and infodemic is blunting the 'reflective capacity' of humans and reducing them as the passive consumer of the information. The flood of information and the absence of authority which controls the truth has resulted in calling our age as the post-truth age. In the age of post truth there is the declining role of traditional gatekeepers of truth like reputable news outlets, journalists, scholars etc. In the post truth age, there is decline of all these authorities and there is kind of free play of the interpretations. Therefore, today's age, which is called the post truth world, is marked by superficiality, emotions and rhetoric.

However, we need to see whether our age actually can be called the age of post-truth or is it the crisis in the particular notion of Truth? Apart from being the property of proposition, Truth also holds great existential importance because it gives meaning to our existence. We would like to explore whether the so-called post-truth age has really divested the truth of its existential function?

For this, we will mainly underscore the two views regarding Truth: the transcendental notion of Truth and the postmodern view of truth. The former view is mainly upheld in the philosophy of Kant who argues that humans are endowed with the special faculty called Reason and it enables us to transcend our localities and see the things from what he calls, 'enlarged mentality'.[1] Therefore, as rational beings, we can claim objectivity and universality in our judgments.

Postmodern view rejects the possibility of any such universality and argues that human beings are fundamentally embodied and situated subjects who remain under the influence of history, culture and ideology, therefore it cannot claim the universal truth. Even if it claims any universal truth, it can only be formal like mathematics and therefore implementing it in a variety of contexts always remains problematic.

Two Notions of Truth

The rational notion of truth mainly found in Kant's philosophy. Kant's philosophy has mainly come as the response to Hume's skepticism. Skepticism denies any foundationalism. Since human knowledge is ultimately based on the sensory inputs therefore it cannot be finality in the human's knowledge. The skeptic philosophy of Hume challenged the certainty and the universality of scientific knowledge.

The first Critique is basically a response to the challenge thrown by David Hume in *Treatise of Hume Nature.* Kant responds to Hume by showing the necessity of knowledge, what he calls the Copernican Revolution. Kant's main project in epistemology was to establish the 'spontaneity' of mind in the process of acquiring knowledge. In this way, he was able to come out of the empiricist's notion of passivity of mind in the process of acquiring the knowledge. Once the passivity of mind is assumed, one cannot be sure how the particular representation corresponds to reality. Hence, knowledge acquires merely an ad-hoc status in Hume which is merely contingent and based on the

sheer habit of our mind. Kant challenges this passive notion of mind by arguing that we need an active faculty of understanding to explain the knowledge. He starts with claim that "though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience" (Kant, 2003). For the experience to take place, two kinds of faculties are required, sensibility and understanding. At the very outset of Transcendental Logic, he makes the oft-quoted statement.

Our knowledge springs from the two fundamental sources of the mind. The first is the capacity of receiving representations; the second is the power of knowing an object through representation (Kant, 2003: 66).

By granting an active role to the faculty of understanding in the process of acquiring knowledge, Kant is able to respond to the challenge posed by Hume. Hume denies any role to the mind in the process of knowledge acquisition. It also led him to the conclusion that there is no self. It is only a fiction which is produced through abstracting from the experiences we have. There is no self which unites or connects the various experiences. Ideas combine themselves on their own on the basis of the law of association. There are certain principles like causality, contiguity in space and time and resemblance, which are responsible for the combination of simple ideas into the complex one. Although he admits that imagination and memory do play a role in the combination of simple ideas but he grants them an empirical function, not transcendental (See Hume, 2003). Kant, on the other hand, establishes the spontaneity of mind in the process of knowledge acquiring. This alone can guarantee the necessity in knowledge and will keep the skepticism at bay. If we wish to endow knowledge with necessity and universality, we need to find it in us, not in the external world.

Modern thinkers since Kant call the faculty of organizing the discrete sensations into the meaningful whole as Reason. They argue that through the faculty of Reason humans can rise above the particulars and can come to the Universals; hence modernity

argues for the essence of humanity as rationality, where the people can give up their particularities and become the rational agent for upholding their true essence.[2] In fact, in the moral philosophy of Kant reason even acquires the motivating force in order to act morally.[3]

Postmodern philosophers reject the transcendentalist notion of Truth. They argue that what modern philosophers dubs as the 'transcendental' is basically the fallout of the more fundamental situation which modernists ignore. This fundamental situation they call the 'immanence'. According to the postmodern philosophers, thought tries to represent the immanence through the categories of reason, idea, universal so forth but it cannot do so because the immanence is basically fluid, multiple and playful. Therefore, the unifying thought always produces the margins and the outsides.[4]

Therefore, the postmodern view rejects the possibility of any such universality and argues that human beings are fundamentally embodied and situated-selves which itself is the effect of history, culture and ideology, therefore it cannot represent the Truth.

The aim of delineating these two contrasting notions of Truth is basically to explore the source of ethics which has a deep relationship with Truth. Theoretical certainty regarding Truth informs the practical involvement with the world. Transcendentalists offer the robust defence of ethics by making human dignity, freedom and respect as essential to the nature of man. Therefore, they would see the discourse of post truth basically as propaganda which blurs the capacity to distinguish between the right and wrong, good and bad. The ruling ideology and capitalism take recourse to the propaganda to blur the critical abilities of the people. The way out is to recognize our false consciousness and see the propaganda as propaganda in order to come out of it.

Postmodernists do not deny ethics rather they argue that the Reason is just the formal category and it is not capable enough to motivate to act with justice. Therefore, it tries to ground ethics

in relation to the otherness. Derrida says that self is infinitely responsible towards the other. Recognition of one's fluidity makes one more open towards the alterity. Therefore, postmodernist gives more importance to the singularities, differences and margins than the general rules or the metanarrative of emancipation.[5]

Heidegger and Technology

However, we see that the possibility of both kinds of engagement with truth has been seriously challenged in the era of images and social networking where we are spending more time in the digital world than the real one. Both modernists and postmodernists world view assumes the encounter with the concrete world as the condition to come out of our closures and become open towards the other. The voluptuousness and the mystery of the other always surprise me and I become vulnerable towards the other. However, our digital age has resulted in the situation where the self can totally withdraw itself from the other in the virtual world and yet can have the relationship with the other without having any concrete, embodied experience. The rapidity and overwhelming nature of the images is dulling what Hannah Arendt says the capacity to judge between the good and bad, beautiful and ugly. It is not just the psychological problem of addiction but rather the formation of the subjectivity where we start to perceive and evaluate myself via the online experience. The overflowing images and the messages which often are false claims, propaganda and full of malignity has been taking over the criticality and the values. The absence of any depth in life either from religion or politics has resulted in the addiction towards social media.

Martin Heidegger describes the technological age as the decisive turning point in the history of humane existence. He argues that Technology is not simply the technique or know-how rather it is enframing. Enframing is fundamentally the way of ordering the world (Heidegger 1993). According to Heidegger, we do not see the world as it is. There is always the paradigm

by which we see and interpret the things. Heidegger calls this as Enframing.

In his essay *The Question concerning Technology,* Heidegger asks the question that constitutes the essence of technology. In his characteristic style, he says that we should not understand the technology as the product of human beings. Rather technology is *Gestell*, enframing. By enframing, Heidegger means the framework in which we see and understand the things. Technology is the 'framing' which presents the things in the form of 'standing reserve'.

> The essence of modern technology shows itself in what we call enframing…It is the way in which the actual reveals itself as standing-reserve….Enframing is the gathering together which belongs to that setting-upon which challenges man and puts him in position to reveal the actual, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. As the one who is challenged forth in this way, man stands within the essential realm of enframing (Heidegger (1993: 328-9).

In this technological age everything is converted into the resources for the exploitation. This obsession with converting everything into resources is 'calculative thinking'. Calculative thinking is in fact not 'thinking' *per se*. It is rather the thoughtlessness of our age. As Heidegger says, "Most thought-provoking is that we are still not thinking." In the technological age, the world turns into a commodity for calculation.

> calculation is the mark of all thinking that plans and investigates. Such thinking remains calculation even if it neither works with numbers nor uses an adding machines or computers. Calculative thinking computes…calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself (Heidegger (1966: 46).

Calculative thinking has resulted in the impoverishment of thinking. The man has lost his roots, which Heidegger calls 'autochotony'[6]. The Being has been forgotten and we are totally involved with the things. It has resulted in the loss of essence

for humans which is fundamentally to remain in the openness of beings.

According to Heidegger, the only value which the technological age promotes is manipulation and control. Therefore the crisis of Truth in the digital age has to be more seen as the result of the enframing tendency of the technological age which converts every aspect of our life in terms of calculation and control. The value of friendship can be calculated through the number of likes and comments made online; the validity of news depends on how frequently it has been shared among the people. In other words, everything including relationships and values is now available for counting and calculating.

Heidegger proposes that the way out is not to give up technology but recognizing the danger of its Enframing nature. We should realize how the enframing of the technological age is closing off our more open relationship with the world. As such, it is taking away the essence of man and reduces it in terms of calculable resources. There are various modes by which the world can be seen and interpreted like poetic, religious, aesthetic but technological age impresses its particular way to see the world. This is the kind of overriding influence of technology on human life.

Truth and Ontology

Hence the crisis in Truth is induced by our particular age which is technological. Its emphasis is on converting everything into the calculable entity. Heidegger, therefore, calls for a more primordial relationship with Truth which he explains through his novel conception of Being. According to Heidegger, the fundamental mistake of the western philosophical discourse is to reduce the Being into an entity. The metaphysical tradition calls it as Idea, God or presence (Heidegger (2002). As a result of it, Truth has become propositional as it can be demonstrated through the logical procedure. The propositional conception of Truth presupposes rational subjects which logically distinguish

between the truth and falsehood. The propositional nature of Truth makes scientific truth as its model and relies on it for its validation.

The crisis in Truth which we see now after the upsurge of the social media and internet is fundamentally the crisis of the procedure whereby we reach to the Truth. Every 'fake news' now provides the twisted data, false references and concocted facts for confusing the person. As our rational capacity has been trained to interpret the truth as fact so the fake news or propaganda machine always gives access to the 'undisclosed facts' to propagate their version of truth. This shapes the opinion of some people and the debate now shifts from truth to interpretation. It is therefore more important to give ontological value to the truth than merely providing the function of intellectual clarity. Truth is significant because it gives meaning to my existence by giving it coherence. In the absence of coherence, our life loses its significance and value. Therefore, Truth has existential bearing on humans and restores its essence. Therefore, Heidegger tries to explore the essence of human nature in his work but this essence is not something teleological which defines the purpose of human life. Rather the essence restores the 'place' of humans and brings him to the openness.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's analysis of Death shows the specific characteristic of humans in relationship with death, viz., its ability to be singular, to individuate itself. Everyday life covers up the authentic dimension of its being, where it let itself go in the publicness. The self of everyday is therefore inauthentic, unowned. According to Heidegger, we tend to flee from ourselves as it is more comfortable to us. On the one hand, inauthenticity enables us to be part of the intersubjective community, which Heidegger calls as they. But on the other hand, it conceals the fundamental truth about our own being. However, in the ontological mood of anxiety, we realize that the public world loses into insignificance and we cannot respond to this situation through 'chattering', viz. through everyday discourse. We try to evade it by losing ourselves in the everydayness again. However, the fundamental

attunement of anxiety discloses the real possibility of Dasein's being. Dasein's essence gets manifested during anxiety, where it can really 'own' up itself (Heidegger (1962). This owning up oneself makes Dasein authentic. The real possibility of Dasein lies in the authentic moment where it is no longer covered by the everyday chattering. We can also say that the everyday self is not the 'free' self. Its choices, decisions and opinions are shaped by the socio-cultural ethos. The depth or authenticity requires a breakdown of the everydayness. Dasein should be exposed to the situation where all the entities of the world whether present-at-hand or ready-to-hand lose into insignificance. Only in the rare mood of anxiety, the real possibility of Dasein comes up. The possibility of freedom can only be encountered in these moments.

According to Heidegger, the true possibility of freedom lies not in doing something but in transcending it. The possibility of this transcendence realizing our essential relationship with Being. Being reveals the original nature of man which is poetic and non-appropriating. The obsession with representing everything through language has made us lose our essence and which is now culminating in a technological age where even humans are also turning into resources. According to Heidegger, this can only be possible through the return to poetic thinking. Poetic thinking restores the essence of humans and helps them to overcome the obsession with calculative thinking. Heidegger gives importance to poetic thinking because it reveals the qualities which are necessary for letting truth to emerge. Heidegger calls Truth as *Alethia*, unconcealment (Heidegger 2004). This brings the altogether different notion of truth as Truth can happen though passivity rather than the emphasis on the logical procedure. Such kind of truth affirms the internal validity rather than the external procedure for establishing the truth.

Conclusion

Heidegger's notion of *alethia* as truth highlights the existential importance of Truth. Truth does not only have the epistemological

function. This is due to our obsession with 'knowing' and representing rather than 'experiencing' which involves the whole of our being. There are other ways of knowing as well as practical knowing, aesthetic experience, religious experience etc. The truth of these experiences requires the internal validity rather than adhering to some logical procedure.

Technological age has dislodged the things from their essence and turned everything into the usable resource. While the hard and mighty technology of the modern age has alienated the people, the soft postmodern technologies like smartphones, social networking promises joy and fulfilment. However, obsession with these technologies has been gradually eroding the need of an embodied mode of interaction and therefore blunting our reflective capacity. Particularly, technology is reducing the multiple ways of experiencing the world in to a typecast manner. This is the encroachment of the 'tech-power' in our life which has now become the dominant way of interpreting the world. Heidegger's invoking of 'poetic thinking' shows the way to restore the essence of man which lies in wonder and openness towards existence.

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Notes

1. The notion of 'enlarged mentality' has been used here in the context of Hannah Arendt who argues that the true political thought should be more representative and it can only be possible when the persons involved have the 'enlarged mentality' i.e. to see the issue from the various possible ways. For details see Arendt (2003).
2. For example, thinkers like Jurgan Habermas give the idea of communicative rationality by which he believes that the reason will grow through mutual communication.
3. Kant in his second Critique explores the question of what motivates the reason to get involved into the domain of ethics? He argues that it is the 'respect' for the moral law. The respect for the moral law marks the transition from the pure reason to the practical reason. For details see Kant (1997).
4. Postmodern philosophers like Micheal Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze argue against the metanarratives of philosophy which produces the coherent and complete image of the philosophy.

They instead focus on the margins and differences which interrupts the self-sufficient image of the philosophy. See Mullarkey (2006) for the details on this point.

5. The idea of ethics has been developed significantly by Derrida who argues, following Levinas, that ethics is basically the infinite responsibility towards the other. Otherness has been defined as the limit of understanding, which defies any theoretical conceptualization. For details see Derrida (1982).
6. Heidegger defies human beings as the place where Being reveals itself. Since Being cannot be the metaphysical entity therefore it becomes the openness, a kind of clearing which gathers the world of humans. Humans must have the patience to let the Being emerge rather than in hurry to represent it through the concepts. Heidegger defines it through his notion of Gelassenheit, see Heidegger (1966).

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Book Review

Roy, Shubhrangshu. (2019). **Zara's Witness: A Soul Journey into the Nature of Being.** New Delhi: Hay House India. pp.204. ₹ 299/- ISBN: 9789386832900

The inspring novel, Zara's Witness, is a living translation of classical Indian philosophy to the modern youth or Gen Z. It uses fantasy, myth, science, music, poetry and other symbolisms to evoke the depth and beauty of our inner consciousness, as represented by the Indian psyche. It tells the story of a teenager seeking wisdom for herself in her life-journey from the Ganges, to the forest to the city!

With elegant prose, coupled with the sporadic poems, the book tries to share the classical wisdom of Upanishads and sacred texts with the modern youth absorbed by contemporary virtual reality and discotheques.

This book aptly dedicated to "the one within" is an ongoing search to find oneself in all its depth and breadth. It has as its Purva Paksha the following sections: "Song of Creation"; "Illusion of Identity"; "The Essence of Being."

The last two sections, "Song of Creation Revisited" and "The End of Story: The Game Begins" are conversations with the higher self of the teenage Zara, the protagonist of the story, before she ascends to the sky to confront the one and only reality of her being – I am who thou art, or thou art who I am. They reverberate in us the classical Aham Brahmasmi ("I am Brahman) and Tat Tvam Asi ("That thou art").

In a sense, this book evokes in us "Noting Stirs" and in this very process "Everything Happens." That is how human beings experience life and the novel does the same.

The last section of the book, or after-conversation, is "a copyright blueprint of the equation for everything in the Universe" articulated as "the essence of this and that" (p. 13 and 191). The attentive reader will be able to find "this equation" interspersed throughout the narrative. The concept of time and space, as measured by ancient seers, is elaborated at the end of the book (p. 13 and 197f.). Thus time is smoothly blended to life and narrative).

The teachers in this captivating novel are elements of nature. Frogy (the frog), Elly (the elephant), the Wind, Monk!ee, Thunderstorm, River, Koel (the sweet singing bird), Hyena, Rhino, Peacock ridge, etc., impart lessons for Zara and accompany her in her life journey.

The book deploys several tools used in other crafts and science such as literature, poetry, theatre, classical Indian and Western music, cinema, and quantum computing to narrate Zara's inner exploration (p. 12) to arrive at her inner self. So, it is from her close intimacy with nature that Zara acquires the wisdom to lead her meaningful and fulfilling life.

This picturesque book is an attempt to answer eternal human question: Who am I? That search of a teen "meanders along the course of a river to its final destination in the sky where both the river and the human spirit merge at the end of the journey to discover the one eternal truth revealed to mankind since time immemorial—universal love" (p. 11). This search is a perennial one found in the whole Indian philosophy right up to our own times. Shubhrangshu Roy makes a very successful effort to make this search accessible for Gen Z.

For the author, Shubhrangshu Roy, the nature of Indian philosophy and the diverse aspirations of it "not only spirals upwards, i.e., it ascends from one story to another, but it is also essentially recursive. Which is to say, it is never-ending and almost amounts to the same thing being told over and over again through

shifts in the storytelling from generation to generation, from one millennium to another. In a sense, there is actually no ending, no conclusion. The storyteller and the story can go on and on (203).

This fascinating book contains very important lessons for life and articulates the classical Indian philosophy for the contemporary youth.

Most of the themes in this book are philosophically profound and can be traced to the Indian classics. The basic question Zara asks is: "Who am I?" and "Where did I come from?" "You come from, yourself, Zara," (p. 161), answers the river "in celebration." "But how did I come here?" Zara wondered aloud. The reply was enigmatic: "You came here riding time, Zara. Time, indeed, is your father," said the river. And how did I come here riding time?" Zara asked again.

"Your desire of you rode time here," said the river. "Those words were your desire to become something that expanded in time," the river said as Zara waited for the answer. "Your desire illumined your senses with the colours of the rainbow, Zara, so that you could reach out to your higher self within, just as the tendrils of the plant reach out for sunlight. And that light generated heat. And that heat created the germ of life in you that we call the seed. And that seed is what you ceded of yourself within you, splitting you into two." (p. 162).

The river elaborates on time. "Time is the distance you covered for the idea of you to become you and, therefore, turn full circle (p. 163)".

In this discovery of the true self, and the illusion of identity, Zara listens to a sweet song, "Jo tu hai, so main hoon; jo main hoon, so tu hai! (What you are, so am I; what I am, so are you!) repeatedly in the course of this story (pp. 31, 90, 166, 182). 'Have faith in yourself, Zara', said the voice from within the pool. No one here is bigger than you, nor is anyone smaller than you are. Not the ant, not the housefly, not the butterfly, not the dragonfly, not the grasshopper, not the frog, not the monitor lizard, and, least of all, not the elephant. Come look again, little Zara, neither

is there any joy for you around this place nor is there any sorrow . . . what you are, little Zara, so I am; what I am, so you are." (p. 25). Precisely herein discerns the author the richness of the Indian advaitic insight.

Zara's Witness is a philosophical fantasy where Zara's life is explored in terms of human needs for fulfilment, happiness, and spiritual liberation. This book can be compared to two classic novels of the same genre. In Siddhartha: An Indian tale, the German novelist Herman Hesse (2007) explores the spiritual journey and search for the meaning of a young man by the same name during the time of the Gautama Buddha. In Sophie's World: A novel about the history of philosophy, a novel by Norwegian writer Jostein Gaarder (2012), the young teenager Sophie Amundsen is introduced to the history of philosophy through riddles, puzzles, symbols and the genre of story-telling, like Zara..

Like the two books mentioned above, I wish that Zara's Witness also becomes a classic giving purpose, meaning and wisdom to today's Gen Z. I wish that Indian philosophy with its liberative and humanistic vision discovers its valuable roots and make it relevant to the contemporary women and men. May we rediscover the depth and significance of "the Indian Ending" that the British historian Arnold Toynbee refereed to! A fascinating novel that speaks of virtual reality, Gen Z, space warping, quantum mechanics and discotheque in the same breath as Indian philosophy can achieve it! A book highly recommended both to the young and old seekers of wisdom! A book which will hopefully become a classic!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ

M. D. Joseph. **Adolescence and Personality Growth: A Philosophical and Psychological Probe.** Guwahati: Eastern Pub (India), 2021. 978-93-90434-41-1 pp. 66 Hdbd. Index. ₹ 495.

Adolescence is a developmental period that is remarked by substantial change sin affective and incentive-seeking behavior,

which is relative to both childhood and adulthood, incldiang a heightend emotional propensity to engage in risky behaviours and experience persistent negative and labile mood states. This volume on human life discusses the emotional and incentive-driven behavioural changes in the phase of adolescence, associated specially with rapid development and progress in physical and neural changes during this significant stage in the life of the teens. It throws light one what it means to be human, responsible and authentic. This book enables and encourages human life in this phase of life, helping the youngsters to move from childhood to adolescence from adolescence to adulthood and find one's unique and responsible place in the society.

With Forewords by Dr M. Angamuthu, IAS, Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup Metropolitan District, Guwahati and Most Rev John Moolachira, Archbishop of Guwahati, this books deals with the meaning of adolescence, the storms associated with it. It also takes into consideration the role emotion plays in the life of adolescence. It explores the role of friendship and leadership in this crucial phase of life. Then it takes up the philosophical notion of "I am that I am," which talks of personality, maturity behavior, moral growth, etc. the final chapter deals with the important role that the school and teachers play in the life of adolescents.

The author, with his doctoral in philosophy, is a guide and mentor for adolescents, who can guide them in the path of morality, responsibility and wisdom. This book is gentle in it approach and open-minded in its vision and progressive in Weltanschauung. It is highly recommended to adolescents, parents and teachers and will be a good asset in all school and college libraries.

Kuruvilla Pandikattu

Cyril Desbruslais, SJ. **Ancient, Medieval and Modern Philosophy: A Historial Introducstion (500 BC-1800 BC)**. Valerian Mendoncs SJ (ed). Pune: Jnana Deepa and New Delhi: Christian World Imprints. 2021. ISBN: 978-93-5148-519-3; pp.xiv+256, ₹ 600.

This insightful books gives an accurate overview of Western philosophy starting from Pre-Socratic peiord and leading to the great enlightenment philosopher, Immanuel Kant. The vision and understanding of the prominent philosophers of this vast perios are critically studies in terms of their understanding of the human person, world and God. This book explores the Ancient, Medieval and Modern philosophica schools and personalities. This creative venture is the fruit of about 60 years of enriching philosophical discussion the author had with young scholars and seekers. It gives a bird's eye-view of more than 2000 years of Western thought in a progressive and dynamic manner.

The book follows a systematic and progressive style where the life, thought and critical remarks of each philosopher has been analysed. Desbruslais, who has been teaching philosophy at Jnana Deepa, Pune and accompanying the youth of Pune (Search in Service and Unity) for about 50 years has a passion for philosophy and the youth. This book is an edited and revised version of the very popular cyclostyled notes he had been preparing for the philosophy students from 1970's onwards.

This book 17th volume in the JD Philosophy Series.

It is also a fitting tribute to Prof Cyril Desbruslais, a progressive, liberation and humanist Christian, who has reached the mature and fruitful age of 80 by his admirers, well-wishers and students. The book was released on December 19, 2020 just two days before his birthday. It has recalled that he has influenced thousands of youths thorugh this lectures, books and plays.

Definitely this book is a must for anyone interested in the history and development of Western philosophy. A must for all students and teachers of philosophy and for all librarities of humanities and social sciences. A sequence to this volume, dealing with Contemporary Philosophy will be out soon.

Gini George

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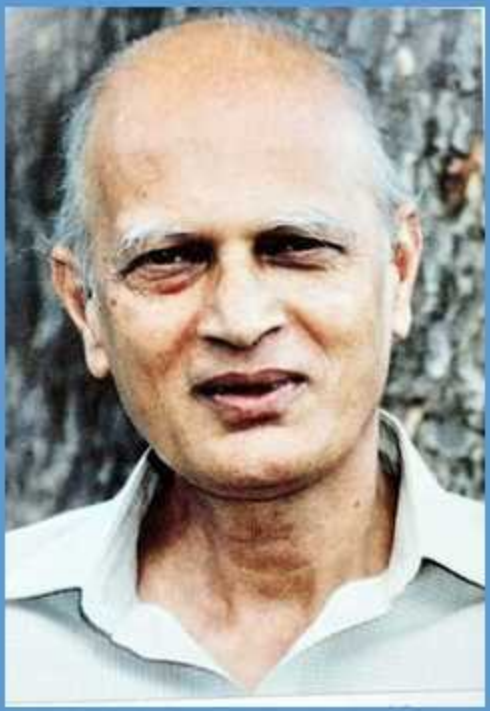

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