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GEORGE M. SOARES-PRABHU AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY IN INDIA

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Abstract

George M. Soares Prabhu, born on November 17, 1929 and died on July 22, 1995, was not only a celebrated theologian of his era, but continues to be a challenging theologian with his unique contributions to Biblical Theology in India. The ambience in which he was born and brought up and the context in which he was trained to be a theologian seemed to have influenced him a lot in making him a theologian with a difference. His theology turned to be effective as it was developed as a response to the problems of the society in which he lived; it was a contextualized theology. The Church in India is in urgent need of theologizing in the context in order to be a relevant presence in India, which is characterized by religious pluralism and social oppression. The contributions of Soares-Prabhu in Biblical Theology can enlighten the Indian Church to enrich its theology taking into account seriously the context in which it is planted. Soares-Prabhu establishes that the traditional methods of analysing the biblical texts like Historical Criticism, Rhetorical Criticism, etc. are not just enough for Indian exegetes for theologizing in India, but they should adopt an 'Indian Religious

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Reading' as well as 'Indian Social Reading' for interpreting the text meaningfully in India, which will in turn manifest an 'Indianness' in their theology.

Keywords: *Abba*, Biblical Exegesis, Biblical Theology, Christocentric Approach, Dharma of Jesus, Ecclesiocentric Approach, Indianness, 'Indian Religious Reading,' 'Indian Social Reading,' Liberation (Moksha), Pluralism, Poverty, Theocentric Approach

Introduction

Indian Catholic Church is said to be one of the most flourishing churches in the world, and it is blessed with a large number of vocations to priesthood as well as to religious life. There are a good number of Indians being trained in India as well as abroad for teaching in the ecclesiastical institutions and for animating the activities of the institutional Church. However, there is a frequent criticism that the Indian theologians usually miss what is 'Indian' in their theology. The Church in India, according to many, is more and more getting institutionalized and thus more and more getting disconnected with the people. The Church in India, according to many, is more and more getting institutionalized and thus more and more disconnected with the people. This disconnect with the people is one of the root causes of the criticism by the media on the Church and its authorities. The Church fails to keep up its credibility as there is a great dichotomy between what it preaches and practices. Moreover, though Christianity reached in India in the first century itself, even today, many consider Christianity as a foreign religion or the religion of the West. One of the main reasons behind such a disorientation in the Church is that the theology on which the Church in India is founded lacks 'Indianness.' The Church in India should introspect into its failures so that it may adopt ways and means to modify its way of theologizing and it may use a theological language which is more people oriented.

In this context, investigation into the contributions of George M. Soares-Prabhu to Indian Theology, especially the innovative methods he adopted in theologizing, to make theology more meaningful in India – which is characterized by religious pluralism and social oppression – is relevant. His personal life as well as his pioneering academic endeavours to enhance the quality of theologizing in India can always remain a source of inspiration for those who are aspiring to be effective theologians in the modern world, especially in India.

1. George M. Soares Prabhu: Life and Works

George M. Soares Prabhu was born on November 17, 1929 at Igatpuri, Maharashtra and he had his schooling in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. The context in which he spent his childhood, that is, North India, might have imprinted on the young mind of Soares Prabhu an indelible picture of the Indian realities of extreme poverty that led to massive misery and India's rich religious tradition, however, poisoned by the caste system existed in India. The Indian milieu in which he grew and had his schooling was that of British colonial rule. He might have seen and experienced the atrocities of colonial rule. It was the time the freedom fight movement in India reached its climax with the *Quit India Movement*, which began in 1942. In 1944 he joined the Society of Jesus and was ordained a priest on March 24, 1961.¹ He went to Rome for higher studies in 1963 and it was a crucial time in the history of the universal Church as it was the time of Vatican Council II. While he was undergoing his doctoral studies he might have been profoundly influenced by two important documents on the study of the Word of God and its significance issued by the Catholic Church.² They might have played a vital role in the making of Soares Prabhu, a Biblical theologian with a difference.

He taught mainly at Jnana-Deepa Vidya-Peeth, Pune and his academic contributions have appeared in a number of well-researched articles published in journals and edited books.³ He

¹ Scaria Kuthirakkattel, "George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.: An Exegete and a Theologian. I" *Vidyajyothi Journal of Theological Reflection* 73 (2009) 761.

² Vatican Council II promulgated *Dei Verbum*, on Divine Revelation, in 1965. The Pontifical Biblical Commission issued another important document called *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* in 1964 for the Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels, which emphasizes the need of finding the real significance of the text of the Bible: "Since there will never be an end to (biblical) problems, the Catholic exegete should never lose heart in explaining the divine word and in solving the difficulties proposed to him. Rather, let him strive earnestly to open up still more the real meaning of the Scriptures."

³ Kuthirakkattel, "George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.: An Exegete and a Theologian. I," 765-766. Kuthirakkattel writes: "He published on Interhuman Forgiveness, Prayers in Jesus' Teaching, and the Bible as the Magna Carta of Movements for Liberation and Human Rights in *Concilium* (London: SCM; New York: Orbis). Likewise, on Jesus and Conflict, the Unprejudiced Jesus and the Prejudiced Church, Miracles as Signs (not Wonders), and Interpreting the Bible in India Today in *The Way* (London: The Way Publications). On the Two Mission Commands in *Biblical Interpretation* (Netherlands), and on the Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste, and by Pluralism and Dialogue in *Sedos Bulletin* (Rome). He also wrote thought-provoking articles for books published in the first world: for instance, "Class in the Bible" in a book

started teaching at JDV in 1970 and continued to teach there till his death in 1995. He taught various courses in the Faculty of Theology, like The Historical Jesus, The Resurrecion of Jesus and The Dharma of Jesus. He was one of the most sought after professors of JDV. His presence and his classes on varied subjects at Jnana-Deepa Vidya-Peeth, Pune made a striking change in the campus. Scaria Kuthirakkattel writes:

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.⁴

He was very radical in his attitudes that, though he was an internationally renowned theologian he never wanted to be part of a seminar or intellectual exercise which would defeat his convictions and teachings. According to Kuthirakkattel, following are some of the personal qualities Soares-Prabhu possessed for being known as a celebrated theologian with an Indian spirit:

1. Soares-Prabhu was convinced that the duty and commitment of an exegete, for that matter any genuine follower of Jesus, demand service to the people of his or her constituency (in his case the people of India, a country characterized by three dialectically interrelated factors of stark and widespread poverty, pervasive and pluriform religiosity, and a brutal and oppressive caste system).
2. He was also convinced that this cannot be achieved without a deep religious experience (a profound, personal experience of God as well as an active and effective identification with one's sisters and brothers in our country).
3. And he was strongly convinced that to realize these two convictions he had to undergo a challenging, demanding and, at the same time, extremely fulfilling transformation in his life-style, in his options, in his priorities and in his values.⁵

published by SPCK (London), and "The Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus" in another book published by Orbis (New York). He was a regular participant and a resource person for the meetings of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). His doctoral thesis titled "The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Mathew: An Enquiry into the Tradition History of Mathew 1-2," is published in *Analecta Biblica* series, Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, which is a very prestigious publication.

⁴Kuthirakkattel, "George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.: An Exegete and a Theologian. I," 762.

⁵Kuthirakkattel, "George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.: An Exegete and a Theologian. I," 767.

2. A Critique of the Traditional Methods of Biblical Exegesis

Soares-Prabhu in his pursuit of developing an Indian method in reading the Bible, was keen to identify the confines of the traditional methods used in reading the Bible like, Historical Criticism, Rhetorical Criticism, Narrative Criticism, etc. He was not personally against any of these methods, but he wanted to make the reading of the Bible more relevant by reading it in the context of the exegete, so that it would address some of the pertinent issues with which Indian society was oppressed.

2.1. Historical Critical Method

Historical critical method emerged as part of the great process of intellectual and social revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries. The introduction of this method in reading the Bible, was a crucial phase in the history of the interpretation of the Bible. “Historical critical method studies the text of the Bible, and of the Gospels in particular, by applying to it a series of techniques (the so-called ‘criticisms’) which have been developed to give us the original form of the text and its original (i.e. its author’s) meaning.”⁶ Soares-Prabhu notes that in historical criticism one is able to trace back the oral pre-history of a biblical text. It further facilitates to arrive at the original text of a literary work through *Text Criticism*, its precise meaning and possible written sources through *Literary Criticism*, its literary history through *Form Criticism*, and its theological perspective through *Redaction Criticism*.⁷ He acknowledges the contributions the historical critical method has brought to the field of investigating into the biblical texts, but he points out certain failures of this method: 1. This method fails to disclose the real meaning of the texts, while supplying masses of information about them. Information about the text cannot achieve the goal of interpreting the text, which aims at the personal transformation of the reader through his response in faith. 2. The treatment of oral tradition in the process of source and form criticism is abstract and unreal, therefore historical criticism is inadequate to supply the needed evidences for the study. 3. This method which aims at finding the ‘literal’ or ‘original’ meaning of the text, treats the text as a static entity with a fixed unchanging

⁶George M. Soares-Prabhu, “The Historical Critical Method: Reflections on Its Relevance for the Study of the Gospels in India Today,” in *A Biblical Theology for India* (edited with an Introduction by Scaria Kuthirakkattel), Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999, 4.

⁷Soares-Prabhu, “The Historical Critical Method...,” 5.

meaning, when text is supposed to undergo an ongoing process of interpretation. 4. Soares-Prabhu laments that the irrelevance of this method is accentuated as it comes to the biblical scholars in India as they often theologize in a vacuum, cut off from the real life experiences that should nourish their theology.⁸

The scholars who have evaluated the works of Soares-Prabhu in the past have observed that he was not at home with the scope of the historical critical method for a relevant reading of the Bible in the Indian context. According to Keith D'Souza:

The *historical-critical method* has not, according to Soares-Prabhu, adequately come to grips with the *nature* of the text, still treating it as if one could elicit from it a fixed and objective set of conclusions that would then be perennially valid for all times and places! The bible is a book of life, not a sterile reporting of facts to be analysed for their historic worth. If followed by itself, this method is perhaps the least context-sensitive and reader sensitive.⁹

Joseph Lobo enumerates in detail Soares-Prabhu's reservation in accepting historical critical method as an integrated and balanced method for interpreting the Bible. Joseph Lobo brings to light some concerns of Soares-Prabhu to be suspicious of historical critical method. They are:

- a. An option for the poor; not only as an intrinsic dimension of the faith-praxis, but also as an essential methodological requirement.
- b. A reading of the scriptural texts geared not primarily towards the "accumulation of knowledge," but rather towards liberation (*moksha*).
- c. An integral liberation of the individuals as well as the social structures, from external as well as internal bondages.
- d. A dialogue with the religious traditions that surround the theologian.
- e. Interpreting the Scriptures by means of such exegetical practice, which is informed by the concerns of the life situation of the community of the theologian so that God's self-revelation becomes effective in the context.¹⁰

The findings of Joseph Lobo make clear the disposition of Soares-Prabhu towards historical critical method. Soares-Prabhu did not completely reject historical critical method but he was looking after a complementary method for making him a theologian committed to

⁸Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method..." 6-9.

⁹Keith D'Souza, "George M. Soares-Prabhu: A Theologian for our Times," in *The Dharma of Jesus*, ed. Francis X D'Sa, Gujarat: Gujrat Sahitya Prakash, 1997, 5.

¹⁰Joseph Lobo, *Encountering Jesus Christ in India: An Alternative Way of Doing Christology in a Cry-for-Life Situation Based on the Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2004, 286-287.

the society which was struggling hard to address some of its existential problems.¹¹

2.2. Existential Hermeneutics

R. Bultmann proposed Existential Hermeneutical method, in which the content of the New Testament is identified by 'demythologizing' the text. According to him, "the true subject matter of the New Testament is neither myth nor history, but the understanding of authentic human existence that it presents."¹² Soares-Prabhu observes that such a method does indeed make the New Testament highly relevant, but only at the ultimate level of personal decision. It reduces the whole New Testament to pure proclamation, at the expense of all the religious values of the text. This method takes into consideration only the blind faith by which a person surrenders himself to God, and human rationality, which plays a significant role in the exercise of historical critical method, is no more relevant or it is completely ignored.¹³

2.3. The New Hermeneutic

New Hermeneutical method is proposed by Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs who were followers of R. Bultmann. This method emerged as a solution to the problem involved in the existential hermeneutics in which there is a sharp dichotomy between faith and history. According to this method, the New Testament is now seen to be not the expression of an abstract 'understanding of existence,' but the written sedimentation of a 'language event' – that is of a primordial utterance. The New Hermeneutic, then aims at making the language event inaugurated by the word of Jesus happen again today. That is why, unlike the existentialist hermeneutics of Bultmann which is completely indifferent to history, the New Hermeneutic looks back to the Jesus of history. However, Soares-Prabhu notes that the focus shifts from the interpreter to the text. Instead of we interpreting the text, the text interprets us.¹⁴

2.4. Structuralism

Structuralism takes a strongly a-historical stance, ignoring the history of a text to focus exclusively on its present structure. The text

¹¹Kuthirakkattel, "George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.: An Exegete and a Theologian. I," 762. He writes: "Why a disenchantment with historical critical method? It was not a personal dissatisfaction with the method as such but was due to the paradigm shift in both biblical interpretation and hermeneutics."

¹²Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method...", 10.

¹³Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method...", 10-11.

¹⁴Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method...", 11-12.

is not read diachronically but synchronically. Here, the exegete is not concerned about the original meaning of the text but the meaning of the text has in itself. Soares-Prabhu identifies *The Actantial Model of Greimas* and *The Semiotic Model of Barthes* as the useful methods among many structuralist methods. The limitation of this method is that “the structuralist is looking for the grammar of narrative. He is concerned with the intelligibility of a narrative, not with the significance of the particular narrative.”¹⁵

2.5. Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical criticism studies the Bible as literature exposing it to the methods used by literary critics. However, the primary goal of this search is to find the personal significance of the text. One of the examples of rhetorical criticism is the analysis of the parable as metaphor. In this method the concentration is on the parable itself, taken as a metaphor, with little interest in its origin or its effect. It is focusing on the discourse meaning of the parable, rather than on its speaker or audience meaning. Such an interpretation of a parable is obviously indifferent to its history. Soares-Prabhu observes that though the method has revolutionized parable exegesis, its application to the New Testament has been severely limited and its results are meagre.¹⁶

2.6. The Psychological Criticism

Psychological criticism of the New Testament functions in two different ways, namely, Academic Analysis and Pastoral Application. In the process of academic analysis a parable is analysed by applying the principles of Victor Frankl’s logotherapy or the principles of Freudian and Jungian theories and it is followed by pastoral application in which the exteriorization of the text is done through the reader’s identification of himself with one or more of the characters or events in the story. Soares-Prabhu writes:

This is an attractive technique for relating Gospel texts to real life concerns. It marks a wholesome reaction to the objectivism of the historical critical method which distances the reader from the text, and

¹⁵Soares-Prabhu, “The Historical Critical Method...,” 15. Lobo, *Encountering Jesus Christ in India...*, 301. “While the Existentialist hermeneutics is at least in some way faithful to the contemporary times, Structuralism neglects both, the history of the text and the contemporary or existential situation of the reader.” Kuthirakkattel, “George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.: An Exegete and a Theologian. I,” 763.

¹⁶Soares-Prabhu, “The Historical Critical Method...,” 15-20.

to the introversion of structuralism which is so lost in the immanent 'meaning' (*Sinn*) of the text that it forgets its 'meaningfulness' (*Bedeutung*). But it tends to trivialize the biblical text, reducing its significance to the petty concerns of the readers. There is little room here for the sort of 'limit-experience,' opening on to transcendence, which rhetorical criticism attempts to reach. Such a 'psychoanalytic approach,' then, hardly constitutes an adequate method for Gospel exegesis.¹⁷

2.7. Sociological Approach

The primary objective of sociological approach is to determine the *Sitz im Leben* or the concrete settings in the life of a community which gave rise to the various forms or genres in which the biblical tradition was handed down and this approach moves in two directions: sociology of early Christianity, and a Latin American theology of liberation. Taking into consideration all the process in the sociological approach, Soares-Prabhu says that all such attempts were not satisfactory.¹⁸

A survey of the critique of the traditional methods by Soares-Prabhu makes it clear that he was not able to tolerate a theology cut off from the realities of this world; a theology which was even justifying wars and the colonial expeditions aimed only at exploiting the weak and the underprivileged for the purpose of making profit. Most of the Indian theologians were trained in the backdrop of armchair theology of the west and many of them are accomplished academicians but completely disconnected from the Indian ethos because of their long stay in foreign countries and their exclusive contact with the scholars of their kind. The methods for interpreting the biblical texts, which were prevalent in his time, appeared to him to be handicapped for engaging himself in theologizing in a meaningful way taking into consideration the Indian situation. This led him to propose an exegetical model for India.

3. An Exegetical Model for India

Soares-Prabhu insisted that the Indian exegesis must be concerned with relevance as it has been the goal of traditional Indian (Hindu) theology, "where a study of the sacred books was never merely an

¹⁷Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method...," 20-23. Lobo, *Encountering Jesus Christ in India...*, 303.

¹⁸Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method...," 23-29. D'Souza, "George M. Soares-Prabhu: A Theologian for our Times," 7.

academic exercise (truth for truth's sake) but always a severely practical quest after liberation."¹⁹ In order to be relevant, Indian exegesis must consider seriously two poles which constitute the reality of India, namely, religious and social.

3.1. Indian Religious Reading

It can be made possible by an Indian exegete, having a pre-understanding of India's rich religious tradition so that he/she will be able to discover in the text resonance missed by the Western exegete with his/her very different sensibility. In such exegesis one may have to adopt a style of finding the suggested meaning (*vyangyārtha*) or finding the resonating effect of a word through which it evokes in the hearer deep meanings (*dhavni* reading).²⁰ Though such methods are able to manifest an Indian perspective they have their own limitations. However, it can help an Indian exegete to break off his fascination for scholarship of the West.²¹

3.2. Indian Social Reading

In doing Indian social reading of the Gospel, there is always the temptation to imitate the liberation theologians of Latin America because it is an explosion of response to the unjust systems prevailed in their society. An Indian theologian doing exegesis must be sensitive to the massive social evils that are endangering the Indian society.²² Some of the pioneers of such theologising are: Sebastian Kappen, M.M. Thomas, Samuel Rayan and D.S. Amalorpavadass.

What India needs is an Integral Indian reading of the Gospel to strike a balance between the two concerns – religious and social.²³

3.3. An Integral Indian Reading

Soares-Prabhu says:

A 'religious' reading of the Gospels which fails to discover the profound social concern which lies at the heart of Jesus' proclamation of the

¹⁹Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method...", 29.

²⁰Francis X. D'Sa, "Dhvani as Method of Interpretation," *Bible Bhashyam* 5 (1979) 276-294. According to D'Sa, *dhvani* is basically a hint, a silent suggestion, and works more through evocation than through implication.

²¹Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method...", 30-32.

²²Soares-Prabhu notes that eighty per cent of the people are below, on, or just above the poverty line, and fully seventy per cent are totally illiterate; where just ten per cent of the rural rich own more than sixty per cent of all the cultivable land, and ninety per cent of private-owned industry is producing consumer goods for less than fifteen per cent of the population. Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method...", 33.

²³Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method...", 33-34.

Kingdom, will not be a Christian reading; and 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. The two readings are thus complementary: each is to enrich the other.²⁴

The academic contributions of Soares-Prabhu manifested the integration of these concerns, which we shall briefly discuss below.

4. Contributions of Soares-Prabhu to Indian Theology

Soares-Prabhu was well aware of the need of a contextual theology as the world around him was characterized by great socioeconomic, political, cultural and religious diversity. He might have been inspired by the teachings of Vatican Council II in this regard. The teachings of the Church insist that the Church had to read the signs of the time and interpret the Gospel.²⁵ He always kept a liberation perspective in his theology. Isaac Padinjarekuttu writes:

Liberation in India means basically two things: liberation from poverty arising out of material want and liberation from oppression and social ostracism suffered by the untouchables and the tribals. Liberation is the answer to an oppressive situation which exists throughout India and the gospel is not the gospel, if it cannot proclaim a liberative message.²⁶

He would opt for a theology which was inclusive as Indian society is characterised by religious pluralism. According to Isaac Padinjarekuttu, "the richly multireligious India demands real dialogue and the religiously tolerant India encouraged it. Its goal should be the development of a theology of religions which will take other religions seriously as ways and source of salvation."²⁷ Soares-Prabhu's writings show that he was a champion of Indian theologians who practiced the qualities expected from an Indian theologian, in his endeavour of doing theology.

4.1. His Contributions to Theology of Mission in India

The Church in India must envision a mission as emerging in the background of the human and cosmic history. The primary task of

²⁴Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method...", 34.

²⁵*Gaudium et Spes*, # 4.

²⁶Isaac Padinjarekuttu, "George M. Soares-Prabhu S.J. and the Quest for a Contextual Theology," in *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today* (edited with an Introduction by Isaac Padinjarekuttu), Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999, xxix.

²⁷Padinjarekuttu, "George M. Soares-Prabhu S.J. and the Quest for a Contextual Theology," xxxii.

the Church must be to promote the growth of the Reign of God. They must fulfil this mission by exercising genuine love and it should not be an occasion for exercising authority or undue moral power.²⁸ A comparative study on the mission commands of Mt 28:16-20 and Mt 5:13-16 gives a reinterpretation to the traditional way of looking at the mission command. According to Soares-Prabhu, Mt 5:13-16 is a double corrective to the traditional understanding of the Church and mission. The aim of the mission is not ecclesiocentric, or Christocentric but a fully theocentric one and the missionary activity is never an individual proclamation but it is a costly, prophetic community witness.²⁹ He further reiterates that mission is not for the sake of missionary activity, but it is a call to missionary discipleship. Such a life demands a detachment from possessions and family ties and a complete surrender to God in trust. This new perspective in mission calls for a shift in focus from Church growth to Church life.³⁰ The mission model of Soares-Prabhu, which is to be followed by the Church of India, is a promising model for Indian mission as it is characterized by a multi-religious context.

4.2. His Contributions to Christology in the Indian Context

Joseph Lobo says that “Soares-Prabhu has not developed a “systematic Christology” in the classical sense... In the writings of Soares-Prabhu, we have an example of a contextual Christological discourse which in its unique way tries to facilitate the disclosure which in its unique way tries to facilitate the disclosure of this symbol, “Jesus of faith,” rather than giving us an objective information about the metaphysical being of Jesus Christ.”³¹ Soares-Prabhu calls entire discourse on Jesus’ God experience and the praxis as *Dharma of Jesus*. The crux of Soares-Prabhu’s Christology is based

²⁸George M. Soares-Prabhu, “Expanding the Horizon of Christian Mission: A Biblical Perspective,” in *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today*, 3-13.

²⁹George M. Soares-Prabhu, “The Church as Mission: A Reflection on Mt 5:13-16,” in *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today*, 16-23.

³⁰George M. Soares-Prabhu, “Following Jesus in Mission: Reflection on Mission in the Gospel of Mathew,” in *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today*; George M. Soares-Prabhu, “Two Mission Commands: An Interpretation of Mathew 28:16-20 in the Light of a Buddhist Text,” in *Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective*, (edited with an Introduction by Francis X. D’Sa), Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001, 53-66. He claims that interpreting the Biblical text by comparing it with an intertext from another religion can help the exegete for a better reading of the Biblical text.

³¹Lobo, *Encountering Jesus Christ in India...*, 322. This comment is included in the footnote.

on Jesus' experience of God as an unconditional love. He claims that Jesus had this experience at the time of his baptism by John, in which, he identified himself with sinful Israel. His God experience as unconditional love gave him the freedom to address God as *Abba* (loving parent). It was a quite unique address as God's name was never uttered in the Jewish tradition.³² The unique God experience of Jesus liberated him from all kinds of bondages, which could originate as a result of an absence of love. In a society that was politically colonized, socially patriarchal, and religiously conservative, he moved around with absolute freedom and authority. Soares-Prabhu would call it a Dharma of Freedom.³³ Experiencing God as *Abba*, Jesus could become aware of his sonship, which in turn empowered him to accept all in this world as Children of God, namely, his brothers and sisters. However, Jesus had preference for the poor because they were in need of liberation and he was in conflict with those who oppressed them.³⁴

Conclusion

Soares-Prabhu published at least 70 major research articles. These 70 articles are published in four volumes.³⁵ I have tried to include in this article the references to all the volumes, but I could not bring out in this short study all the features of his contributions to Indian Biblical Theology within the limited scope of this article. Soares-Prabhu could be an effective critique of the traditional methods of Biblical Exegesis, as he was very thorough with categories of such methods and those methods were used by him in the beginning of his research and study. His mastery over such methods only empowered him to venture into new methods of reading the Bible. He could make a difference in reading the Bible as an Indian by adopting an Indian religious reading and an Indian social reading. He developed

³²George M. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus," in *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action* (edited with an Introduction by Scaria Kuthirakkattel), Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2003, 3-4.

³³George M. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus...," 164.

³⁴George M. Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus...," 8-10.

³⁵George M. Soares-Prabhu, *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today* (edited with an Introduction by Isaac Padinjarekuttu), Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999. George M. Soares-Prabhu, *A Biblical Theology for India* (edited with an Introduction by Scaria Kuthirakkattel), Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999. George M. Soares-Prabhu, *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action* (edited with an Introduction by Scaria Kuthirakkattel), Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2003. George M. Soares-Prabhu, *Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective* (edited with an Introduction by Francis X. D'Sa), Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2001.

a theology of mission by taking into consideration the Indian context where the real mission is being carried out. He introduced a Jesus who is the embodiment of God's love, who is concerned about all without any discrimination. His attempts have of course enlightened many to theologise in a more meaningful way.

As a theologian he was open to make use of methods used by other religions to interpret the biblical text. He preferred to use inclusive language when he interpreted the biblical text, taking into consideration, the multi-religious context of India. He insisted that his theology as well as the theology done in India must be a response to the social oppressive systems prevalent in India. His attempts have of course enlightened many to theologise in a more meaningful way by taking into account the concerns of the society.