

Soares-Prabhu's Dialogical and Inclusive Theology: A Study of His Liberation Theological Perspective

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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.

Keywords: George M. Soares-Prabhu SJ; 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, n.d.). 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 Vidyapeeth (JDV), 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-Columbian 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.

a. 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 liberational 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)

b. 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). Our author 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 criticizes 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 a rigid a priori dogmatism. 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.

a. 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)

b. Collective and Inclusive Search for Truth

So our author 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).

c. 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 I-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 only 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 II. 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 plea 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
- Inculturation 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 genteel and humble person that he is, he goes about doing his work without disturbing anyone or creating a flamboyant ambience. Sincerely and seriously he seeks to bring about rapprochement between various schools, disciplines and world-views. He listens patiently and intently. 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 Vidyapeeth, 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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