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DREAMS OF JOSEPH: CHALLENGES OF DOING CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Paulachan Kochappilly, CMI♦

DVK, Bangalore

Abstract

The creation of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) represented a unique reception of the Second Vatican Council, positioning the Latin American Church as a Source Church for today's process of reforms. The General Conferences, hosted by CELAM, such as Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979), Santo Domingo (1992), and Aparecida (2007), cannot be reduced to mere texts. In the specific case of Medellín (1968), presented in this paper, the way in which this Conference proceeded gave rise to a spirit of convergence among bishops, priests, religious, and laypeople that took shape in the *working method*. This inaugurated a unique ecclesiality inspired by a collegial practice and completed by a Synodal Spirit that advanced the ecclesial model of People of God of the Second Vatican Council in Latin America. In this paper, we will present the key elements to understand how Medellín gave shape to a synodal style and practice, more environmental than thematized, that led to a new way of being Church in Latin America.

♦**Dr Paulachan Kochappilly, CMI** holds a doctorate in Moral Theology from Accademia Alfonsiana, Rome. He defended his dissertation *Celebrative Ethics: Ecological Issues in the Light of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana* in 1998. Some of his published works include *Celebrative Ethics: Ecological Issues in the Light of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana* (1999), *Evangelisation as Celebration* (2002), *Life in Christ: Eastern Perspectives on Christian Ethics* (2010), *Spectrum of Ethical Imagination and Action* (2019), and *Eastern Perspectives on Evangelisation: "that your joy may be complete"* (2021). Prof. Kochappilly has been the Dean, Faculty of Theology and the President of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru. Email: paulachan.kochappilly@cmi.in

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Introduction

Martin Luther King Jr delivered a historic speech in 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, DC. This speech is entitled "I Have a Dream." In his opening remark, Martin Luther said, "I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation."¹ Throughout the speech, he shares his dreams. One of his dreams states, "I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."² Dreams come true in the course of history, step by step though.

Invariably, all have dreams, some are articulated and others not. Dreams drive people to their destiny. In spite of all the odds, a few dare to dream and get to its realization. They leave no stone unturned to see the actualization of the dream project. Meticulous planning and careful execution of the dream is the key to its success.

The Acts of the Apostles offer a quote from the prophet Joel highlighting the significance of prophesy, visions and dreams at the outpouring of the Spirit, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). It is the age of the Spirit. The Spirit inspires and invites us to dream the dreams of God in the context of our lives, in the footsteps of Joseph of the Gospel towards the celebration of life in Christ, ensuring the glorification of God and the wellbeing of all in the world.

In what follows I shall discuss three aspects of the dreams of Joseph from the point of contextual theologizing: 1) Dreams of Joseph as Challenges to the Celebration of Life; 2) Dream as the Context for Theologizing: for the Celebration of Life in Christ; and 3) Dreams of Joseph as the Code of Contextual Theology.

¹Martin Luther King, Jr, "I Have a Dream," on 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C. <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>

²Martin Luther King, Jr, "I Have a Dream."

1. Dreams of Joseph as Challenges to the Celebration of Life

Joseph was gifted with dreams, challenging his thoughts, dispositions and actions. Dreams transformed his thoughts and actions. Dreams accompanied his way until they were accomplished faithfully and fruitfully. They directed Joseph step by step, one after another. Having accomplished one, Joseph went about dreaming new dreams in succession.

People see dreams, big and small. A dream offers programme and project for the future. Dream, in this sense, a drawing of a future plan; it is the blueprint of the next undertaking in life. By creating and translating the dream into a reality, the future is unfolded. At the realization of a major plan, people begin weaving the next dream. And the story of dream goes on and on. Dreaming for better, higher, faster, happier, healthier benchmark in life has contributed to growth and development. Gratefully we remember and rejoice in the fruits of the big dreams people entertained and the struggle they had undertaken to accomplish them in the course of history. Invariably, all cherish and treasure dreams. As long as desires thrive, dreams will be in the making. The popular quote on dream from Abdul J Kalam is in order, "Dream is not that which you see in sleep, the dream is something you see that does not let you sleep." This is the case with many great dreamers; they keep chasing their dreams day by day. The dynamic in the statement holds true in the case of Joseph of Nazareth as well.

Dreams disturbed Joseph's sleep. He was focused and single-minded throughout the journey. He silently and willingly followed the dreams, faithfully towards the end. Joseph seems to have treasured the dreams in his heart and went about following his heart to the logical end, confronting the challenges of all sorts that a family might encounter on its journey.

The language of dream is a medium of communication in the Bible. "Dream language is the language of the ages. This is one of the mysterious ways that God intersects our lives. He invades our comfort zones. He visits us in the night and simply speaks to us."³ According to scholars, "The Hebrew language makes little distinction between a dream and a vision."⁴ In the Bible "we find that prophecy

³James W. and Michal Ann Goll, *Dream Language*, Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2006, 49.

⁴James W. and Michal Ann Goll, *Dream Lang*, 51.

and dreams were treated equally.”⁵ There are different types of dreams narrated in the Bible. And biblical scholars classify the dreams of Joseph into “a simple message dream. In Matthew 1-2, Joseph understood the dreams concerning Mary and Herod. There was no real need for interpretation. These dreams were direct, to the point and self-interpreted.”⁶ The message of the dreams of Joseph is plain and calls for an immediate plan of action.

The first dream of Joseph (Mt 1:19-24) Joseph is told to take Mary as his wife because she was conceived by the Holy Spirit

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”... When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife”

The second dream of Joseph (Mt 2:13): Joseph is warned to leave Bethlehem and flee to Egypt

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

The third dream of Joseph (Mt 2:19-20): While in Egypt, Joseph is told that it is safe to go back to Israel

When Herod died, and angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in dream of Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.”

The fourth dream of Joseph (Mt 2:22-23): Joseph was warned in a dream not to go to Judea. Instead, when he woke up, he took his family to the region of Galilee

But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth.

All the four dreams or visions offered to Joseph, at different intervals, were wake-up calls for him to rise to the need of the hour and to address the novel challenges in the context. Though he was

⁵James W. and Ann Goll, *Dream Language*, 13.

⁶James W. and Ann Goll, *Dream Language*, 13.

free to accept or reject the dream, there was not much time at his disposal to think leisurely and to consult someone for clarification. For Joseph, they were urgent and immediate action plans, executed without delay and with great diligence. Some of the dreams represented the baggage of space-time and demanded Joseph to challenge the then-dominant thought and praxis through his silent yet eloquent course of justice. Joseph responded to the dreams and took the risk to challenge the domineering customs and practices of his time.

The four dreams of Joseph were packed with action plans risking life, identity, and solidarity against the status quo of the time. In spite of the impending dangers, Joseph dared to dream big along the line of the divine plan. As a prospective husband betrothed to Mary, he confronted a number of threats and challenges in his life. We can guess how a gentle man or a woman of our time would face such difficult times. Joseph stands out in seeing the dreams and acting justly, in accordance with the scheme and measure of God designed for the holy family of Nazareth, which by ordinary reasoning remains a riddle to this day. But the faith in the Lord throws divine light on the context to move the mountain of dilemmas in the mind and heart of Joseph and embrace the dream or vision of God for the greater glory of God. It was nothing less than the reading of the signs of the times and doing what is required of him. He could have had a number of excuses to evade the responsibilities entrusted to him, but willingly and freely Joseph went ahead doing theology, which I would like to describe as faith seeking the celebration of life. Joseph, through his firm and friendly discernment and doing theology in silence, emerges as a great theologian of his time and stands as a torchbearer of doing contextual theology. Joseph showcased the celebration of his faith by embracing the challenging and life transforming questions of his time, yielding life in abundance.

Joseph was doing theology as he was reading and responding to the challenges of the context creatively and constructively. In his case, contexts kept changing as he continued his journey of faith. Celebrating his faith in the ever changing contexts was a challenge to Joseph, but his successive dreams came to his assistance. Though it was not easy to seek the dream of God in each circumstance which accompanied Joseph throughout his faith journey, we should give credit to his faithfulness and responsibility, the hallmark of the

indwelling presence of God. Certain dilemmas in the mind of Joseph are traceable at the context of the first dream. He was really confused, but he had almost decided not to expose her to public disgrace, planning to dismiss her quietly. In a similar vein, Joseph might have encountered troubles at different crucial points on his journey. And the specific dream at the given occasion sheds light on his path. His faith in the Lord becomes active and alive as the challenges mounted on his way. The dream comes as a decider for faith, and as a result the celebration of life picks up its momentum. Consequently, his theology helps him and others in the scene to celebrate life in the challenging context.

2. Dream as the Context for Theologizing: for the Celebration of Life in Christ

Theology, in the axiomatic expression of Anselm, is “faith seeking understanding.” Working on the expression of Anselm, Jonas Thaliath describes theology in its relational and contextual framework as “faith seeking harmony of life.” In his elaboration, Jonas writes, Christ is the key to theology. Exploring, experiencing, and expressing the harmony of life in the light of the faith in Jesus Christ is the challenge before theologians.

Samuel Rayan writes, “Theology is faith seeking justice.”⁷ The purpose and meaning of theology, according to Rayan, “is not mere conceptual clarity, intellectual grasp and academic systems. The aim is practical: to enable people live authentically and joyfully as human beings and believers.”⁸ This is similar to seeking harmony of life. Rayan emphasizes the liberating aspect of theology. “If reality is not taken into account nor grasped analytically and critically, theology may become irrelevant or serve as a tool of ideological manipulation, while its true meaning is liberation and life for the people.”⁹ Inspired by Saint Paul, Jacob Parappally presents theology. “Paul’s transforming encounter is the foundation of his faith. His theology is the articulation of that faith-experience. For him doing theology was not an academic exercise. It was his life of commitment to Christ enfleshed in the concrete situations of his life and mission. It was

⁷Samuel Rayan, “Doing Theology in India,” in *Theology in Context. Statements of the Indian Theological Association*, ed. Jacob Parappally, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2002, 18.

⁸Rayan, “Doing Theology in India,” 18.

⁹Rayan, “Doing Theology in India,” 18.

indeed dangerous enterprise for him (2 Cor 11: 23-33)."¹⁰ In the light of the Pauline perspective, Parappally opines that "Doing theology is dangerous."¹¹ Theologizing, hence, "is making one's faith come alive, meaningful and contextual."¹² Explaining the process of theologizing, he points to a disposition of being "responsive to the challenges of the context" which must take both "the life-threatening and life-promoting concerns of the people seriously."¹³ Sharing another aspect of theologizing, J. Parappally observes:

Genuine theologizing is a contemplative action. It is the expression of a commitment to unfold one's faith-experience of God in Jesus Christ in dialogue with the context where God's Spirit confronts the believer through unexpected ways. Therefore theologizing is a mystical experience and praxis-oriented prophetic commitment to reveal God's presence in all that is humanizing and to transform dehumanizing situations where God is absent.¹⁴

Joseph Kallarangatt feels sorry for the crisis of contemporary theology, "Theology simply ceased to be mystical, pastoral and faith nourishing. There is a kind of divorce between the so called contemporary theology and the real God."¹⁵ George Karakunnel gives the glimpse of the present day discussion on theology, which is "mostly concentrated on the context, which includes all forms of culture and aspects of human living."¹⁶ Jacob Naluparayil proposes theology as having two important currents mutually complementing each other, "In personal terms, it is a call to a complete *metanoia* or change-of-heart, which calls you to have the self awareness that you are the child of God. In social terms it calls for the establishment of an alternative community formed from the point of view of God (Mk 8:33)."¹⁷

¹⁰Jacob Parappally, "Theologizing in Context: Commitment to Discover the Challenging Presence of the Divine in the Context of Life," in *Theology in Context. Statements of the Indian Theological Association*, ed. Jacob Parappally, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2002, 23.

¹¹Parappally, "Theologizing in Context," 23.

¹²Parappally, "Theologizing in Context," 23.

¹³Parappally, "Theologizing in Context," 52.

¹⁴Parappally, "Theologizing in Context," 53.

¹⁵Joseph Kallarangatt, "Inaugural Address," in *Syro-Malabar Theology in Context*, ed. Mathew Manakatt & Jose Puthenveettil, Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 2007, 27.

¹⁶George Karakunnel, "Theology in the Life of the Syro-Malabar Church: A Search for Orientation," in *Syro-Malabar Theology in Context*, 55.

¹⁷Jacob Naluparayil, "Jesus as the Paradigm for Theologizing," in *Syro-Malabar Theology in Context*, 208.

Kuncheria Pathil speaks of twofold immersions for a genuine theology. On the one hand, “we have to be immersed in our Christian faith with a strong commitment to Jesus and his Gospel, without which ‘Christian’ theologizing is impossible. In order to confront and challenge the society and the realities of today with a prophetic spirit, one has to imbibe the spirit of Christ, the vision and mission of Christ.”¹⁸ And on the other hand, “for any authentic theologizing, one has to be immersed fully in the world and in the realities of every new age, where God is at work and through which God is speaking to us.”¹⁹ Among many features of theology in India, Francis Vineeth advocates the development of a mystical theology, “It should develop a mystical theology of knowing God through the eye of faith, rather than by the analytical theology dominated by reason.”²⁰

In the light of the select descriptions on theology, I would prefer to describe theology as faith seeking the celebration of life in Christ, which to my mind takes into account the different aspects of the above articulations. Theology is to help people celebrate their life in the context of their real and right relationships and in the light of their faith in Jesus Christ. The relationships may be summarized as triadic: personal relationship with God, creation, and people, the essential realities of the covenant community. Celebration of life must include the threefold realities, namely, the Lord, the land, and the people, and it should be envisaged in reference to the past, present and future of the community of life. Celebration of life is not in isolation, but in and through genuine relationships. Nothing is alien to Christian faith and celebration. All things, from a Christian perspective, are meant for the flowering of joy. Jesus teaches clearly and unambiguously, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11). Theologizing, hence, should be the celebration of life in Christ, leading to the dawn of the new heaven and new earth in the presence of the Lord and with the assembly of the people (Rev 21:1-5). Theology understood as the celebration of life in Christ is contextual, liturgical, and pastoral and it requires and enables the faithful to see the joy, beauty, and glory of the Lord and to work for its realization,

¹⁸ Kuncheria Pathil, “The Syro-Malabar Church in Theologizing: Context and Concerns Today,” in *Syro-Malabar Theology in Context*, 192.

¹⁹ Pathil, “The Syro-Malabar Church in Theologizing: Context and Concerns Today,” 192.

²⁰ Francis Vineeth, “Syro-Malabar Faith-Experience in the Cultural Context,” Pathil, “The Syro-Malabar Church in Theologizing: Context and Concerns Today,” 233.

“Our Father in heaven, heaven and earth are full of your glory, Angels and people sing out your glory” (Qurbana, 14). It presupposes and proposes the commingling of earth and heaven, time and eternity.

3. Dreams of Joseph as the Code of Contextual Theology

As we have seen above, theology is through and through contextual; it is incarnational in substance and style. Faith seeks the celebration of life in Christ in each and every instance of everyday life. Invariably, every believer theologizes in one’s context. Often this field of theologisation is neglected, if not ignored all together. In fact, each and every disciple of Jesus seeks the possibility of celebrating life, in tune with the revelation in Christ and which is supported by human reason. Each one is required and enabled to do this exercise of theologizing—relating faith into the concrete context of one’s life. And this is possible, for every believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit enlightens and empowers the faithful in discerning the demands of one’s belief in Christ. In other words, faith in Christ is made vibrant and alive through the earnest and effective engagement in the real life situation. This is the test of doing theology. If people come up with a faith perspective to celebrate their life in the given context, then that is genuine theology - incarnational in structure and substance.

Unfortunately, theologising seems to be the exclusive ministry of professional theologians. All God’s faithful are theologians in the Church.²¹ This does not mean that the trained theologians do not have a specific ministry. On the contrary, it is their ministry to set the parameters and accompany the faithful in doing theology on their own. Moreover, the ministers of theology have a responsibility to recognize and respond to the theological insights celebrated in the community, which are pastoral, practical, and presentable to the Church at large for the benefit of all. Our parents guided by simple and deep faith in Christ are good at doing theology, though they may be poor in articulating it in categories known to theologians. They are not trained and qualified ministers in articulating theology, but they excel in acting it out or actualizing it in an incarnational pattern, at times to the surprise and shame of the so called professional theologians.

²¹Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, § 12 & § 35 and *Dei Verbum* § 8.

It is within the realm of actualizing theology rather than articulation of theology, I find Joseph to be an outstanding theologian, challenging us to do contextual theology. Before the mystery of God, believers are speechless, but showcase their observance of the will of God in a marvellous manner.

Dreams of Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew may be considered as contextual challenges confronted by a gentle, generous and faithful man on a day of ordinary life. Joseph was a conscientious man and was aware of what was the need of the hour. Confronted by a dilemma, Joseph was overwhelmed. But the dreams served to clarify Joseph's confusions and move forward with courage and conviction – leading to a proper discernment in accomplishing the right and just actions in the light of faith towards the celebration of life in the context of the mystery of Christ and history of salvation.

Joseph was blessed with these shocking dreams, in turn, they set the scene for contextual theology. Joseph championed the cause of encountering the challenges with firmness and in freedom. Every dream of Joseph's speaks volumes regarding the challenging context. He sees the dreams, recognizes the challenges, and responds to them, silently but unwaveringly.

In the case of Joseph, dreams were the channels of enlightening on and encountering with the challenges. In the journey of his life, Joseph faced a number of challenges before his eyes. The vicissitudes of life presented a number of tasks to Joseph. In all these circumstances, the theologian in Joseph engaged, discerning the will of God in changing contexts. As a theologian, Joseph was ever attentive to the call of God in faith, despite the demanding situations.

Joseph did not flee from the realities of life, both personal responses and social standing. He scripts a new narrative of theology with a difference amidst the pressing circumstances, unlike in words and but through the sequence of deeds, responding to the challenges of the context.

In what follows, I shall examine the dreams of Joseph to trace a few theological strands in the context of his life and activities. Taking into account the urgent areas of theologizing, I limit the discussion to three streams of theology, namely, 3.1) Mystical Theology; 3.2) Family theology; and 3.3) Marga Theology.

3.1. Mystical Theology

Joseph was a man of faith and deep commitment to his tradition. The textual evidence of the first dream gives us necessary details on his faith and his take on the vicissitudes of his life. Joseph was an ordinary human being.

“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:18). This is a verse dense with the mystery of the history of Jesus, the Emmanuel. Jesus is the central figure of the scene. Along with Jesus, Joseph and Mary are introduced to the reader. A young man getting engaged is an ordinary event and that is well documented. There is nothing secret in this disclosure. Mary, mother of Jesus is also presented to whom Joseph was engaged. Mary is the cause of surprise. She is found to be with child, causing bewilderment to the onlookers and it demands an answer, for Joseph and Mary did not live together. It is strange and causes concern for anyone who watches the reality of the child in the womb of Mary, considered to be a breach of promise between the betrothed woman and man. To clear up all the speculations and confusions on the conception of the child, there is a hint given to the readers in the sentence.

This passage takes us beyond the normal and ordinary. We are told that the child Mary carries is from the Holy Spirit. There is no further reason to maintain any doubt whatsoever, for the reason of the child is the Holy Spirit. Before the message is communicated to Joseph and Mary in individual instances, the mystery of Jesus is succinctly painted on the large canvas of the history of salvation. This information allows us to understand the genuine disposition and the character of Joseph in a proper setting. The sight of Mary carrying Jesus in her womb disturbed the mind of Joseph. He was clueless and confused about what to do with Mary. Joseph, as any other young man of his standing in the community, was deeply troubled. This is pretty clear from the following narration.

“Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly” (Mt 1:19). Though what has happened to Mary is unimaginable, Joseph takes up the challenge to respect and honour Mary, manifesting his character and commitment against all odds and consequent threats he might have to face thereafter. He takes a bold step forward not to bring public disgrace to Mary, his proposed wife. Being righteous Joseph is frank and friendly with Mary. To avoid all the loose talk in

the neighbourhood, Joseph plots to dismiss her quietly. Is this not revealing the upper limit of a gentle man by any ordinary standard? In the given context Joseph opts to better celebrate life of all in the scene – Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. While taking up the burden on himself, Joseph is almost decided to dismiss her and to go all alone into the wilderness. Joseph shines as a gentle and generous man, taking up the difficulties to help others celebrate their life.

It is at this decisive juncture that Joseph is given the first dream. “But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:20). The dream serves as a turning point in the life of Joseph. Joseph, a man of faith, is challenged to go beyond the limits of human reason and to walk the path of faith—taking Mary as his wife and accompanying the promise of the Lord. The dream is a directive of faith to take up the challenge to do theology—celebrating the life of Jesus and Mary, in which consists the celebration of his own life. Joseph’s dream—the luminous eye—offers him the best possibility ever to uncover the joy of the mystery of salvation and confers a mystical approach to life. The dream takes Joseph to a better horizon to see things and events from the perspective of God and follow it knowingly and willingly. In this sense, the dream of Joseph offers a challenging moment to Joseph to cross over into the arena of faith in the Lord, on the footsteps of Abraham who trusted in the Lord God against all human reasoning, to discern the will of God here and now. In other words, the first dream of Joseph lifts him up to have a mystic take on the mystery of life.

Joseph emerges as a theologian by doing what is required of him in the dream, consecrating himself to the challenge of taking Mary as his wife despite there being the babe in her womb without his knowledge. Joseph did not articulate his theology in black and white, but he celebrated it in a silent yet eloquent manner. Having uttered no word in response to the revelation in the dream, Joseph undertook the word of God freely and faithfully. This is typical of mystical theology—celebrate life and faith in the Lord in the midst of challenges, confusions, and misunderstandings. Mystical theology is an invitation to encounter the presence and providence of God, often against all odds. It is a wake-up call to embrace the mystery of faith,

surrendering to the majesty of the Lord throughout one's faith journey. Joseph had the eye of a mystic piercing into the heart of God through the dream, enabling him to set out down the lane of faith with hope against hope.

The dream was a trying time for Joseph. Like Abraham, the faith of Joseph was tested. He stood his ground and responded to the dream positively and creatively, sans a word. The response of Joseph to the dream through the action of Joseph, "When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife" (Mt 1:21), is louder than a million words, with the heart of a mystic. The celebration of life goes on and on due to the work of Joseph in tune with the dream, a theology par excellence.

Joseph committed himself to carry out the will of God, in the challenging context disclosed through the dream, which is rarest of the rare. The dream of Joseph was nothing less than a darshan of God, demanding a great sacrifice from his side, a price he had to pay for following the command of the Lord. Joseph considered everything else as having less worth than fulfilling the demands of his faith in God. So he held high the reputation of Mary and took up the cause of babe Jesus as a priority owing to his faith perspective - faith seeking the celebration of life.

3.2. Marriage and Family Theology

All the four dreams of Joseph in the gospel of Matthew directly or indirectly address issues concerning marriage and family life. Each dream of Joseph reveals the context for doing theology in the real and genuine sense of marriage and family. A few of the contexts that Joseph encountered are still alive to date, the difference may be in their casting in our times.

In fact, the issues around marriage and family life are mounting more than ever before. The breakdown of marriage on silly grounds is on the increase. A number of psychological, legal and social arguments are presented to approve such sudden divorce of a marriage and consequently the incompatibility of partners is orchestrated. Suddenly marriage is labelled as unmanageable. Legal cells are on the watch to get a case to fight. They are ready to take up the case free of cost, on condition that if their client wins the case a certain percentage of the legal settlement is to be remitted. So these legal assistance groups fly around with the eye of an eagle to jump on the couples, pretending to settle the problems they face in their life. Legality and, therefore, rigidity is on the rise. Unfortunately, many

are trapped and often times they have no easy exit from the treachery.

The grandiose extravaganza of marriage is staged and before the end of the celebrations divorce is announced. Such cases of divorce may be very rare. However, before the beginning of life, on the basis of some misunderstandings, the marriage bond hits a dead end, and the couple are not ready to make a U-turn to continue the journey together. No dream is given or seen during sleep to mend the challenges the couple face.

Joseph champions the cause of marriage and family life through his commitment to the dreams he was blessed with. In the first instance, Joseph, being a righteous man, did not want to expose Mary to public disgrace. He held her in high esteem. Woman is given dignity and equality. Joseph respected Mary's liberty. He does not jump in to be critical and judgmental. Irrespective of the unfaithfulness on the part of Mary, on any reasonable ground, she is given legal justice. Joseph intends to dismiss Mary quietly. Though there are sufficient reasons to accuse Mary, Joseph is resolved to maintain calm and quiet.

The dream turns the resolve of Joseph upside down. At the disclosure of the reason for the babe in the womb of Mary, Joseph takes Mary as his wife. In the light of the faith, Joseph overcomes his confusion and treats her with faithfulness. Joseph was enlightened and empowered to accept Mary with her child, not looking back to the possible false allegations or accusations. Joseph gives Mary loving care and protection in the covenantal bond between husband and wife. In a world of rumours and calumny, Joseph sets an example in embracing the partner with dignity and honour, though the world might engage in gossiping against the couple resulting in an end to a marriage bond. Joseph, in this case, draws a roadmap showing how to treat the partner without prejudice, though there might be an unpacking of the unholy relations in the past or present, real or fictional. In a world of paparazzi culture, where people indulge in all sorts of processes of defaming partners, the couple need to anchor their life on the bond of marriage, at times with the assistance of a dream of living together as sweethearts for eternity.

Joseph accompanies Mary joyfully throughout her journey, as a faithful husband. As the fulfilment of the dream, Joseph gives the name Jesus to the child. Beyond any internal fear, though there were number of external challenges, they walked together and celebrated

their life in the light of the faith which united them. This is an excellent example of doing theology in the context of manifold challenges in life. The faith in the Lord comes to their assistance in celebrating their life.

Observing the rules and customs of the land, Joseph “went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child” (Lk 2:5). Joseph takes all the troubles and responsibilities expected of a good husband at the hour of her labour pain and giving birth to Jesus (Lk 2:6-7).

The second dream of Joseph is another test of his faith in the Lord and his faithfulness to his family, Mary and Jesus. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him” (Mt 2:13). On the one hand, it is a terrible dream of impending killing, and on the other, it signals the safe passage from the valley of death. The dream comes as a bolt from the blue. There is no rest and relaxation for the family. Joseph has to get up and flee to Egypt at short notice, as if the news were of bombardments of a country. Similar to a migration of our times, Joseph is asked to flee from his country and seek political asylum in the neighbouring country. The scene of the holy family is pathetic and helpless. Joseph shows courage and “got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt” (Mt 2:14). Being faithful to the promises made to Mary, Joseph trudges the distance in the dark night with mother and child. Without wasting any minute, Joseph is on his road to Egypt with Mary and Jesus. The family’s priority becomes his priority, the safety and security of Mary and Jesus. Once again the dream of Joseph directs his steps in safeguarding the interest of the family, risking his own life. The faith of Joseph comes to assist and accompany him to undertake the contextual challenges confronted by the family, a true celebration of life in the light of his faith.

The third and fourth dreams narrate the care and commitment of Joseph to his family. Again at the wake of challenges, Joseph is given a dream. And he acts on the dream promptly, without calculating the difficult consequences. Joseph takes the family to Nazareth from Egypt, as it was intimated to him. Steps are taken in the light of the dream—the light of faith—to lead the family into a celebration, whether it is to flee from a danger zone or to return to home country, towards the full flowering of the family. In our contemporary times, many families migrate to different countries in search of better living,

but never to return to their kith and kin severing all family bonds in the long run. Does the return of the holy family from Egypt to Nazareth send a signal for the migrated families to return to the land and people of their origin?

Joseph followed the dream—the dream of God for the salvation of the world—in unambiguous terms, guiding the holy family to a safe shore in the midst of all trials and tribulations. The dream of Joseph was throwing sufficient light on his path and it was a lamp on his road to celebration of life.

3.3. *Marga* Theology (Theology of the Way)

Theology of the way or *marga* theology is the identity of Christian theology. Theology is always a journeying with Jesus, who revealed himself as the Way to true life. And the people who followed Jesus were called “people who belonged to the way” (Acts 9:2).

A close watch of all the four dreams of Joseph discloses the necessity and beauty of *marga* theology. He was literally on his journey, undertaken in the light of his dream or call it the light of his faith in the Lord.

We see Joseph almost resolved to go for a journey, when he encountered Mary with the child. It was a journey away from the proposed marriage to an unknown territory. After having had the dream, Joseph takes another road, to take Mary and the child Jesus, again a journey of faith to celebrate their life. He is seen ready to go away from his own interests and plans to fulfil the will of God as disclosed in the dream. Joseph bears witness to theologizing in and through faith, seeking the way to celebration of life, taking into account everyone in the picture. Theology is not isolation or through alienation, but it is the celebration of relationships, inclusive of God, creation, and people.

The second dream sets the scene for a typical journey, leaving the homeland to a foreign land. We are reminded that life is a journey. So also theology is a journey in faith. Joseph is asked to get up and take Mary and Jesus to Egypt, with a view to save the family and further the plan of God. The dream presents a roadmap for the journey of the holy family. Here again, Joseph is enlightened to undertake the theology of the way. Always he is on the way, seeking the celebration of life - celebrating his faith in the promise and presence of the Lord, like his ancestors passing through the wilderness to enter the promised land.

The third and the fourth dreams draw up a clear map of the *marga* theology, for they direct the steps of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to return to their homeland, as the situations on the ground have improved for the celebration of life. Joseph leads the journey of faith—a theology of the way – through his luminous eye and music of the Spirit.

Joseph bears testimony to the truth of the *marga* theology, for he actualizes the dream of God by setting out for journeys one after another. The life and ministry of Joseph is a witness to the journey of faith—a wayfarer theology—for all times. All God’s people are on a pilgrimage and they have no permanent city here on earth, indicating the structure and nature of Christian theology. All are walking to God in Christ through the Spirit. Joseph emerges as an outstanding theologian by walking the way towards fulfilling the will of God—a theologian of little words and full of works involving walks from the shells of self to all directions. Walking the way of the Lord makes one fit and creative to collaborate with the dream of God, as it is evidenced by the person and mission of Joseph of the Gospels.

Christian life is a journey; it is a pilgrimage to the abode of God. Joseph of the Gospels is a wayfarer, always fulfilling the will of God, as directed by the dreams. The dream disturbs Joseph’s sleep and he is found busy in walking the way with Mary and Jesus. He was a man on the move, moving with a vision and with a sense of mission. On his path Joseph has been just; showcasing the mercy of the Lord throughout his faith journey. Though he had to encounter numerous difficulties and hurdles, Joseph navigated his voyage smoothly and successfully, following the light from the dream of God. Doing theology is celebrating one’s life in the light of faith or it is following the path of faith as per its demands in the concrete situations of one’s life. Joseph, therefore, is a torchbearer on our path of doing theology—a theology of the celebration of life, always walking with or towards the Lord. The Christian theology is essentially a theology of journeying; it is not one of stagnation nor is it stationary, but a free and faithful walk on the path, taking up the cross and following the Lord, always experiencing and expressing the joy of the Gospel of Christ towards the full flowering of peace on earth and hope to human beings.

Conclusion

People dream big or small; it depends on their imaginations, insights, and involvement in the given context. Joseph was blessed with great dreams, though challenging and troublesome. He was

enlightened and engaged by his dreams to celebrate his life in the company of Mary and Jesus.

Context matters in doing theology. No context is alien to Christianity, for the mystery of Incarnation includes all things in creation. In fact, contexts challenge the believers to discover the ways and means to celebrate their faith. As the context, so is the celebration. The dreams of Joseph were herculean tasks in his life. They were disturbing, but directing the steps of Joseph to move forward in the journey.

The dreams of Joseph narrate the context of his life in reference to the community he belonged to and the plan of God for humanity. Drawing inspiration and insights from the dreams, Joseph converted them into a great opportunity to celebrate the salvation of all through the mystery of Jesus, the Emmanuel. Such a disposition assisted Joseph to celebrate his life in the wider context of the covenant community.

The dreams of Joseph decode the path of contextual theology and they present a code of conduct of contextual theology as well. All the dreams reveal the real context of Joseph's call and ministry. A preliminary reflection is attempted focusing on three areas of contextual theology, which are of prime significance for our times and for all times. Joseph helps us to contemplate and celebrate the ingredients of mystical theology, a theology of marriage and family, and a theology of the way. These areas pointed out do not exhaust the ambit of doing contextual theology. Joseph focused his doing of theology on the basis of relationality and on the significance of virtues. There are numerous scopes for theologizing from the dreams of Joseph including a theology of silence, a theology of service, and a theology of sacrifice through obedience. Joseph is the icon of all these and more. Joseph champions the cause of contextual theology—a theology of celebrating life charged with the enlightening faith and empowering certainty regarding what to do in the here and now, beyond any dilemma.

The contexts keep changing. So also do the challenges. The possibility for doing theology acquires farther dimensions as we move on our faith journey. Joseph shines as a great theologian—faith seeking celebration of life in the ever changing and challenging contexts of history—for he contemplated the path of the Lord through the dreams of God and showcased his unwavering commitment to the light of faith. A vibrant faith constantly keeps the

believers, as in the case of Joseph, challenged to take a check on the context of their living, including the structures and systems perpetuated by blind and dead faith. Joseph seems to be telling us: dream the dreams of God and dare to do them willingly and joyfully.