

FAITH SEEKING HARMONY OF LIFE THE LEGACY OF DHARMARAM THEOLOGY

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Abstract

Jonas Thaliath, CMI, the visionary architect and founder of Dharmaram College and its constituent Institutions in Bengaluru, described theology as “faith seeking harmony of life” (*fides quaerens harmonium vitae*). Furthering the traditional definition of Anselm of Canterbury and focusing on the Indian and Oriental genius of theological perspectives, Jonas’ script on theology is groundbreaking, contextual, ecumenical, and interreligious in essence, surpassing the bounds of spacetime. Theology may be described as learning, loving, and living the art of life, striking a harmony of life in tune with Jesus Christ and His Gospel, for the salvation of the whole world. In essence, theology enables and empowers us to celebrate our life in Christ.

Scanning the theological contributions of the Pontifical Athenaeum Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru, the harmony of life emerges as the major current running throughout the centuries, with its incessant spring flowing from the hilltop of Mannanam (Bethrauma) (1833) through the Sacred Heart Study House, Chethipuzha (1918), to the garden city of Bangalore (Dharmaram) (1957) and beyond. Theology reminds us of our path of faith, seeking harmony in life, the

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Keywords: Harmony of Life, Dharmaram, Theology, Inculturation, Dialogue, Darshan, Celebration

Introduction

Resting on a tender branch of the banyan by the side of the river Kaveri, the bird sang an ode to the Lord. Seeing the river's eternal flow, it flew to the source of the snow-clad Himalayas, drinking from the sacred streams, and it took pleasure in gazing as it gushed down to the plains, watering the earth, awakening seeds, and yielding an abundance of fruits. Gathering the current, the river runs to join the source of all life and splendour with greater joy and enthusiasm.

Jonas Thaliath, CMI, the visionary architect and founder of Dharmaram College, Bengaluru, described theology as "faith seeking harmony of life" (*fides quaerens harmoniam vitae*).¹ Furthering the traditional definition of Anselm of Canterbury and focusing on the Indian and Oriental genius of theological perspectives, Jonas's script on theology is groundbreaking, contextual, ecumenical, and interreligious in essence, surpassing the boundaries of spacetime.

Harmony of life is like singing a beautiful melody of concord and communion; it is to play the notes to sing and dance the joy, beauty, and glory of God in the context of one's life and as the *dharmachakra* (wheel of dharma) of life travels on. Meaningful, joyful and fruitful play of the notes is an art of the heart, integrating all things and being inclusive through a dialogue and discernment of life. Theology may be described as learning, loving, and living the art of life, striking a harmony of life in tune with Jesus Christ and His Gospel, for the salvation of the whole world. In essence, theology enables and empowers us to celebrate our life in Christ.

Scanning the theological contributions of the Pontifical Athenaeum Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru, the harmony of life emerges as the major current running throughout the centuries, with its incessant spring flowing from the hilltop of Mannanam (*Bethrauma*) (1833) through the Sacred Heart Study House, Chethipuzha (1918), to the garden city of Bangalore (Dharmaram College) (1957) and beyond. Theology reminds us of the path of faith, seeking harmony of life, the

¹ Jonas Thaliath, "His Vision of Theological Formation" in *Dharmaram Pontifical Institute Annual Jubilee Souvenir, 1957-1982*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Pontifical Institute, 32.

hallmark of salvation in Christ, which takes us to the realm of the celebration of life in Christ.

The harmony of life envisaged at the Athenaeum resonates in its vision statement: “A living temple of wisdom and the dharma of Jesus Christ for the welfare of all and the glory of God.”² As stated, the theological endeavours at this temple of wisdom seek the glory of God by engaging and establishing the dharma of Jesus for the welfare of all in the world. It is on this vibrant foundation that we anchor our thoughts, words, and actions, striving for harmony in life. *Ísa bhakti param jñānam* (devotion to the Lord is the supreme wisdom) is the motto of the Athenaeum, setting the stage for a journey of harmony with a genuine disposition and focused orientation.

In addition, the Pontifical Athenaeum celebrates the *Mar Toma Mārgam*, shared by Saint Thomas the Apostle, the Father of our faith, which is a confluence of *karma mārgam*, *jñana mārgam*, and *bhakti mārgam*, as enshrined in the Johannine episodes of Jn 11:16; 14:5, and 20:28, respectively.³ This journey of faith is similar to wayfarer theology, which welcomes all on their way and embraces all things in the light of the dharma of Jesus Christ and His Gospel, which aligns with the Indian genius, “Let noble truths come from all quarters” (Rig Veda 1.89.1). Harmony of life is at hand for those who are open to the gospel of Christ and ready to undergo a conversion of heart. The *Mārga* theology also brings surprises, struggles, and successes, as in the life and mission of Jesus.

In what follows, we explore the legacy of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram – faith seeking harmony of life – under three successive moments: 1) the sources of the spring, 2) the streams of the spirit, and 3) the splendour of joy, beauty, and glory.

1. The Sources of the Spring

Theology, as faith seeking harmony in life, traces its sources in sacred scripture, the Liturgy of the Church, and the poems of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family.

² Pontifical Athenaeum Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, *Statutes 2012*, Bangalore, 2014, 21.

³ Paulachan Kochappilly, “Mar Toma Margam: A Theology of the Way”, in *The Way of Life: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr Varghese Pathikulangara*, CMI, eds. Paulachan Kochappilly, Geo Pallikunnel, and Joseph Varghese Kureethara, Kottayam, Denha Services, 2011, 41-60.

1.1. “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”

God is the source of harmony; it flows from God. The harmony of life is traceable in the prayer Jesus taught us. “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” reveals the frame of harmony of life. Acknowledging the divine image in each one of us is the foundation for our covenant community consciousness and an ambience necessary for the harmony of life. Where the will of God finds its translation, there is harmony, harmony between earth and heaven, human and divine, cosmic and eschatological. It is in fulfilling the will of God – truth, justice, freedom, mercy – we can imagine harmony. It is by ensuring dignity, identity, diversity, and solidarity that we shall forge a harmonious ambience in life. Where people have no shortage of food, drink, and shelter, there dawns harmony. As we recognise, respect, and respond to the truth, goodness, and beauty of God, the possibility for harmony shines brightly. As the parent, so are the children. As the will, so is the way.

1.2. “Glory to God in the highest, Peace on earth, Hope to Humans”

The angelic hymn at the Nativity of Jesus - Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and hope to humanity – unfolds a package for harmony in life. The hymn outlines three spheres of relationship: God, creation, and human beings. It demands a vertical relationship with God, a radical relationship with creation, and a horizontal relationship with human beings, which, when celebrated, is the foretaste of salvation or reconciliation. By rendering glory to God, establishing peace and prosperity on earth, and offering hope to human beings, we strive towards harmony in life, the essence of the divine revelation at the birth of our Lord. This hymn is a concise and comprehensive treatise on harmony, starting with God, striving for peace, and sustaining hope in our world. As one believes, so one behaves.

The daily chanting of the angelic hymn during the Church’s liturgical celebration creates and recreates the mindscape of the assembly, enabling them to enter into a realm of harmony with ease and readiness. As the prayer, so is the praxis.

“Heaven and earth filled with your glory” is an antiphon in liturgical prayers, creating a lasting image of harmony in the academic community. Joseph Pathrapankal captures the beautiful blend of faith and liturgy, manifesting the harmony of earthly and heavenly life:

Liturgy is the supreme moment of this religious experience where the heavenly and the earthly realms meet together in their polarity, the

heavenly laying hold of the earthly and infusing into it a dynamism and strength that transform and vivify the earthly existence of Christians and lead them in their pilgrimage towards the heavenly sanctuary, towards the heavenly Jerusalem.⁴

Ephasing on the eschatological character of the liturgy – earthly and heavenly – Pathrapankal underscores that it is the eschatological nature of worship that "nourishes their faith, encourages their hope and instils into their hearts the charity that unites them all together to pray, "come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20).⁵ Seeing the glory of God in heaven and on earth inspires and motivates the celebrants of the liturgy to imbibe the spirit of it and translate it into the context of their lives, paving the way to harmony.

1.3. "Thy exuberant beauty, I long to see"

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family, one of the founders of the Congregations of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and the Congregation of Mother Carmel (CMC), a poet and mystic theologian, social reformer, bequeathed to the members a path of interreligious harmony and ecumenical communion, beginning with the purchase of plot of land for the construction of the monastery. Drawing on Indian genius, Kuriakose, in his composition, accentuates the importance of darśan – the vision of God in varied stages and moods of Jesus the Lord. For instance, he writes characteristically in *Atmanutapam*:

"The Lord of Mercy, the Son of God
Thy exuberant beauty, I long to see"

It is typical of Kuriakose to sing and pray in the oft-repeated words, "I long to see", showcasing his eagerness to see the truth, goodness and beauty of God. The catchphrase, "I long to see", is suggestive of a sense of harmony of life and goes in perfect agreement with the intention of the founding fathers to start a "darshana vedu" (a house of darshan). Hence, when they acquired a land for the monastery, it was on the hilltop of Mannanam, a meeting place of waterways and roadways. The naming of the first monastery, *Bethrauma* (the house on the hilltop), suits the religious sentiments of darshan and the longing for seeing. Seeing is believing. Sight from the hilltop of Mannanam

⁴ Joseph Pathrapankal, "Christian Life and Heavenly Liturgy in the Syro-Malabar Rite," in *The Malabar Church. Symposium in Honour of Rev. Placid J. Podipara, CMI.* ed., Jacob Vellian, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 186, Roma, Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1970, 70.

⁵ J. Pathrapankal, "Christian Life and Heavenly Liturgy", 71.

presents a panoramic view, and *Bethrauma* sets the ambience of attraction and action. In 1833, soon after the foundation of the Congregation, its founders ventured into establishing a quasi-Malpanate system for the training and formation of diocesan and religious clergy among the Thomas Christians of India.

Spirit of harmony is the DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) of the members of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate from its inception. Throughout their lives, the founders dedicated themselves to seeking the will of God; “Will of God Always and Everywhere” became a synonym for Kuriakose. He anchored his life on a vision, “Sanctification of Self and Salvation of All”. These insightful thoughts and actions of Kuriakose bequeath a strategic plan for harmony in life. As one sees, so one acts.

2. The Streams of the Spirit

Having briefly traced the source of the legacy, it is now appropriate to explore the streams that contributed to its development.

2.1. “Faith Seeking Harmony of Life”

Jonas Thaliath, CMI, the visionary architect and founder of Dharmaram College, proposes a description of theology that expands on Anselm’s account, infusing experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ to create an inclusive, integrative, and life-transforming encounter with life’s manifold challenges. Appreciating the dictum of St Anselm of Canterbury on theology, *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding), which is the title of Anselm’s dissertation, Jonas Thaliath acknowledges that “we still missed something”⁶ According to him, “theology as such was not so speculative as perhaps it was made out to be a little prior to our own times.”⁷ Jonas assesses that the definition of Anselm is good, but he judges that “it has to be enlarged”⁸ and to include “modern vicissitudes of life so that life in its totality may be Christianized.”⁹ This process, in his opinion, “is the concern of theology.”¹⁰ Supported by the teaching of Vatican II, Jonas argues that the Council has “a constant preoccupation to relate it to the problems of modern life. It is not a discussion in the abstract; it is not merely an

⁶Jonas Thaliath, “His Vision of Theological Formation,” in *Dharmaram Pontifical Institute Annual Jubilee Souvenir 1957-82*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy, 31.

⁷J. Thaliath, “His Vision of Theological Formation,” 31

⁸J. Thaliath, “His Vision of Theological Formation,” 31.

⁹J. Thaliath, “His Vision of Theological Formation,” 32.

¹⁰J. Thaliath, “His Vision of Theological Formation,” 32.

exegetical explanation of what has been handed down by revelation."¹¹ Jonas Thaliath proposes a description¹² of theology:

May I, therefore, humbly propose that we, instead of saying, "*Fides quaerens intellectum*", say *Fides quaerens harmoniam vitae*" to understand the nature of theology? "Fides" is the starting point in any case, and there is the quest to understand its content but not in a conceptual manner so as to be able to systematically relate it to life and dialectically defend it: but there is a deeper meaning in theology, that is, the confrontation of theology with the problems of modern life and to relate theology to life in such a way that you can harmonise theology with its everyday vicissitudes. And this is what I am humbly proposing. I have not given sufficient thought to the details and also to the weaknesses of the revision, which this will certainly require. What I want to emphasise is not that this should be taken as a new definition but that this aspect of theology is of paramount importance, and if we lose sight of it, we may miss what is very important in the entire theological discipline.¹³

Faith seeking harmony in life is the concern of theology; it is not merely theoretical investigation and reflection, but an encounter of faith and life. The incarnational principle of salvation is unfolded in this description of theology, embracing everything and integrating all aspects of life. Faith in Christ encompasses all aspects of life. Jonas explains, "I feel that the word 'vita' includes 'intellectum' and is a broader, wider and richer concept than 'intellectum', understanding, at the conceptual level."¹⁴ Going beyond the conceptual and objective aspect of faith, Jonas opines:

But theology is also related to the subject to the knowing subject and the environment in which it is applied. That aspect comes into focus when we say "vita", "harmony of life." We also have to realise that our theology has to be an ongoing affair, which is influenced by modern developments at the political, technological and sociological levels. And theology has to be alive to the situation.¹⁵

Most importantly, Jonas proposes that theology should touch and transform the theologian:

And finally, and perhaps most important of all, theology has to relate itself not only to modern life in general, but to life in particular, to the seeker, to the theologian himself. And that also is taken care of when we say

¹¹J. Thaliath, "His Vision of Theological Formation," 32.

¹² See Paulachan Kochappilly, "Theological Formation in the Multicultural Context of Asia," *Third Millennium* XII (2009) 4 October-December: 06-27.

¹³J. Thaliath, "His Vision of Theological Formation," 32.

¹⁴J. Thaliath, "His Vision of Theological Formation," 33.

¹⁵J. Thaliath, "His Vision of Theological Formation," 33.

“theology seeks harmony of life.” Unless your own system is harmonised with the deep mysteries of faith which you are trying to fathom and understand even in your own humble human way, if there is not that harmony of your own total personality, it does not become theology for you; it may be theology for somebody else.

Harmony of life is to be seen worked out in every realm of life, beginning with the one who theologises – one seeks harmony of life. In the next step, Jonas advocates Jesus as the key to theology. The point he undertakes in this section is the personal encounter with Christ. “Revelation is a person, Christ, and only by relating your own person with Christ, and in that union, will you understand what theology is.”¹⁶ It is through the personal encounter with Christ one has to strike the of theology, namely, applying it through Christ to all the modern situations and all the modern problems with which you may be faced, one way or another, and also to find solutions to the deep inner problems of your own spiritual life.”¹⁷ It is not short of mysticism. One is able to see things and events through the luminous eyes of faith where everything is interconnected and interdependent. In this process “the content and the contained meet. The believer and the believed become one. And there, there is harmony.”¹⁸ Imbued with an Indian and Eastern theological frame of mind, Jonas outlines the essential characteristic of Christian theology as the personal encounter of Christ. Knowledgeable with the theoretical foundation in theology, one has to be immersed in the experiential knowledge of Christ to do theology:

But if that is to have life and vitality, if that is to have a meaningful orientation, if that is to realise a specific objective, then Christ must come into the picture, Christ must come into one’s life. And there you will find harmony. And then, your own self, your own presence, becomes the concrete proof of theology for another person, of course, coupled with your knowledge. But if you are untied with Christ there will be over and above all this an intangible which will animate all your discussion.¹⁹

In the final segment of his article, Jonas presents a theological symbol through the image of the creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel. He exclaims, “We see God extending his finger and touching Adam’s finger and life is passing through those fingers. What was mute and inactive, by the touch of God receives the gift of life.”²⁰ The

¹⁶J. Thaliath, “His Vision of Theological Formation,” 33.

¹⁷J. Thaliath, “His Vision of Theological Formation,” 33.

¹⁸J. Thaliath, “His Vision of Theological Formation,” 34.

¹⁹J. Thaliath, “His Vision of Theological Formation,” 34.

²⁰J. Thaliath, “His Vision of Theological Formation,” 34.

touch of God triggers life and it transfers the image of God."²¹ This divine touch is necessary for doing theology in context. Unambiguously, Jonas emphasises the necessity of our life in Christ. He advocates "let Christ be to us the key to all theology."²²

2.2. "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, and Oriental in Worship"

A illustrious son of the Thomas Christians of India and a luminary of the Syro-Malabar Church, Placid J. Podipara, CMI, presented the harmony of life of Thomas Christians, "They are Hindus or Indian in culture, Christian in Religion and Syro-Oriental in Worship"²³ Over the centuries, Thomas Christian of Malabar appropriated an identity comprising of multiple identities, through an immersive and integral interactions with the cultural, religious, and worshipping ambience. Rooted in their faith in Christ bequeathed by Thomas the Apostle, the Thomas Christians had a wonderful and living exchange with the milieu they enveloped in their faith journey, giving way to a unity expressed in diversity. This exchange is a beautiful witness to the life of dialogue, inherited from the ethos of India:

Till the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the Thomas Christians had no regular contact with the West. All their relations were normally with the East Syrian Patriarch of Mesopotamia. The bishops sent out by these Patriarchs were practically content with the exercise of the power of Order alone. The effective administration was in the hands of local leaders or Archdeacons. This is how the Thomas Christians kept up their entity with an individuality of its own. This individuality was shaped by their cultural environment based on the socio-political set-up of the communities or castes of Malabar, each of which may be said to have had a culture of its own, conditioned by the rules of the caste. Each of these particular cultures formed, as it were, a facet of the Hindu-Malabar culture. To a casual observer, therefore, the Thomas Christians would have appeared as one of the several Hindu castes whose number was a legion. But they were Hindus or quasi-caste-shaped only in their culture, i.e., in their socio-political formation and way of life. This culture,

²¹J. Thaliath, "His Vision of Theological Formation," 34.

²²J. Thaliath, "His Vision of Theological Formation," 34.

²³ Placid J. Podipara, "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship," *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 1959: 89-194. Reprinted in *Collected Works of Rev. Dr Placid J. Podipara*, CMI, vols II & III, ed. Thomas Kalayil, Mannanam, Sanjos Publications, 2007, 531.

however, was Christianised by their faith and rendered doubly Oriental by their Syro-Oriental mode of worship.²⁴

Placid's thought leadership among the Thomas Christians was outstanding, for his analysis and arguments were true to history and well within the ambit of communion ecclesiology, as the Vatican II document *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* advocates. Through his communion ecclesiological understanding, Podipara reiterated the significance of ecclesial identity and solidarity within the Catholic Church. The praxis of the communion of Churches is a thought that aligns with the harmony of life among the Churches.

Podipara concludes with a pathbreaking note on developing Indo-Oriental approach to theology through a thorough dialogue with the available sources with an open heart and mind:

They could also develop a specifically Indo-Oriental approach to theology by the end of the S. Scripture, of the Oriental (especially Syrian) liturgies and of the Oriental Patristic tradition baptising also the great philosophic thoughts of India. In this latter case they can take pride as any of their neighbours that Sankara, probably the greatest philosopher of India, was a son of Malabar.²⁵

Harmony of life is not concluded project; it must keep going. Placid challenges today's theologians to seek harmony in the context of their lives and missions. Acknowledging the truth, goodness and beauty found in cultural, religious and philosophical traditions, we are inspired to embrace whatever is fitting for organic ecclesial flourishing.

2.3. "To be oneself and growing and going out of oneself"

Joseph Pathrapankal, CMI, a long-serving Professor of biblical theology at the Pontifical Athenaeum, carried forward this legacy of Dharmaram theology of harmony of life. His administrative and academic contributions to keep the spirit of harmony is incredible. At this juncture, I consider only one of his scholarly and pastorally insightful articles setting harmony of life with reference to religious identity and interreligious dialogue. The title of the article is "Jesus and the Greeks: Reflections on a Theology of Religious Identity". Pathrapankal suggests, "The glory Jesus speaks about as associated with his suffering is illustrated through the parable of the grain that

²⁴ P. Podipara, "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship", 531.

²⁵ P. Podipara, "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship", 539.

falls to the ground" (Jn 12:24-25)."²⁶ The parable of the grain of wheat is the mystery of Jesus' life and mission, offering Jesus' *darshan* in capsule to inspire and motivate the faith to follow the path of the Lord. Pathrapankal reflects, "There are many grains which are waiting for a chance to fall to the ground so that they can die and initiate a process of producing hundreds and thousands of grains."²⁷ Drawing inspiration from the life of Jesus, he concludes, "The moment those grains opted for death they started giving meaning to their existence."²⁸ Pathrapankal attaches special significance of the story in multi-religious context and writes, "It is a symbolic story which has a message for every religious man, especially for a Christian living in a multi-religious context."²⁹ Critically responding to the slavish attitudes of religious, he observes, "the attitudes of Christians and, for that matter, of many non-Christians, has not yet become a spontaneous and out-reaching one."³⁰ He raises the pertinent question and attempts to address the issue on identity:

What, then, is the criterion of religious identity? Is it a question of being everything else except being oneself? It seems that the true criterion of religious identity is 'being oneself and growing and going out of oneself'. In other words, a Christian has to be a Christian; but his being a Christian should be such that it should not hinder him at any given moment from acknowledging and appreciating any authentic reality in other religious traditions.³¹

Having developed the principle from the Parable of the grain of wheat, Pathrapankal illustrates Jesus as the living testimony of the metaphor – a metaphor for harmony of life and flourishing through the mystery of death and resurrection:

Being a member of this religion, Jesus established his religious identity by going and growing out of that religious identity whenever he found it necessary. The many stories we have in the Gospels are proof of that, whether it be the criticism of Jewish regulations such as the Sabbath rest or the appreciation of non-Jews for their profound faith gratitude.³²

²⁶ Joseph Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative. Studies in Bible and Theology*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1986, 78.

²⁷ J. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, 79.

²⁸ J. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, 79.

²⁹ J. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, 83.

³⁰ J. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, 83.

³¹ Joseph Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative. Studies in Bible and Theology*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1986, 84.

³² J. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, 84.

Calling the attention of the erosion of world religions, he points to the fact that “religions have become more ‘worldly’ and more ‘secular’ so much so that they cannot help getting involved in the problems affecting humanity as a whole.”³³ Conclusively, Pathrapankal opines, “The ultimate goal of all these efforts is to create a new atmosphere in which human beings live in harmony, related to each other on the basis of the image of God they carry with them.”³⁴ The dynamics of Indian theology, he proposes is *satyagraha* (grasping the truth), which challenges theologians “to take into account the complex situation in which India finds itself today.”³⁵

3. The Splendour of Joy, Beauty and Glory

Drawing from the source and drinking from the radiant streams of the harmony of life, it is time to behold its splendour, which spreads to the plains, quenching the thirst for eternal life and watering the garden for the welfare of all and the glory of God.

In this section, I hand-pick a few theologians who served the Pontifical Athenaeum, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, to highlight a few strands of the splendour of the harmony of life, which is not exhaustive in nature.

3.1. “Theology of Dialogue” and “Cosmic Consciousness”

John Britto Chethimattam, CMI, ‘versatile thinker’ and ‘the wrestling Jacob of our times’, upheld a path of dialogue, switching freely from one realm to another with ease, always rooted in Jesus Christ, as the point of departure. Human beings, by nature, are dialogical and the authentic human activity is dialogue:

‘Poetry is dialogue with the world, love is dialogue with others, and prayer is dialogue with God.’ Self-expression and self-gift constitute the rhythm of personal life in dialogue, which naturally ends in communion. For this religion, philosophy and culture should be bonds and links enabling people to share experience, ideas and ideals instead of being dividing fences between classes and groups.³⁶

Being dialogical, human dialogue aims at “communion with all.”³⁷ With this note on communion, Chethimattam proposes “a sense

³³ J. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, 174.

³⁴ J. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, 175.

³⁵ J. Pathrapankal, *Critical and Creative*, 179.

³⁶ Thomas Kadankavil, “The Wrestling Jacob of Our Times”, in *John Britto Chethimattam: A Pioneer of Indian Christian Theology*, eds. Kuncheria Pathil and Shaji George Kochuthara, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, Year, 32.

³⁷ T. Kadankavil, “The Wrestling Jacob of Our Times”, 34.

mysticism" and silence in his search for synthesis. Dialogue envisages "a total liberation of man, and the attainment of limitless freedom is the end of all faith, religion and philosophy."³⁸ Integral and all-embracing is his concept of dialogue on freedom: "What he aims at is freedom, freedom in its true sense, namely freedom from misery, ignorance, and bondage, freedom for what one can genuinely be."³⁹ Dialogue for temporal liberation is an integral part of spiritual liberation. Mundadan makes a succinct observation of Chethimattam on dialogue:

Speaks of a theology for dialogue and a theology of dialogue. The former will help a partner in dialogue to be open to the other, while the latter will focus on the actual encounter of the partners. Dialogue demands conversion, and this is not a one-way traffic. The Christian needs to be converted to the religious experience of their partner, who belongs to another faith. Only then can the Christian ask the partner to share the Christian message of salvation.⁴⁰

Chethimattam championed the cause of dialogue. According to him, dialogue partners should possess six necessary conditions: "i) concreteness of the partners, ii) self-identity and self-appreciation, iii) non-academic and non-conceptual, iv) repudiating self-interest, negativism, aggression, v) part-truth and wholeness, and vi) willingness to be critical of oneself"⁴¹ All these dispositions ensure harmony of life and progress in the pilgrimage of hope towards joy, beauty and glory. In the light of the above principles for dialogue, Chethimattam emphasises, "Everyone has the right to know what God did in Jesus, his Son, for the sake of the whole human race."⁴² In his approach to interreligious dialogue, Chethimattam highlights the fundamentals in this pilgrimage towards theosis:⁴³ all religions are

³⁸ Mathias Mundadan, "John Britto Chethimattam: A Versatile Thinker", in *John Britto Chethimattam: A Pioneer of Indian Christian Theology*, eds. Kuncheria Pathil and Shaji George Kochuthara, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, Year, 38.

³⁹ M. Mundadan, "John Britto Chethimattam: A Versatile Thinker", 38.

⁴⁰ M. Mundadan, "John Britto Chethimattam: A Versatile Thinker", 43.

⁴¹ Saju Chackalackal, "Dialogue in Indian Tradition (1969)", in *John Britto Chethimattam: A Pioneer of Indian Christian Theology*, eds. Kuncheria Pathil and Shaji George Kochuthara, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 94.

⁴² John Britto Chethimattam, "Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism: The Future of the Christian Mission", in *A Missiology for Third Millennium: A Contextualised Mission Theology*, ed. Thomas Aykara, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1997, 96.

⁴³ Paulachan Kochappilly, "John Britto Chethimattam on the Theology of Religion, Dialogue and Mission", in *John Britto Chethimattam: A Pioneer of Indian*

integral parts of that economy, all religions are parallel systems, do injustice to all religions, and an effective divinisation of the recipient"⁴⁴ Furthermore, he recognises the significance of Jesus Christ in this process of dialogue, "The only question is what Jesus, who is equally the historical heritage of all human beings, has specially to contribute to the message of other religious leaders."⁴⁵

Thomas Aykara proposes cosmic consciousness, which suggests a thought process in harmony with the universe. "Man left to himself is neither the origin of this evolution nor its final goal. He – being an incarnate Spirit – is only the bridge between Heaven and Earth, Spirit and Matter."⁴⁶ He elucidates the idea of cosmic consciousness:

Man, understood in terms of a growing cosmic consciousness, is the centre of the subject-object encounter in which neither Spirit nor Matter, neither God nor man, is absorbed by the other. In this context of a co-existent progressive progression of human consciousness, the world is not a panorama of objects but a network of relationships subjectively centred on the human consciousness and human person who creates and is simultaneously created by the world.⁴⁷

In this process of cosmic consciousness, Aykara distinguishes the ultimate religion of divine consciousness and the human dimension of consciousness. These human and divine dimensions "are essential to the nature of the Incarnate-Spirit."⁴⁸ This idea is further explained by "man as sacrament" in the context of Christian revelation, which sees man's nature as "Christic".⁴⁹ It is by the power of Christ's sacramental structure that man and matter are incorporated into the very body of Christ.⁵⁰

The Christic sacramental structure flourishes in the sacrament of the Eucharist. "This realising and transforming character of sacrament is abundantly evident in the Christian Eucharist when understood in its depth, in its mystical, mythical and ecclesial dimensions."⁵¹ Cosmic consciousness finds its culmination in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Christian Theology, eds. Kuncheria Pathil and Shaji George Kochuthara, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 291-313.

⁴⁴ John Britto Chethimattam, "Towards a World Theology", 299.

⁴⁵ J. Chethimattam, "Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism", 99.

⁴⁶ Thomas Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1997, 261.

⁴⁷ T. Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 261.

⁴⁸ T. Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 261.

⁴⁹ T. Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 282.

⁵⁰ T. Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 282.

⁵¹ T. Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 282-83.

"The Eucharist celebrates the sanctification, the transformation, the consecration, indeed the very Christification of man and matter."⁵² The focus of human endeavour is "Christogenesis".⁵³ It is a creative and transformative process that occurs in everyday life. "It is man, through his everyday activities, who transforms the whole cosmos into a Divine temple."⁵⁴ Practically speaking, "man's sacramental structure combines both knowledge and love; hence the only way to reach his final perfection is the way of prayerful knowledge and selfless love."⁵⁵ Striking a note on harmony, Aykara underlines the theological and philosophical ground for harmony of life, "One can find its perfection only in All, and All can reach its goal only in One. The same is the endeavour of man who is an incarnate spirit."⁵⁶

In this process of total transformation, Aykara delineates three intimately interconnected dimensions, which are the essence of evangelisation. "These triple traits of the CMI vision are intimately related to the triple roots of CMI charism, namely Carmelite, Oriental and Indian, understood in a deeper and wider context."⁵⁷ These triple roots reveal three paths of "contemplative, ecclesial and people-oriented, all three oriented towards the total transformation of the whole man."⁵⁸

Awakened consciousness is the catchphrase of Vineeth Vadakkethala, CMI, and it is the flourishing of integration; they mirror each other. Call to integration is "a life-long process",⁵⁹ open to possibilities going beyond the imagination of space and time. He presents Jesus as an example of an awakened consciousness, the mystery of Incarnation explains the mystery of becoming:

The mystery of Incarnation is precisely the mystery of becoming: remaining ever the same, the full expression of the Word as the Father, yet the same Word expressing itself as man, actuating and informing the finite human nature which the Word itself has become.⁶⁰

⁵² T. Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 283.

⁵³ T. Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 283.

⁵⁴ T. Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 283.

⁵⁵ T. Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 285.

⁵⁶ T. Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 285.

⁵⁷ Thomas Aykara, ed., *A Missiology for Third Millennium: A Contextualised Mission Theology*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1997, 21.

⁵⁸ T. Aykara, *A Missiology for Third Millennium*, 20.

⁵⁹ V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration. New Perspectives in the Theology of Religious Life*, Trichur, Jyothi Book Centre, 1979, 54.

⁶⁰ V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 90.

The above explanation serves as validation of the integration process that each individual must undertake in their life journey. He presents Jesus – the Word Incarnate – as the perfect model of integration:

Christ himself is the perfect model of this integration. He is the most perfect union of humanity and divinity. In him, the human consciousness was well subordinated to the divine, always seeking the will of the Father who sent him.⁶¹

In Jesus Christ, there is perfect integration. An ideal integration aims at such a transformation of consciousness and character. Clearly, he states, “Christ is our model of perfect integration of the human and divine consciousness, in existence as well as in operation.”⁶² The Christic consciousness is the end of human life, where we behold the harmony of life.

3.2. “Cultural Symbiosis” and “Ecclesiogenesis”

Mathias Mundadan, CMI, a renowned Church historian with a theological vision and ecclesial mission, has been promoting thought leadership on the harmony of life through his scholarly works, in-depth investigations, and friendly accompaniment of students in their formation. There was harmony in Kerala guided by enlightened self-interest, “which must have been responsible for the harmony and the cultural ‘symbiosis’ that came to prevail in Kerala from very early times up to the advent of the Portuguese.”⁶³ The relationship was symbiotic, not parasitic, and therefore harmonious. Acknowledging the contribution of various religious traditions, he writes:

The multi-coloured fabric of Kerala society has been woven through centuries with Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and Islamic elements coexisting without losing their identity or even their contrast in character. It must be remembered that each religion brought to it not only a creed but also its own specific way of life.⁶⁴

Though there were small Christian communities in different parts of India, Mundadan identifies the characteristic feature of symbiotic coexistence in Kerala, “it was in Kerala, in the symbiotic socio-cultural and religious context described above, that the bulk lived and grew

⁶¹ V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 94.

⁶² V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 94.

⁶³ A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. I: *From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century (1542)*, Bangalore, Church History Association of India, 1989, 152.

⁶⁴ A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. I, 153.

until the arrival of the Portuguese."⁶⁵ In this regard, he attests special importance to Kerala Christians, "They had developed a theological vision and a lifestyle of their own which somehow or other were congenial to the ground realities of their social-cultural and religious milieu. It was a vision and life of coexistence and or respect for other faiths."⁶⁶

Mundadan elucidates the characteristics of theology, such as an implicit Incarnational theology, a lived theology of other faiths, and a practised theology of a particular Church.⁶⁷ Mundadan establishes the theological perspective of the Thomas Christians, arguing that the search for harmony in life is at the heart of the faithful. The same sentiments of harmony in life run high at the Pontifical Athenaeum Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, for the pioneers of this school of theology belonged to that tribe, and they, in turn, have bequeathed that legacy to the academic community's lifeline.

Known for his ecclesiological and ecumenical insights, Kuncheria Pathil, CMI, through the concept of "ccclesiogenesis", propels the harmony of life by proposing a pilgrimage as an ongoing, open, creative, and dynamic process – a journey from Jerusalem to the end of the earth. "Christianity was not a new religion, but a movement, which was dynamic, creative and ever growing in encounter with various peoples, cultures and nations"⁶⁸, argues Pathil. Such a journey of harmony with people and cultures, "liberated them, but empowered them to take this message to the ends of the earth."⁶⁹ Reading the silver lines of current recognition of the diversity, Pathil scores, "the pilgrim Church today recognises God's providence, wisdom and guidance in all the events of history even in ecclesial division by which the rich diversity of the Church was mysteriously protected and preserved."⁷⁰ Examining the spread of the Gospel of Jesus, Pathil recognises, "Jesus and the Gospel has a tremendous potential to challenge every culture to reform itself by getting more

⁶⁵ A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. I, 154.

⁶⁶ A. M. Mundadan, *Paths of Indian Theology*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1998, 237.

⁶⁷ A. M. Mundadan, *Paths of Indian Theology*, 30-61.

⁶⁸ Kuncheria Pathil, ed., *Church on Pilgrimage: Trajectories of Intercultural Encounter*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 2.

⁶⁹ K. Pathil, *Church on Pilgrimage*, 3.

⁷⁰ K. Pathil, *Church on Pilgrimage*, 3.

and more purified from its human deficiencies, sinfulness and distortions and thus constantly reformed.”⁷¹

As history witnesses, Pathil acknowledges, “ecclesiogenesis is never complete, it is an ongoing process, open, creative and dynamic.”⁷² According to his learned opinion:

The process of ‘ecclesiogenesis’ will be in principle continued on this journey of the Church ‘from Jerusalem to the ends of the Earth’, but may not be in past models or paradigms. New paradigms will always emerge and the old will give way to the new.⁷³

The process of ecclesiogenesis presupposes the preaching of the kingdom of God, which embodies the unconditional love of God and invites everyone to respond to it by metanoia, setting the stage for harmony in life.

3.3. “Celebration of what we are, our Christian existence”

The liturgical insight of Varghese Pathikulangara, CMI, enables and empowers the celebration of life’s harmony. Pathikulngara describes liturgy as “a celebration, a celebration of what we are, a celebration of our own Christian existence.”⁷⁴ He sees liturgy as “the authentic, official and communitarian response to the call of God.”⁷⁵ This celebration encompasses “the participation and involvement of man of today in the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation.”⁷⁶ All these nuances help us understand liturgy as an existential celebration of our life in Christ. This celebration is in tune with the harmony of life. Elucidating the spirit of the liturgy, he writes:

The liturgy of the Church is also such a celebration: a remembrance – a *Dukrana* – an *Anamnesis* – of what we are. We are reminded of our own Christian identity in that regard. We are persons unconditionally committed to the Christ-event, namely, to the person of Jesus Christ and His mysteries. Liturgy, therefore, is the celebration of this commitment. As Jesus Christ continues to be present today in and through the Church, liturgy is a celebration of the very reality of the Church. It is, in fact, a

⁷¹ K. Pathil, *Church on Pilgrimage*, 4.

⁷² K. Pathil, *Church on Pilgrimage*, 4.

⁷³ K. Pathil, *Church on Pilgrimage*, 4.

⁷⁴ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Qurbana. The Eucharistic Celebration of the Chaldeo-Indian Church. Chaldeo-Indian Liturgy 2*, Kottayam, Denha Services No 48, 1998, 5.

⁷⁵ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Introduction to Liturgy. Chaldeo-Indian Liturgy 1*, Denha Services, No 33, Kottayam, Denha Services, 2005, 25.

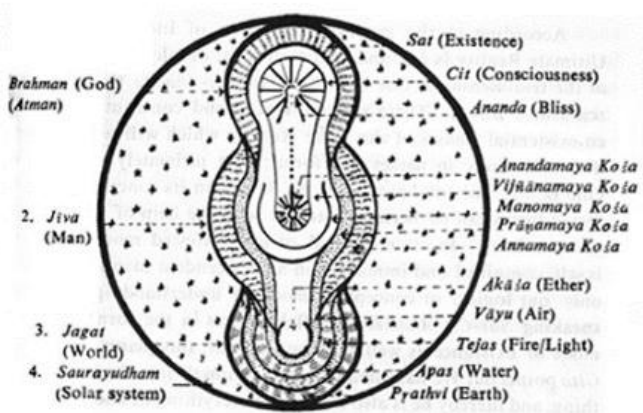
⁷⁶ V. Pathikulangara, *Introduction to Liturgy*, 26.

proclamation of our identity in the Church, which is both cosmic and eschatological.⁷⁷

Being a celebration, the liturgy is a remembrance of our existence – our saintliness and sinfulness. It reminds us of our identity in Christ and our solidarity with all who belong to Christ. It is a personal and ecclesial celebration as the mystical body of Christ. Liturgy is the epiphany and kerygma of our Christian identity. It proclaims the world vision of Christians – a vision that takes into account the cosmic and eschatological, encompassing both heaven and earth. The liturgy, therefore, is the school where the celebrants learn, love, and live the lesson of the harmony of life in Christ. Every liturgical celebration is an invitation to immerse ourselves in the mystery of Christ and become an epiphany of our Lord in the world – bringing the tangible and credible joy, beauty, and glory of God.

The spectrograph of reality, as presented in Thomas Manickam's article, captivates our imagination and guides us on the path of life harmony, which ultimately converges with the path to holiness.

The Spectrograph of Reality The Harmony of Human Life



The Spectrograph of Reality illustrates the pathway to harmony of life.⁷⁸ The interrelatedness of all things in the universe – encompassing

⁷⁷ V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 5.

⁷⁸ Thomas Manickam, "Holiness as Harmony of Life", *Journal of Dharma* 8 (1983), 195. See also Paulachan Kochappilly, "Harmony of Life as the Way to Holiness and Happiness", in *Eco-Philosophy and Harmony of Nature. Collected Works of Dr Thomas*

God, creation, and human beings – is the key to holiness and happiness. Paul Kalluveettil expounds this interrelatedness from a biblical covenant community consciousness. He directs our attention to ‘landedness’ of human beings, “The relationship between man and the earth is so fundamental that humankind can be mostly understood and defined only in reference to the earth, and vice versa. The story of one becomes the story of the other. Admah serves the whence and whither of Adam, task and sustenance.”⁷⁹ Theology that attends to the cry of the earth, the poor, the dalit and women works towards the harmony of life after the mindscapes of Yahweh, who cared for the migrants, sojourner, the widow and orphans.

Conclusion: Harmony and Celebrating Life in Christ

Theology, described as faith seeking harmony of life, is the legacy of the Pontifical Athenaeum Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram from its inception, and as envisioned by the founding fathers of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and carried forward with nuances throughout its journey.

The Dharmaram College Chapel is a living testament to this legacy of ecclesiastical education and formation, consecrated to the Lord of Dharmaram (Sacred Heart of Jesus) in 1975, a year before the Faculty of Theology at Dharmaram College was established. As an attractive temple of visual theology. The Chapel symbolises, in general, and the two panels on either side of the sanctuary, in particular, showcase the wings of theology – the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue – that recapitulate all things in the person of Jesus Christ. Thanks to the artistic creation of Joy Elamkunnappuzha, CMI, for such a beautiful monument to the theology of the mystery of Christ and the harmony of life. Another work of art in the Chapel by Joy is the icon of Jesus, the Guru, a meditative posture that welcomes and blesses every pilgrim. This icon is positioned on the façade of the Chapel and is at the heart of Dharmaram theology.

Manickam, CMI, ed. Sebastian Alackapally, Bengaluru, Dharmaram Publications, 2019: 279-304.

⁷⁹ Paul Kalluveettil, “The Transcending and Transgressing Man”, *Bible Bhashyam* 12 (1986), 99.



The five journals published by the Pontifical Athenaeum – *Journal of Dharma*, *Asian Horizons*, *Vinayasadhana*, *Iustitia*, and *Star of the East* – are waves heralding the gospel of harmony of life to the world.

The Darshana Institute of Philosophy, Wardha, and Samanvaya Theology College, Bhopal, and Jnaodaya Institute of Religious Sciences are expanded versions of the harmony of life. As the names suggest, *darshana* (vision), *samanvaya* (integration), and *jnanodaya* (the dawn of wisdom) are further attempts to carry on the legacy of the Atheneum. All these centres of learning showcase the legacy through their immersion in mission context and by addressing the mounting challenges of everyday life.

The name Dharmaram unpacks its legacy. The term Dharmaram is composed of two words: *dharma*, meaning righteousness, virtue, duty, ethics, etc., and *ārām*, meaning a garden. Literally, *dharmārām* means the garden of dharma, suggestive of the harmony and beauty of life, which, in some sense, is the abode of the legacy of the College. This name was given before the celebration of Vatican II, reflecting the vision and mission of the pioneers. The founders were pioneers in successfully experimenting, making it relevant and revealing to the people of the land. Hence, Dharmaram bloomed as the garden of dharma in Bangalore, often referred to as the Garden City of India. Dharmaram was a genuine garden in every sense of the Word, attracting many. Religiously, Dharmaram stands for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the garden of all virtues, which also pushes the legacy of the ecclesiastical educational mission of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate.

By maintaining the garden ambience and reclaiming the green campus, it is reasonable to expand our vision to a broader horizon, which I would like to call Dharmosphere. Dharmosphere refers to the vibrant, moral, religious, and spiritual sphere in which *dharma* is lived, interpreted, and embodied—personally, socially, ecclesially and cosmically. *Dharma chakra* revolves around *Rta* and finds its foundation in *Satya*. The symbol of the *dharma chakra* (*wheel of dharma*) instils in us the path of renewing and restoring the truth, goodness, and beauty that bring harmony to life. Dharmosphere is the locus where the dharma of Jesus reigns supreme, and the joy, beauty, and glory of God resplendently abide in every seeker, both interiorly and exteriorly.

Novel experiments in the fields of art, music, and theatre were woven into the fabric of Dharmaram education and formation, which hallow the campus and its ethos. To name a few, *Indian Liturgy* introduced at the Church in India Today Seminar in 1969, *Christian Bhajans* in 1979, and *Kristu Sahasra Namam* in 1984 are pathfinding creations of joint ventures between professors and students. Such fields of creative composition are rich theological resources that attract the minds and hearts of all, inviting them to contemplate and meditate on the mysteries of God. Dharmaram has nurtured and fostered numerous musicians of national and international reputation. It has contributed to visual theology; the artworks of the Dharmaram chapel are a fitting testimony and a treat to our senses.

Regular national and international conferences, seminars, and workshops held at Dharmaram expand the academic community's mindset at this temple of learning and encourage a search for harmony of life through the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty, as embodied in the spirit. The Church in India Today Seminar 1969 celebrated at Dharmaram was a historical landmark in the ecclesial landscape of India. Ever since this Seminar, Dharmaram has regularly offered thought leadership and broadened theological horizons, a hallmark of harmony, through several celebrated national and international conferences.

The legacy of faith seeking harmony of life endures. Taking history and culture into account, we journey on, striking the right notes of concord and communion with the mystery of the holy Trinity. Building on Jonas' description of theology, it may be elaborated as faith seeking harmony and celebrating life in Christ. This daily celebration calls for the *mārga* of love and life in the light of Christ, the

splendour of *satyam śivam, sundaram* (truth, goodness and beauty). It is a celebration of our life in Christ, culminating in the confluence of *trivēni* – glorification of God, peace on earth, and hope for humanity in everyday life - transforming the experience of theosis. Harmony of life resonates in the perichoresis of the Holy Trinity. Celebration of life in Christ is an invitation to witness the mystery of the Trinity daily – showcasing the creative love of God, the liberating grace of Jesus, and the accompanying fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

At this historic juncture, marking the completion of fifty years of the Theology Faculty at the Pontifical Athenaeum, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru, we stand with profound gratitude to all who have shaped the legacy of this temple of wisdom. With joy in the faithful unfolding of that legacy, and with hope for the future, the Faculty renews its commitment to its mission: to spread the Gospel of harmony of life through the celebration of life in Christ.

Gazing upon the landscape of *Vidya Kshetram*,
the bird of the spacetime gently descends
into the **garden of dharma**.

There it chants the eternal *śabdam* -
sangītam, sāgaram, sundaram:
The **Word before all worlds**
steps into the river of harmony,
rises from the womb of the earth.

The earth listens as the cosmos resounds
with an ode to the **Lord of Epiphany**,
the One made manifest
for all creation to behold and befriend.