

HARMONIAM VITAE: **Dharmaram Vision of Theological Formation**

Jonas Thaliath♦

1. Introduction

Theology as such was not so speculative as perhaps it was made out to be a little prior to our own times. By the time we were introduced to theology it had become somewhat more of a positive science. But there were certainly elements of biblical exegesis, historical relation of theological development and so on. So it was not so abstract a kind of theology that we learned. It was somewhat intimately linked to the Bible and the history of dogma and the history of the Church. Even so I think we missed something. Theology was defined and handed down to us, according to definition given by St Anselm, the 11th century theologian and Archbishop of Canterbury. You must all be familiar with what he said about theology. Others have taken this dictum of his and applied it as definition to theology but it was never his intention to define theology. *Fides querens intellectum* – this was the sub-title of one of his books about the existence of God. There, in the first part he delved deep into the nature of any disquisition about God. And there he has this famous dictum: *Fides querens intellectum* – Faith searching through the understanding of its content. Faith tries to understand what is conceived in it, but not quite explicitly. There are many merits in this for use as a definition of theology. First of all, this dictum puts faith and theology in their proper relation. Theology is not something like a rediscovery of faith. Theology is something which presumes faith. *Fides* is faith which is already there; that intellectual assent of the theologian is there. He is only groping using the gift of God to understand it: “querens intellectum.” And St Anselm also emphasizes the faith aspect, that it is not merely by intellectual, rational

♦**Bishop Jonas Thaliath CMI** (1919–1981), the first bishop of the diocese of Rajkot, was a visionary. Dharmaram College, Bangalore and its allied institutions including Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Centre for the Study of World Religions and the Journal of Dharma were the realisation of the dreams cherished by this genius of Indian Church. His doctoral dissertation on the Synod of Diamper led to the renaissance of the Syro-Malabar Church in the recent history. The present article was his contribution to one of the Annuals of the Dharmaram Pontifical Institute and was republished on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of Dharmaram College in 1982 in the Jubilee Souvenir.

pursuit that we can understand faith. He believed that faith could be understood only through prayer, and therefore he emphasized that; although in his dissertation he uses the term “ratio” very often, he has not lost sight of the fact that it is only in prayer that we can understand the meaning of faith. As Karl Barth has explained the whole thing, “ratio,” however, also gets a prominent place in two ways: “Ratio” as the faculty, of inquiry, and also as the level of understanding cannot be realized in real terms; it can be realized only in analogical terms; nevertheless, you understand the content of what you believe. This has been offered as the definition of faith, and many theologians have accepted it. And even in the Vatican Council we find a reflection of this conception. And there we read: When reason, enlightened by faith, seeks its object with reverence, diligence, and moderation, it attains, by God’s gift, to some understanding of the mysteries of faith. The definition of St Anselm is good and it has to be enlarged to include also what I am later on going to say. Even so, it does not bring into focus the point of view I am now going to present before you.

2. Fides Querens Harmoniam Vitae

The word “intellectum” is usually understood as a rational, conceptual understanding of the content of faith; it is certainly there, may be even in the core of the understanding, but I wonder whether it puts into proper focus all that is there to theology. If you look up Vatican Council, you find that the definition of the Church has been changed from the traditional definition. The traditional definition of the Church was “A society that is perfect.” And the nature of the society that is perfect would be explained in theology, and perhaps, also in Canon Law. But in *Lumen Gentium* and the Vatican decrees you have a new definition of the Church. The definition of the Church is given as “a people of God.” Even a slight variation in a definition will have a significant repercussion on the whole system, because a definition of a central theme is very important and it will affect every area covered in that discipline. The Vatican Council did not attempt a new definition of theology. But if you read the decrees carefully, you realize that the whole perspective is very different from the perspective of Vatican I. There is a constant preoccupation to relate it to problems of modern life. It is not a discussion in the abstract; it is not merely an exegetical explanation of what has been handed down by revelation. There is a constant effort to apply what theology brings to us, modern vicissitudes of life so that life in its totality may be Christianized. That is

the concern of theology. May I, therefore, humbly propose that we, instead saying, “*Fides querens intellectum*” say “*Fides querens 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 such a way that you can harmonize theology with its everyday vicissitudes. And this is what I am humbly proposing. I have not given sufficient thought to the details and also the weaknesses of the revision which this will certainly require. What I want to emphasize 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.

3. A Theology for Today

May I compare the two definitions and show the proposed perspective will bring more worthwhile vistas to the concept of theology itself? First of all if you take “*Fides querens intellectum*” in a conceptual way – I am not saying that it is wholly a conceptual way – the word “*intellectum*” is much richer than mere “*concept.*” That I understand. But I feel that word “*vita*” includes “*intellectum*” and is a broader, wider and richer concept than “*intellectum,*” the understanding, at the conceptual level. If you take it that way, then you understand that your theology is not only related to the objective part of the content of it, may be the revelation that is expressed in the Bible, the revelation that is handed down to us by tradition – all that is there, that is objective. But theology is also related to the subject, to the knowing subject, and also the environment in which it is applied. That aspect comes into focus when we say “*vita,*” “*harmony of life.*” We also have to realize 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. And unless theology is fully and truly alive one will not be able to realize the objectives of a theological training. This means that theology itself will have to be related to the cultural background in which theologians have to operate. All this is the consequence of an understanding of theology as a quest to apply the content of faith to modern life situations. 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 “theology seeks harmony of life.” Unless your own system is harmonized 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 your own total personality, it does not become theology for you; it may be theology for somebody else.

4. Christ the Point of Harmony

Revelation is a person, Christ, and only by relating your own person with Christ and in that union will you understand what theology is. And there you will be able to bring about the harmony that is required of theology, namely applying it through Christ to all the modern situations and all the modern problems with which you may be faced, one day or another, and also to find solutions to the deep inner problems of your own spiritual life. There the content and the contained meet. The believer and the believed become one. And there, there is harmony. The two objectives of theology are fulfilled: the first, of getting conviction, of understanding the content of theology; and the second of communicating it to another. You cannot convince another person by mere theological discussions and theological argumentation. Of course, that too is necessary. I am not in any way trying to mitigate or dilute the importance of the intellectual content of theology. That should be there to help bridge the gap that exists between your profession and that of the other person.

Let nobody, therefore, deceive himself that he can get away from all theological discussions – you have to acquire a firm theoretical foundation in theology by diligent study of the prescribed curriculum. That is a must. But if that is to have life and vitality, if that has to have a meaningful orientation, if that is to realize 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 united with Christ there will be over and above all this an intangible which will animate all your discussion.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, a symbol of theology the way I have now explained to you, I would like to present a famous painting. I stood motionless many a time before that picture. I do not know whether it would attract others as much as it has attracted me. It is a picture of the creation of Adam. It is in the

Sistine Chapel. We see God extending his finger and touching Adam’s finger and life is passing through those fingers. Similarly, theology is something which, with a touch of God vibrates with life. What was mute and inactive, by the touch of God receives the gift of life. And by that touch God has communicated also his own image to Adam because man was created in God’s image. And what was the image? That image was the image of his own Son because we are all created in the image of Christ. And, therefore, let Christ be to us the key to all theology.