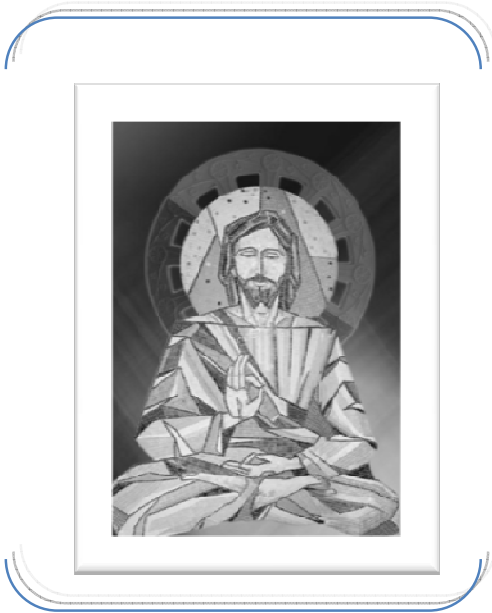


Editorial

PHILOSOPHY AT DHARMARAM AND AN INTEGRAL OUTLOOK

‘Dharmaram’, translated as a ‘garden of virtues’ and symbolizing the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is a name the founding fathers of Dharmaram College have consciously and purposefully selected to initiate the process of nurturing a noble legacy of integration that would mould a group of human beings and a set of institutions for the coming generations. It is an *ārām*, a garden, where everything has its constitutive role, resulting in the very formation of the garden itself. The garden, in turn, sets the dynamic ambience where each person and each thing can find its rightful and



meaningful place. Indeed, primarily, the garden that the Dharmaram is, as the Sacred Heart of Jesus, symbolises a nurturing ground of human beings who would blossom into persons endowed with virtues, i.e., with an integral outlook that would pave the way for oneself and others, along with the whole nature, to co-exist and pro-exist, and work for the establishment of a just and dialogically vibrant society.

Dharmaram College, which celebrated its golden jubilee in 2007, was originally established to provide philosophical and theological education to Catholic men with the intention of training Catholic priests and Christian leaders.¹ The motto of Dharmaram College is “*Īśabhakti paramjñānam*,” which literally means

¹The vision enshrined in the Gospels, and later articulated in the “Declaration on Christian Education,” has been very much part of the legacy of Dharmaram: “to make a more penetrating inquiry into the various aspects of the sacred science so that an ever deepening understanding of Sacred Revelation is obtained, the legacy of Christian wisdom handed down by our forefathers is more fully developed, the dialogue with our separated brethren and with non-Christians is fostered, and answers are given to questions arising from the development of doctrine.” Vatican Council II, “Declaration on Christian Education,” §11.

“devotion to the Lord is Supreme Wisdom.” Dharmaram College, therefore, “pays constant attention to the spiritual values to be cultivated by the students, as well as to a thorough and profound intellectual discipline to be acquired by them through *īśabhakti* (devotion to the Lord) and its ever flowing *paramjñānam* (knowledge par excellence), leading them to an integral transformation.”²

In course of time, however, its horizons were opened up to the needs of the people of Bangalore, thus, initiating various educational endeavours on and off the campus, a move that has now become a mark of quality education under the leadership of Christ University.³ As per the statistics available this year, Dharmaram campus caters to more than 15,000 students on a daily basis, and the courses offered range from pre-primary education to doctoral studies in specialised subjects.

Dharmaram, through its allied and affiliated institutions, has moulded a myriad of good citizens, educators, scientists, social workers, etc., from the secular perspective, and a galaxy of well-motivated and dedicated Christian priests, religious, missionaries, and lay leaders who continue to stand in good stead in the multi-faceted fields of Christian service carried out both within and outside India. What is characteristic of the training imparted in this campus, which has become the ‘Dharmaram legacy’, is the successful insistence on the formation of an integral outlook. History will testify to the fact that the Dharmaram style of education stands in good stead in enabling her wards to meet the challenges of the changing times within India as well as outside.

In an attempt to take stock of the evolution of Dharmaram legacy, I shall briefly recall a few landmarks. The Sacred Heart Study House of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, a Catholic religious seminary founded in 1918 at Chethipuzha, Kerala, was shifted to Bangalore in 1957 and was given the name Dharmaram College. On December 8, 1965, Dharmaram College was affiliated to the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, by a

²*Directory of Dharmaram College 2003-04*, inside cover page.

³It was with a view to achieve an integrated study of sacred sciences along with secular subjects that Dharmaram College started on its campus, in 1969, an arts, science, and commerce college, which has achieved “deemed to be university” status in 2008. This prestigious institution, Christ University, along with Christ Junior Colleges, Christ Schools, and Krista Vidyalaya, offers multi-faceted academic programmes, including research degrees, and operates now in its various on- and off-campus centres across India.

decree of the Congregation for Catholic Education. On January 6, 1976, by the decree *Nobilissimae Indiarum Gentes*, the Congregation for Catholic Education established in Dharmaram College a Faculty of Theology with the rights and powers to confer the Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Theology and Bachelor's degree in Philosophy.

In 1975, with a view to widen the scope of ecumenical activities, Dharmaram, under the auspices of its theology wing, worked out a programme of collaboration in the field of religion, philosophy, and culture with the United Theological College, Bangalore. A one-year diploma course in Spirituality and Counselling, started in 1992-93, was enhanced into a two-year master's degree programme in 2004. Apart from these developments, in 1994, an extension centre for the study of theology named *Samanvaya Theological College* was established with its headquarters in Bhopal in the state of Madhya Pradesh for a contextualized theological formation in view of the changing pastoral and missionary scenario and the corresponding theological reflection (Its other regional centres are in Jagdalpur, with its specific thrust on the Tribal cultures, and Rishikesh, with its unique ambience of multi-religious dynamism). Under the auspices of the Faculty of Theology there is a one-year diploma course in Theology and Religious Sciences, specially designed for the consecrated religious women, which is conducted at *Jnanodaya* (Bangalore). In 1999, an Institute of Oriental Canon Law was established (aggregated to the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome), which offers a three-year licentiate programme in Oriental Canon Law. Further, in 2004, the Centre for Biblical Studies was reconstituted to become the Centre for Biblical and Theological Studies; this centre offers a one-year diploma course in Bible and Theology especially for the laity in and around Bangalore. In 2007, the Faculty of Theology started its bi-annual journal, *Asian Horizons*, indenting to avail platform of Dharmaram integral theological deliberation to a wider audience through the publication of scholarly articles that would see to the blending of Christian vision and Oriental patrimony in the existential crucible of the Indian milieu.

Along with theological and secular university education, from its inception itself, Dharmaram had initiated her students into various philosophical streams of thought. It is a matter of pride that the founding fathers of this temple of learning made it a point that all her students are acquainted with the philosophical patrimony of the Indian thought along with other secular and Christian schools of thought. Taking into account

the fact of religious pluralism in India and the need of equipping her students to positively respond to it, Dharmaram instituted, in 1971, Centre for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) with the noble intention of fostering better understanding of the various religious traditions; it continues to work for the promotion of research in the area of religious dialogue by imparting short term and long term regular programmes to national and international student groups. In 1975, Dharmaram College also started the publication of *Journal of Dharma*, an international quarterly for the scientific study of religions and philosophies, with a commitment to enhance research in the fields of inter-religious dialogue, ecumenism, and philosophy, and, thus, to contribute to the development of indigenous philosophies and theologies. It was by the decree *Antiquissima Indorum*,⁴ dated December 8, 1983, the Congregation for Catholic Education, Rome, created the Faculty of Philosophy in perpetuity. In the same year, an extension centre of philosophy, *Darsana Institute of Philosophy*, was established at Wardha in the state of Maharashtra.

Dharmaram has made a lasting and far reaching impact within the Indian Church through its existence over a period of fifty years. Her academic excellence is recognized and sought after by many other institutions; the lead given by Dharmaram has been carried over by many other scholars and institutions in India.⁵ In an attempt to impart the integral vision to the people of other cultures and continents, Dharmaram has

⁴Interestingly, naming of the documents establishing faculties in Dharmaram – “*Nobilissimae Indiarum Gentes*” (1976, Faculty of Theology) and “*Antiquissima Indorum*” (1983, Faculty of Philosophy) – very clearly indicates the ‘Indian’ thrust that Dharmaram nourishes all through her existence. I believe that it was providential as well as intentional on the part of the Congregation for Catholic Education to word the documents in this manner so that the specific thrust and the goal of instituting these faculties in Dharmaram will have a bearing on its programme of learning and research. Indeed, to those who are familiar with the Indian view of life, there is no need to make any specific mention of the integral outlook: it is the quintessence of all that ‘Indian’ is.

⁵During the past years a number of institutions of ecclesiastical studies have been affiliated to DVK. Prominent among them are the Vidyadeep Institute of Theology, Bangalore (1988), belonging to the Conference of Religious India, Carmelaram Theology College, Bangalore (1989), belonging to the Order of Discalced Carmelites, De Paul Institute of Religion and Philosophy, Bangalore (2001), belonging to the Vincentian Congregation, Pushparam Institute of Philosophy, Mysore (2003), belonging to the Order of Discalced Carmelites, and Ruhalya Major Seminary, Ujjain, belonging to the Missionaries of Saint Thomas.

opened up its horizons to wider international audience at two international centres, one in Rome (Chavara Institute for Indian and Interreligious Studies) and the other in Sacramento, California, USA (Chavara International Centre for Indian and Inter-religious Studies).

As the Faculty of Philosophy celebrates its silver jubilee in 2008-2009, I am pleased to affirm that the professors as well as the students of this faculty have played a pivotal role in the development of an integral outlook that has become the characteristic feature of Dharmaram legacy over the years. The ground-breaking initiatives of the stalwarts like John Britto Chethimattam, Thomas Aykara, Francis Vineeth Vadakkethala, Thomas Kadankavil, Albert Nambiaparambil, Thomas Mampra, Thomas Manickam, Cyriac Kanichai, Gabriel Aranjaniyil, etc., who had been the backbone of philosophical education in Dharmaram over a period of 30 years have opened up new avenues in Indian Christian thought. It must be respectfully acknowledged that the noble vision of Jonas Thaliath, Canisius Thekkekara, Januarius, Paulinus Jeerakath, Mathias Mundadan, Joseph Pathrapankal, etc., had the foundational role in the flourishing of the unique mode of philosophical programme at Dharmaram; moreover, their own innovative theological deliberations have had a catalyst effect in promoting the integral mode of philosophical education within Dharmaram and in many other institutions across India. The much acclaimed Indian theology, to my mind, had its roots in the pioneering work done by these talented and erudite philosophers and visionaries.

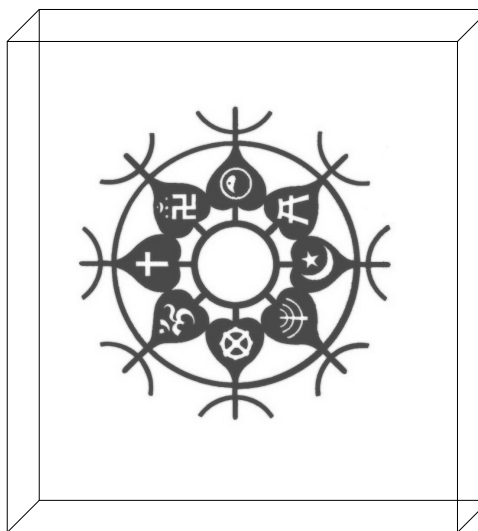
Just as everything has an integral place in a garden, the programme of philosophy that was designed by the visionaries of Dharmaram took care to make a blend of sacred and profane, religious and secular, East and West, Christian and Indian, without losing sight of the ‘little’ traditions (although it took a long time for their official recognition) and ‘unorthodox’ schools of thought. Addition of two important centres – Centre for the Dalit Studies and Centre for Women Studies – is hailed as important and insightful steps in the evolution of Dharmaram legacy.

The careful planning initiated by the teaching faculty insisted on an integral balance of the subjects taught in the curriculum. Without sacrificing the academic requirements stipulated by the Congregation for Catholic Education and the perennial philosophical patrimony of the Catholic tradition, a meticulously planned programme was put in place, with the intention that a student who passes through the portals of Dharmaram should have not only a deeper theoretical understanding of

human thought evolved through various secular and religious traditions, but also should have a lasting respect for their vision of life and ennobling practices. This was not a mere pious wish, but a definitive project, which also included equipping students to acquire the critical acumen to approach these same traditions with a view to engage in constructive dialogue as well as critical and creative appreciation. Of course, this goal amounted to additional working hours both for the teaching faculty and the students; however, as it is an outlook gravely in need, especially in the disturbed pluralistic contexts of India and the wider global horizons due to their too late realization and recognition of the plurality of religions and cultures, all at Dharmaram have taken to heart this noble responsibility and have invested the best of resources into it.

The integral outlook introduced in the academic programmes is creatively supported by two main organs of Dharmaram: the Centre for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) and the *Journal of Dharma*, the international quarterly of religions and philosophies. While the CSWR conducted regular wide-ranging programmes to equip the wider public of Bangalore city and others, especially in fostering better understanding among various religious, cultural, and ethnic traditions, *Journal of Dharma* made Dharmaram platform' available to the international audience through the publication of research articles and reviews on issues pertaining to religions and philosophies. While the former mainly catered to the local audience through discourses, dialogues, and experiential prayer/sharing sessions, the latter toiled in initiating mutual understanding and respect among various traditions and disseminating the same to international centres of higher learning, by bringing together the best minds around the world through its quarterly publications. These two arms of the faculty of philosophy have been, therefore, instrumental in making the faculty very vibrant over the years, and making its vision and presence felt all over the world.

Further, the research programmes, both at the licentiate and doctoral levels, have been successful in eliciting interest among students to dwell deeper into the wisdom of wide ranging traditions. It is a matter of pride



that some excellent theses at the licentiate and PhD levels have been published and are well acclaimed by experts as well as the erudite public. Moreover, the training imparted at the licentiate level has had a very successful catalyst effect, as most of the scholars trained at Dharmaram have assumed their responsibility of teaching philosophy or theology at various centres. They, in turn, carry forward the noble Dharmaram tradition of integral philosophical education in the institutions they have assumed their office.⁶ In one of the editorials in *Journal of Dharma*, I wrote about the Dharmaram legacy of education as follows:

... Dharmaram has taken the lead in initiating positive steps in inculcating a healthy approach towards different religions, cultures, and linguistic groups. Many who have passed out of this institute have changed batons with the succeeding generations in the field of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue and harmony. The success of “Dharmaram-style education” could also be attributed to her ability to integrate nature with nurture, the human with the divine, the secular with the religious, and the profane with the sacred. It enables each of her wards to be human beings thoroughly rooted in their own culture and tradition, but at the same time transcending their bounds and boundaries to share the riches of our common human destiny and to reach out to the unseen and unexplored horizons, thus, constituting the supreme wisdom as the ultimate aim of education.⁷

This noble and effective chain will set a new phase and face in inculcating positive outlook and approach among/toward various traditions, even if apparently they seem to be antagonistic in theory and practice.

The opening of Dharmaram Academy for Distance Education (DADE), in 2007, is a milestone in taking the integral vision of Dharmaram to a wider audience. In the age of information technology and

⁶Research in philosophy has assumed a new dimension with the opening of the Department of Philosophy at Christ University, which is practically constituted by the members of the Faculty of Philosophy, DVK. In 2006, the MA in Philosophy was introduced and, in 2008, the MPhil in Philosophy was also opened up. We expect that Christ University would begin its doctoral research programme in 2009, with more emphasis on inter-disciplinary research. As the research in philosophy is opened up to the wider ‘secular’ public, we earnestly hope that our goal of spreading the message of integral philosophy will get further boost and wider recognition.

⁷Saju Chackalackal, “Religion and Education: A Philosophical Appraisal” (Editorial), *Journal of Dharma* 31, 2 (April-June 2006), 161-62.

information explosion, DADE could reach out to many who cannot come to the campus on a daily basis. In just one year, this Academy has successfully launched post-graduate diploma programmes in seven different areas, including philosophy. Here is a laudable step that will have a lasting and effective impact in the years to come, especially in spreading the message of integral outlook far and wide.

Our philosophical engagements are not one of denying the existence of other traditions and schools of thought, but of recognizing the other/s, responding to the issues raised from such recognition, and of engaging in ongoing dialogues. That is, there is an existential realization that our life world is fundamentally plural, that there is the possibility of divergent viewpoints and life visions, without precluding one's own meaningful and dynamic existence. Yet, our programme does not leave all these discrete entities as mere parts of the plural, but enables every individual to evolve an integral viewpoint for oneself. In fact, Dharmaram does not serve a ready-made solution to the reality of plurality, but enables her scholars to weave and blend together their own view of life.

It might be emerging from the very Indian mindset that the training in philosophy was never restricted to secular philosophers and their philosophies. The fundamental religious outlook that Dharmaram has assumed always made room for recognizing and incorporating the religious wisdom bequeathed to humanity by renowned teachers and founders of religions. As their insights have been effective in moulding the outlook of generations, mostly for good, our philosophical programme has a significant focus on philosophies emerging from various religious traditions. The integral outlook that we facilitate in our scholars makes sure that no valid contribution as far as the human thought is concerned is neglected; on the contrary, we make sure that due recognition is paid to religious as well as non-religious viewpoints so much so that the perspective of life that a scholar develops will have the possibility of recognizing contrary and even contradictory viewpoints. We insist that every scholar is enabled to balance the creative tensions existing among contrary and contradictory and opposing forces: indeed, here is the blending of the physical and the metaphysical, the rational and the mystic, the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine.

As most of the students attending our programme of philosophy are Christians, specifically Catholics, the cornerstone of their philosophical endeavours fundamentally turns out to be the faith in the person of Jesus

Christ. Here, I hold that such a point of view, having its centre in Jesus Christ, does not go against cultivating an open and integral attitude towards other traditions; instead, it provides the best ambience for lasting integration. In fact, it is the very catholic Christic life vision that takes us beyond the limiting horizons of one's self and all that is immediate. The Christic model of self-emptying for the sake of engendering life in the other is the most generous approach in life and philosophy that anybody can adopt. It begins with the integration of oneself with the others, one's interests with that of the others, which ultimately climaxes in harmonizing every stream of thought, strengthening the bonds, and widening the horizons in view of building up a new earth and new heaven, the *dharmarajya*, the kingdom of God.

The Silver Jubilee celebration of the Faculty of Philosophy at Dharmaram is an occasion to take stock of what we have attained so far and, thus, to feel proud of it, which

is indeed a justified sentiment. However, as twenty-five years is only a very short period as far as human achievements are concerned, this jubilee celebration shall be taken as an occasion to plan for the future so that the goal of an integral outlook could be better realized in the coming years, especially as the times are changing and the challenges are



mounting. In the last twenty-five years, Faculty of Philosophy at Dharmaram, as a tree that has been offering shade and vital life to many seekers of wisdom, has got firmly rooted and has spread its branches far and wide; as a stream that has been flowing and nourishing everyone on its either banks, it continues to flow serenely, enriching and enhancing all who want to quench their thirst from her ever-flowing waters of wisdom. Now, the challenge is to let the tree grow taller and stronger to offer better shade and life to many more, and to flow more dynamically into the lives of many, so that the goal of integration not only remains intact but becomes all the more vibrant and life-enhancing.

As the needs and expectation of the society are changing, it is necessary that our programme is revamped in such way that all our

scholars are equipped to respond to the existential situation more creatively. Apart from initiating scholars into the age-old wisdom of humanity, especially at the research levels, Dharmaram must chalk out plans to infuse in them a creatively critical and a critically creative approach to various traditions and schools of thought. Further, some important elements, which were side-tracked by the elitist tendency, must be reinstated to the mainstream of philosophical endeavours. They would include further research and studies into the ecological concerns, the subaltern traditions, the feminist movements, post-modern trends in philosophy, etc. The new centres like Centre for Dalit Studies and Centre for Women Studies should assume active role in chalking out programmes for day-scholars as well as wider public, so that an effective conscientization could be initiated. Further, I wish that the Silver Jubilee celebrations also become an occasion to initiate processes to start a new Centre for Environmental Philosophy and Action under the auspices of the Faculty of Philosophy. As these centres become more vibrant and effective, I hope, Dharmaram legacy will regain some dimensions that were lost sight of and open up new vistas in its further philosophical sojourn. Moreover, centres of these stature should be capable of eliciting interest among research students so that more effective research programmes would evolve, thus, initiating more dynamism and broader ambience for integration into the life of Dharmaram itself.

As an integral outlook is never a finished product, Dharmaram has to delve deeper into the questions of ultimate interest, and bring in many more dimensions of life and reality into its philosophical scrutiny and synthesis. It is also high-time that new programmes are designed in such a way that they would respond to the needs of the new generation of information sciences and the emerging social problems. As philosophy could engage in these issues with a healthy distance, the solutions proposed could naturally open up new and better avenues in social life. The faculty as well as the research scholars must become more integral in their outlook and proactive in responding to the current vexing issues of the Indian and international society, which I hope would give a better edge to our programmes, opening up wider horizons, and offering deeper meaning to the existence of the Faculty of Philosophy at Dharmaram.

Saju Chackalackal
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