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Towards an Integral Approach to Religious Studies:

Observer's Remarks

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At the completion of the interdisciplinary seminar, one puts together the outcome that was meant to throw light on an integral approach to religious studies. At the start, the meaning of the three terms highlighted in the course of the seminar is set down.

I. Terms and their clarification

(a) Faith is seen as an experience that related at least two persons, one to the other. It exists within a community and enables the community to exist because of the trust shared among the members. In human communities, human faith exists. Faith in God supposes more than a human's ability to trust since the 'other' cannot be reduced to the level of another human person.

(b) Reason can be viewed as a critical understanding of one's own and a community's experience. It can be seen as accounting for experience at different levels and is not necessarily confined to the use of the scientific method alone. For instance a person may have beliefs (in virtue of his/her faith) which preside over and influence his/her life, and then uses creative and critical tools to assess the value of those beliefs.

(c) Finally wisdom is a person's discerning ability to measure the quality of his/her own relatedness to the "other" and to make choices in life accordingly.

II. Integration as a Process

Unity is seen as a positive where parts attain their realization in the whole: this is a supposition. Such unity can be seen in terms of being a complement, completion, fulfilment, harmonious relationship, etc. Integration can be seen as a species of unity where parts are united in a larger whole even though the nature of the larger whole is not known or recognizable a-priori.

Secondly, such integration is a process, a journey that continues throughout the life of a person and that cannot be measured in exact terms. Integration is a dynamic process to which intentionality, rights and duties, human efforts, and the 'breaking of idols' contribute.

III. Reference Points of an Integration Process

- (a) *Community*: Relatedness beginning with man-woman, self-society, people-humankind, etc.
- (b) *Intentionality*: What does a person intend when posing a question and finding an answer?
- (c) *Breaking of Idols*: No non-negotiable status should be attributed to what a human being 'confects'.
- (d) *Critical discernment*: To use all means honestly to add to oneself and the common good.
- (e) *Habits of Mind and Heart*: Intellectual rigour, compassion, forgiveness, care, love.
- (f) *The Sense of Mystery*: Human experience and the transcendent. Dialogue as a way of life.

The above points/factors are to be considered when one seeks to integrate the fruits of learning so that they are readily available for future projects and planning.

IV. Significant Points in the Papers

- (a) Some neo-Pentecostals employ categories (sacred and profane) inaccurately. (SAVIO)
- (b) Relatedness and egalitarianism: tribal identity, development and dialogue(?) (HAOKIP)

- (c) Gender was seen correctly in terms of an inclusive equity.
(KOCHURANI)
- (d) Assessment is always necessary in theological claims whether
Indian or from abroad. (WILSON)
- (e) Keep in mind “the breaking of idols” in thought processes.
(GEORGE KARUVELIL)
- (f) Do not attribute certainty to a ‘scientific event’ even when such
claim is made. (STEPHEN JAYARD)
- (g) Traditions are found in communities; the more we learn about
other traditions the more communities we belong to.