

JPJRS 17/1 ISSN 0972-33315, January 2014: 189-196

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.4273773

Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4273773>

The Weaver in the Web

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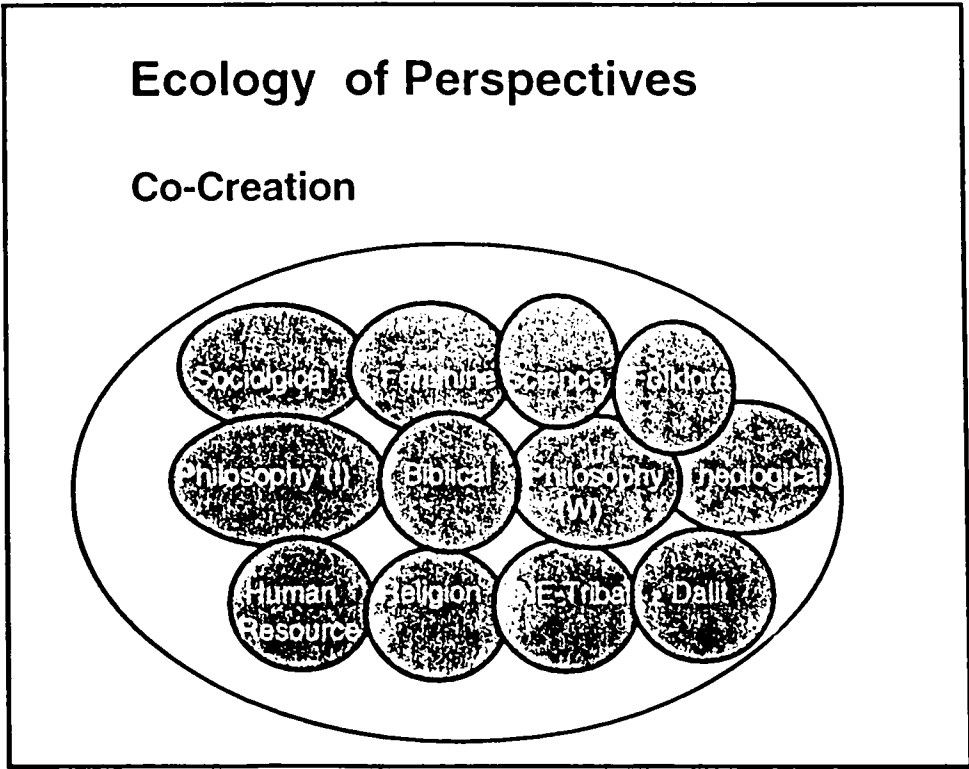
Introduction:

Co-existence, complementarity, compatibility and contradiction are some of the themes that have dominated the discourse on faith and reason. Wisdom has never been seriously positioned as a binary to faith or reason. Inclusion of wisdom in the ongoing debate on faith and reason is perhaps a wise decision to enrich the dialogue that is increasingly been perceived as a necessary condition to bridge the gap between faith and reason. Therefore, organising a seminar on the theme, 'Faith, Reason and Wisdom' deserves sincere appreciation and admiration.

Though this seminal seminar was organized to commemorate the 50th year of Vatican Council II, the historical Encyclical Letter 'Fides et Ratio' of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the relationship between faith and reason, has provided a strong platform for the confluence of thinkers with diverse perspectives to examine the power and profundity of faith, reason and wisdom. While the first Vatican Council laid the foundation for weaving the relationship between faith and reason as it stressed that there is "knowledge peculiar to faith" that transcends but does not contradict natural reason¹, the Church after Vatican II felt the need to strongly reaffirm the indomitable relationship between faith and reason. This was done in 'Fides et Ratio' with its assertion that "faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves."² However, in the face of modernity, in order to understand the interrelationship between faith

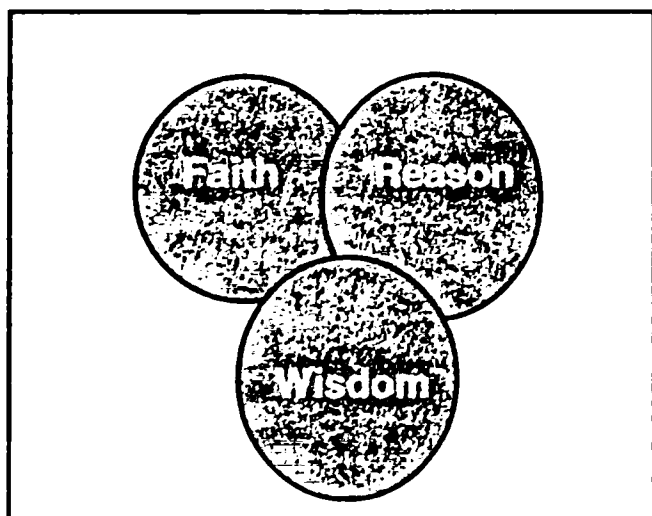
and reason, we need “philosophical reason as a form of wisdom that attains to true knowledge of God.”³

The relevance of discourse on faith, reason and wisdom will lose its merit if it does not transcend the boundaries of theology and philosophy. This is because, in the wake of growing economic crisis, nuclear threat, ecological imbalance, demographic transition and rising terrorism, humanity is searching for sustainable solutions. The resonance of the cry for peace, love and harmony is felt across nations and cultures. While some rely on the power of reason, others search for solutions in the profundity of faith and wisdom. However, the general tendency appears to be to invoke the power of the one independent of the other. Therefore, the challenge is to harness the collective power of faith, reason, and wisdom. This seminar perhaps is an attempt to delve into the depth of this collective force through different lenses and perspectives. However, in my view, one perspective that can provide us the canvas to paint clearly the interplay between faith, reason and wisdom is the ‘ecological perspective’, which for some reason or the other did not find a place in the seminar. Therefore, while attempting to state my humble observations on the seminar, I have also taken the liberty to explain briefly the basic tenets of ecological perspective and how it can be used to create a web of faith, reason and wisdom.



1. Ecology of Perspectives:

One of the key outcomes of this seminar is the co-creation of different perspectives. The seminar, by encouraging different perspectives to look at the power of faith, reason, and wisdom, has created an ecology of perspectives that can help us see how each perspective is interlinked to the other.



2. Psychology of Perspectives:

The Seminar did create a psychology of perspectives. This is because of the inherent and perhaps, unintended tendency among the presenters to position their perspective as something more comprehensive than the `ones articulated by their co-presenters in the Seminar. While this tendency can be explicated at the inter perspective level, we can also see the manifestation of this propensity at an intra perspective level. This is because of the following concerns that emerged during the seminar.

Preeminence:

A careful look at each of the perspectives indicates that there was an attempt to place one before the other suggesting the preeminence of faith or reason or wisdom.

Centrality:

One could also see the tendency to give central position to any one of the factors indicating its importance or supremacy.

Interjection Vs Interdependence: While some perspectives attempted to maintain the eminence of each factor, argued that all the three could interject at a particular point and need not depend on each other. At the same time, some perspectives maintained the position that all the three are so interdependent that it is impossible to understand one in exclusion to the other two.

Inclusion Vs Exclusion: Some perspectives took the position that the power of each factor can be fully understood only to the exclusion of the other two. This is because, as argued by them, all the three cannot co-exist at the same time.

Coalescing factor: One of the important views that emerged during the course of the discussion was the role of each factor in unifying all the three factors. It was perceived that the opposing tendency, say between reason and faith, can be overcome with the power of wisdom.

The seminar created a strong platform to generate and disseminate diverse perspectives to examine the relevance of faith, reason and wisdom. It did try to identify the threads that could be used to weave a web of faith, reason and wisdom. It also attempted to identify the linkages between all the perspectives. However, what was found missing, in my view is the weaver in the web. The ensuing part of this note attempts to explain the weaver.

Ecological Perspective: The seminar would have been highly enriching if it had created some space to include the ecological perspective to look at the web of faith, reason and wisdom. This is because, in all the other perspectives, while the weaving is visible, what is invisible is the 'weaver'. In order to see the 'weaver' we need to understand the following concepts.

a. Interbeing⁴: This concept was coined by a Vietnamese Buddhist Monk and scholar Thich Nhat Hanh. Interbeing means 'to be'. According to him, 'to be' means inter-dependently co-exist. The meaning of interbeing recognizes the dependence of any one person or thing as to all other people and objects. For instance, if we use the lens of interbeing, we can see the ocean, cloud, rain, tree, pulp etc in a sheet of paper. Interbeing helps us to see the

power of interdependence transcending boundaries and spiral of co-existence.

Therefore, faith and reason can co-exist. Faith and wisdom can co-exist. Reason and wisdom can co-exist. Faith, reason and wisdom can co-exist. Faith, reason and wisdom can co-exist with other elements that are necessary for human existence.

b. Deep-Ecology⁵: One of the celebrated books of Fritjof Capra is, ‘Web of Life’. In this book, he argues that the web of life is weaved by two threads. They are our thinking and our values. According to him, our thinking and values can be either self-assertive or integrative. The following table presents the factors that can help us see if our thinking and values are self-assertive or integrative.

Thinking and Values: Factors of ‘self-assertive’ and ‘integrative’ dimensions			
Thinking		Values	
Self-assertive	Integrative	Self-assertive	Integrative
Rational	Intuitive	Expansion	Conservation
Analysis	Synthesis	Competition	Cooperation
Reductionist	Holistic	Quantitative	Quality
Linear	Non-linear	Dominance	Partnership

Source: Capra, Fritjof (1996): Web of Life, Harper Collins, London.

3. Deep-Ecology framework to analyse the perspectives on Faith, Reason and Wisdom: The ‘Deep-Ecology’ framework can be used to understand whether all the perspectives on faith, reason and wisdom presented and discussed in the seminar are self-assertive or integrative⁶. The interbeing or the integrative nature of the web of faith, reason and wisdom can only be understood by knowing the weaver and not just by knowing the threads alone. The threads are our thinking and values. The perspectives presented and discussed in the seminar do reflect the thinking and values behind each of them. As suggested by Capra, our thinking can be either self-assertive or integrative. If we give preeminence or centrality to any of the three factors (faith, reason, and wisdom), it would assume

the role of self-assertive both at the thinking and value level. Ecology by definition means an ecosystem consisting of many parts but closely and deeply interrelated to each other. Interbeing and interdependence is vital for the existence of humans and all other living and non-living organisms. The essence of our existence can be understood only in the realm of interdependence -how each one of us is dependent on other human beings and all the life sustaining objects found in the universe. While our own existence is a mark of interdependence, why can't faith, reason and wisdom continue to co-exist with each other and also with us?

4. Love: The Weaver: The ecological framework helps us understand the threads, which are our thinking and values. Thinking is related to reason and values can be attributed to faith and wisdom. However, the ecological perspective espoused by Capra does not give enough scope to widen the boundary of faith. Though faith is strongly linked to values, the integrative dimensions of values mentioned by Capra do not include love, which is critical to keep the web active and alive. In my view, faith can only be expressed and experienced through love. If Abraham agreed to sacrifice his only son Isaac, it was entirely and essentially because of his love for God. If God sent his son Jesus to the world to die on the cross, it was purely out of His love for mankind. Jesus' death on the cross is the greatest act of sacrifice, which is the supreme form of love. Life without love is meaningless. Reason and wisdom, which dominate life, are meaningless without faith and faith can fully be comprehended only in the form of love.

Love is not just faith; it has the power to encompass faith, reason and wisdom. The interbeing or the interconnectedness of faith, reason and wisdom can fully be seen and experienced only through love. Jesus is the epitome of love. One of the greatest commandments he gave is, 'love your neighbour as you love yourself'. This command speaks not just of inclusion, but immersion, which is the greatest form of interbeing. Hence, love, if expressed and experienced, can integrate faith, reason and wisdom in their entirety. The world today is in need of love that can make life fully human and fully alive. I wish, all the perspectives had the courage and conviction to include love, the weaver in the web.

5. Conclusion: I would like to conclude my observation by quoting Pope Francis. “At time we lose people because they don’t understand what we are saying, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity and import an intellectualism foreign to our people. For ordinary people the mystery enters through the heart”⁷. Love is the function of heart. Let this seminar help all of us to discover, rediscover and experience the power and purpose of this mystery of love that is Jesus, the Weaver in the web of faith,reason and wisdom.

Annexure 1 Deep-Ecology framework to assess the degree of self-assertive and integrative nature of the Perspectives on Faith, Reason and Wisdom				
Perspective:				
	Faith*	Reason*	Wisdom*	Remarks
Thinking (Self-assertive)				
Rational				
Analysis				
Reductionist				
Linear				
Thinking (Integrative)				
Intuitive				
Synthesis				
Holistic				
Non-linear				
Values (Self-assertive)				
Expansion				
Competition				
Quantitative				
Dominance				
Values (Integrative)				
Conservation				
Cooperation				
Quality				
Partnership				

Notes

1. Neuhaus J.Richard (1988): : A Passion for Truth: The Way of Faith and Reason (http://bearspace.baylor.edu/Scott_Moore/www/Phi_Rel_info.html)
2. Pope John Paul II (1988): Fides et Ratio, Vatican II (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides)
3. White J.Thomas (2009): Wisdom in the Face of Modernity(Faith and Reason: Studies in Catholic Theology and Philosophy (<http://www.amazon.com/Wisdom-Face-Modernity-Faith-Reason/dp/1932589554>)
4. <http://bodhileaf.wordpress.com/2009/05/25/understanding-interbeing/>
5. Capra, Fritjof (1996): *Web of Life*, Harper Collins, London
6. The sheet at annexure 1 can be used to assess the self-assertive and the integrative nature of each of the perspectives presented in the seminar.
7. *Asian Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 58/5, Sept.2013