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Nature, Dynamics And Praxis Of Faith, Reason And Wisdom Theological Perspectives

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Abstract: This essay discusses the nature, dynamics and praxis of reason, faith and wisdom in the context of our life, mission and our journey towards our final goal. I begin by making a brief presentation and a critique of the depiction of the relationship between reason, philosophy, faith, theology and wisdom in Pope John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* (FR). I then critically consider the approach of Raimundo Panikkar to understand the nature, dynamics and praxis of faith; and finally verify the possibility of wisdom providing a framework for integrating faith and reason at a deeper level.

Key words: Faith, Reason, Wisdom, Ortho-poeisis, Ortho-praxis, foolish wisdom

Introduction

This essay discusses the nature, dynamics and praxis of reason, faith and wisdom in the context of our life, mission and our 'journey' towards our final goal. Since this journey is a present reality¹, somehow the final goal too becomes at once an ongoing experience (albeit, partially) as well as something that is yet to be arrived at in the full measure. I intend to begin by making a brief presentation and a critique of the depiction of the relationship between reason, philosophy, faith, theology and wisdom in Pope John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* (FR). I then critically consider the approach of Raimundo Panikkar to understand the nature, dynamics and praxis of faith; and finally verify the possibility of wisdom providing a framework for integrating faith and reason at a deeper level.

Some initial clarifications

At the outset we must acknowledge that a clear distinction between faith, reason and wisdom may exist in the Greco-Latin-Christian tradition; but not in several others elsewhere in the world.² In fact it is acknowledged that separation of theology/faith from philosophy led to some of the main disasters of late 18th and 19th centuries in Europe.³ These continue to this day in the form of philosophies of radical scepticism and agnosticism, atheistic humanism, nihilism and consequent totalitarian ideologies and regimes, relativism and provisionalism (FR 45, 46). It is equally disastrous when theology is separated from wisdom and from life in general.

Since the point of reference of our discourse is the human being, reason as such cannot be left out of any kind of human act. But one can speak of different types of reason. The *discursive reason*: Here belong science and philosophy. Faith is the human response to the Divine revelation and theology is the articulation of what is received in revelation. Though human reason is involved in this process, it cannot be restricted to its *discursive* nature alone. There can be *intuitive*, *aesthetic* and other forms of reason involved here.

In Western thinking we can broadly identify four positions regarding the relationship between faith and reason: 1) faith dislodged from reason, (St. Paul, Tertullian, Luther, Kant, and Kierkegaard) 2) reason based on faith (Augustine, Anselm, and Barth) 3), autonomy of faith and of reason; yet their relatedness (Aquinas), and 4) harmony of faith with reason (Spinoza, Hegel, Leibnitz).⁴

The Roman Catholic position concerning the issue of the relationship between faith and reason can be summarised as: *fides non destruit sed perficit rationem* (this in fact is a paraphrasing of the formula: *gratia non destruit sed perficit naturam*). That is to say that between faith and reason there can never be a real contradiction, but only a substantial harmony.⁵ The four main stages in the development of the doctrine of harmony between faith and reason can be traced as follows: (1) origin of the doctrine (Clement of Alexandria, who actually moves away from Pauline distaste for pagan philosophy and considers it as the highest positive achievement of pagan culture); (2) defence of this doctrine against the “double truth

theory” (Aquinas); (3) defence of the harmony between faith and scientific reason (Vatican I); (4) defence of the harmony between faith and “cultural” reason (Vatican II).⁶

In more recent times, what Clement of Alexandria considered harmony between faith and philosophy is interpreted by Antonio Rosmini-Serbati and Cardinal Newman as harmony between faith and science. Catholic theologians such as Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu extended this view to speak about a possible harmony between faith and cultural reason. Just as grace does not destroy nature but only perfects it, so does it perfect culture. Hence a harmony between faith and cultural reason can be meaningfully posited.⁷ Obviously such a harmony does not exclude mutual critique, which in turn is intrinsic to a process of perfection.⁸ In this sense, faith life denotes a journey. As *Lumen Fidei* of pope Francis rightly puts it, “faith ‘sees’ to the extent that it journeys, to the extent that it chooses to enter into the horizons opened up by God’s word” (no. 9).

In this context *Gaudium et Spes* strongly affirms that the gospel “takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age, and with supernatural riches it causes them to blossom, as it were, from within; it fortifies, completes, and restores them in Christ.”(No 58).⁹

***Fides et Ratio* on the interrelation between reason, philosophy, wisdom, faith and theology**

The biblical wisdom literature remarkably exhibits the relationship between knowledge gained by faith and that gained by reason. A very striking feature of this literature contains not only the faith of Israelites but also the wisdom of other civilizations (cf. Sir 14: 20-27) (FR 16). Prov 16:9 sums up an ideal collaboration of human reason and faith: “The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps”. In understanding the course of history the collaboration of faith and reason is held to be of special significance in the Christian tradition. In this process, reason is denied absolute autonomy. It is faith that makes it ‘see’ the fact that God is active in the historical events (FR 16). To see history in the larger framework of God’s activity is the true knowledge that texts such as Prov 1:7;

Sir 1:14 speak of: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”/ knowledge.

But what is ‘fear of God’? Among other things it can also be understood as the awe at created reality which is the starting point of philosophical enquiry. Awe is followed by speculation and construction of logically coherent affirmations, which is done to ensure an organic unity of their content (FR 4). A similar process is clearly visible at the origin and in the historical development of Christianity when it encountered various cultures in the context of its proclamation. In the early Christian ages Justin Martyr was a pioneer in relating philosophical truth to that which was revealed in Jesus Christ. In the thinking of Clement of Alexandria, the defence of faith is the primary role of philosophy.¹⁰

The mutually complimenting roles of faith and reason are considered essential for an enlightened Christian life. The teaching of Vatican II echoes it when it says: “Methodical research, in all realms of knowledge, if it respects... moral norms, will never be genuinely opposed to faith: the reality of the world and of faith have their origin in the same God” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 36). Indeed faith divorced from reason can end up being a question of mere subjective emotion and worse, as superstition, just as reason having no links to faith can lose sight of the ultimate dimension of existence. It is for this reason “[F]aith and philosophy recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy. The *parrhesia* of faith must be matched by the boldness of reason.” (FR 48)

The interrelation between faith¹ and reason is seen in the very nature and functioning of theology, which is governed by a bi-polar methodological principle: the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*. The first refers to the appropriation of revelation and the consequent formation of the sacred scripture, sacred tradition and the living magisterium. The second is at work in responding to the questions that need speculative enquiry. The role of philosophy is obvious in the second. In the first, philosophy facilitates a correct *auditus fidei* by its study of the dynamics of human knowledge, language and other communication forms (FR 65).

In this context, the knowledge of the role of culture becomes significant, though no specific culture or philosophy as such can gain priority over others in providing the ultimate criterion for truth (FR 72). The interaction between the Gospel and culture is obvious. Indeed “culture itself has an intrinsic capacity to receive divine Revelation” (FR 71). In such interactions, the Gospel does not destroy culture; rather it liberates it from distortions caused by sin thereby enabling it to “develop in new ways” (FR 71).

FR makes a special mention of Indian traditions and encourages us to “draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with [Christian] faith, in order to enrich Christian thought.” Three criteria are suggested to be employed in this process: First, “the universality of the human spirit, whose basic needs are the same in the most disparate cultures.” The second, “in engaging great cultures for the first time, the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history.” And the third, in affirming the uniqueness and originality of the Indian thought one should not imagine that “a particular cultural tradition should remain closed in its difference and affirm itself by opposing other traditions.” (FR 72)

In this connection Thomas Guarino points out that just as it took time to develop a certain degree of consistency in adapting the cultural forms to articulate Christian faith in the early ages, so too it would need sufficient time to judge the adequacy of such adaptations at present.¹¹

Finally, when it comes to religion and faith a fine balance needs to be struck between various realms of human activity. *Fides et Ratio* cites the following insight from St. Bonaventure, who points out the inadequacy of “reading without repentance, knowledge without devotion, research without the impulse of wonder, prudence without the ability to surrender to joy, action divorced from religion, learning sundered from love, intelligence without humility, study unsustained by divine grace, thought without the wisdom inspired by God”.¹² And hence the encyclical intends to maintain the mystery dimension of faith that falls beyond the confines of reason: “Reason

cannot eliminate the mystery of love which the Cross represents, while the Cross can give to reason the ultimate answer which it seeks. It is not the wisdom of words, but the Word of Wisdom which Saint Paul offers as the criterion of both truth and salvation.” (FR 23).

In summary FR affirms:

- o The distinct fields of reason and faith and yet their inseparability and complementarity.
- o Dignity of human reason in terms of its God-given capacity to probe deeper into truth and arrive at certainties, though not at the full truth.
- o Necessity of faith to provide the safeguards to reason which otherwise could end up in darkness.
- o Need of reason for faith which otherwise could end up being superstitious.

What kind of philosophy according to FR is consistent with Christian revelation? Three criteria are mentioned:

- o It must have nothing less than the ultimate and overarching meaning of life (the sapiential dimension) as the object of its search (FR 82).
- o It should affirm the “human capacity *to know the truth*, to come to a knowledge which can reach objective truth by means of the *adaequatio rei et intellectus*.” (*Summa Theologiae*, I, 16, 1. Cited in FR 82). That is, it should uphold an epistemology that is related to some sort of realism.
- o It should be “capable of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth” (FR 83)

A critique of the main thrust of the *Fides et Ratio*

It is clear that FR demands certain realism and a foundationalism in prescribing the adequacy of a philosophical foundation for faith and theology. However, such factors are to be applied within the framework of the *auditus fidei-intellectus fidei*. Hence the employing of philosophy is subjected to theological criteria. Further, by

emphasising the principle of not favouring any particular philosophy over others a priori, the encyclical looks for “new and creative syntheses to express the truth of Christian faith”, thereby remaining open for some sort of pluralism.¹³ However, the autonomy of human reason is clearly stressed. Therefore, theology cannot, in a unilateral manner, demand philosophy to adapt itself to the demands of religion. In this context the encyclical’s distinction between “valid autonomy” of reason and its “self-sufficiency” is important (FR 75). While the former can be legitimately held, the latter can be upheld only by subjecting divine revelation to human reason – indeed an untenable position.¹⁴

The pluralism envisaged in FR can be summarised as follows:

- Approaches other than Greek philosophy are not precluded (FR 72)
- The Church does not favour any one philosophy a priori; nor does it have a philosophy of its own (FR 49, 76)
- , “No historical form of philosophy can legitimately claim to embrace the totality of truth” (FR 51).
- The Magisterium has no competence to direct/ compel theologians to follow particular methods (FR 64)
- “There are many paths which lead to truth ... [and] any one of these paths may be taken, as long as it leads ... to the Revelation of Jesus Christ” (FR 38)

The encyclical’s demand for some sort of realism and foundationalism in theology should be understood as a reaction to extreme forms of constructivism and conceptual pragmatism. Hence it demands that theological statements should at least refer to a really and objectively existing reality.¹⁵ Otherwise “there would be no Revelation of God, but only the expression of human notions about God” (FR 84).

Looking at the encyclical more critically we can make the following observations:

With all its openness to plurality, FR still does not seem to be adequately addressing some of the issues raised by the disciplines

of current epistemology and hermeneutics; such as the role of subjectivity and historicity in the process of human knowing.¹⁶ Hence the contemporary search for the middle grounds between nihilism and foundationalistic metaphysics is not seriously considered by the encyclical. Between rejecting relativism (FR 80) and affirming foundationalistic metaphysics as the only alternative, the encyclical does not seem to be sharing the concerns of many a current thinker such as Gadamer and Habermas of looking for other possible alternatives. In other words the encyclical does not show sufficient awareness of the situated nature and the linguistic and historical limitations of human reason.

Just as a religion bereft of reason can turn out to be dangerous to human life, so too reason without a balancing dialogue with faith can be pathological and destructive, as we have seen in the modern era.¹⁷ Though the encyclical affirms the importance of a dialogue between faith and reason, it does not show adequate suspicion about reason when it advocates a return to metaphysics.

An alternative approach: faith as *orthopraxis*

Faith in God is essential for salvation. However, I have always wondered whether it would not amount to positing a certain pettiness in God if we believe that God would save us only if we hold on to some faith propositions (orthodoxy). On the other hand if our salvation depended on our doing certain deeds (morality), wouldn't salvation cease to be a gratuitous gift and be only a reward for good behaviour? The third position is that living morally amounts to actually accepting God's free gift of salvation. This is a conceptually unclear statement. Panikkar's deliberation on the nature, dynamics and praxis of faith can be seen a response to this problematic.

Faith, according to Panikkar, is *orthopraxis*, understood as the most fundamental act that manifests itself as the openness of oneself to the possibility of perfection of one's being.¹⁸ It is the existential 'thirst' that moves one towards the Absolute. It is at once "seeking as well as the finding, deriving from inquisitive man."¹⁹ We are at once reminded of the *supernatural existential* as posited by Karl Rahner. Such concepts are closely linked.

Panikkar points out three distinct ways of understanding faith. They are: *orthodoxy*, *orthopoiesis*, and *orthopraxis*. The first refers to the primacy of Truth and identifies faith with holding on to correct doctrinal propositions. The second, in its emphasis on the correct moral behaviour, identifies faith with “the attitude and moral deportment which leads man to his destiny.” The first of these can turn out to be “dogmatism” while the second “moralism”. Panikkar is careful to point out that these two need not necessarily be false, but are “unilateral”. That is, “as does *orthodoxy*, *orthopoiesis* has its place in a global conception of faith. However, the relationship is not reversible: negative moral deportment could be an obstacle to a real life of faith, but an irreproachable ethical life is not equivalent to a life of faith.”²⁰

Faith as *orthopraxis* links religion to our very being seen as act. “If man as such is a religious animal, his religion cannot be a sect; his religiousness cannot be one element among others, or a mere ‘virtue’ (cf. *Sum. Theol.*, I-II, q. 60, a. 3). Rather his religion must be this movement which penetrates the totality of his being in re-joining his most profound existence to its source, and faith must be what gives him liberty.”²¹

It is clear that Panikkar’s usage (as in Aristotle) of *orthopoiesis* refers to the human activity which primarily affects an external object; whereas, *orthopraxis* while containing within itself a *poiesis* “reverts on the agent himself and transforms him.”²² The first type of activity is represented by *facere*; the second, making the human being a real agency can be called more an *agere*. Faith as an *agere* (praxis) makes man himself, thereby completes him and saves him.²³ “The effects of *praxis* are part of man’s very being: it is the salvific activity *par excellence*. In a certain metaphysical framework, *praxis* is that activity by which the potentiality of the human being is actualized.”²⁴ The author of the letter to the Hebrews is right in saying: “Now faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1, KJV). Faith as the *orthopraxis* which refers to the most fundamental act of self-realization in human beings indeed is geared towards the “things hoped for” – the finality of humanity.²⁵ The *orthopraxis* understood in this way is conceptually articulated in the doctrinal statements of a religious tradition. When

it is perceived in terms of a righteous living, it takes the form of moral injunctions.²⁶

In the perception of Panikkar, faith as *orthopraxis* has a social/communitarian dimension. It constitutes those actions of the human individual which contribute towards the full flowering of a humane society.²⁷ Such contributions in their genuine sense should not be seen only as affecting persons other than oneself; and hence a sort of *orthopoiesis*. They affect oneself as much as they do others. The human being indeed is ‘metaphysically’ a social being.²⁸

We now understand why faith is absolutely necessary for salvation. For, faith by its very definition (as Panikkar understands) is the bridge/ the very possibility that links us to our ultimate goal.²⁹ In this sense faith for Panikkar is a given state of affairs of the human condition as creature. Hence he can speak about the faith of an atheist as “what permits him to discover himself entirely divorced from any theistic transcendence. This faith alone, so he says, offers him the possibility of realizing his life’s destiny. Christian theology here cannot escape the alternative: either only those who have Christian faith are saved, or salvific faith can also be found among the so-called ‘non-believers.’”³⁰ In this way, revelation, to be truly humanly intelligible, has to be presented to the human subject as the answer to his/ her fundamental quest. Hence the nature of revelation corresponds to the structure of the human condition of faith.³¹

In the perception of Panikkar if *faith* is the human condition of being open to the ultimate goal, *faith-act* is the human response to this condition.³² Such an act, if misled, could take the individual away from the Goal (a case of faulty faith-act). But faith as such is the givenness of all human beings. If the faith-act is appropriate it leads us to the ultimate Goal which is the Beatific Vision. The itinerant human condition, that faith is, is meant to end up in the Vision, the fullness of the things hoped for (Heb 11:1).³³

In summary, we can say in the words of Panikkar

The essence of faith seems to me to lie in the question rather than in the answer, in the inquisitive attitude, the desire, rather than in the concrete response one gives to it. Faith is the existential “container” rather than the intellectual content of

“that thing” which we try to describe. It is not only in those who give a correct response, but also in all those who authentically seek, desire, love, wish ..., in those who are of “good will.” The proper realm of faith is in the orthopraxis, in those right actions that men believe they have to perform in order to be what they believe they have to be.³⁴

A critical evaluation

Panikkar defines faith-act as the response to the faith-condition (*orthopraxis*). But he does not tell us how to verify whether a particular faith-act actually performs this function. In fact this is a common difficulty in all the existential and transcendental approaches to faith. Is it left to the discretion of an individual? Does it amount to being guided by an external authority? Or is it both? One thing however is clear. A human act whether in terms of a belief or a deed, to the extent that it is actually helpful towards responding positively to the existential faith-condition alone becomes the genuine faith-act. Hence the criterion for judging its authenticity cannot be an external authority as such but its actual consequence for the individual. Hence ‘dogmatism’ and ‘moralism’ as such have no place in Panikkar’s depiction of faith-response that is essential for salvation. Salvation is neither a reward for our good behaviour nor is it some automatic event that depends on what faith propositions one holds on to. It is rather a free gift of God already given at the very creation of the human being in the image and likeness of God. It needs to be fully realized by the faith-acts as explicated above, both at the individual and the communitarian levels.

- *Dhharma*, derived from the Sanskrit root *dhr*, is a good rendering of *faith*. It points towards being held together – a relatedness in all that is real. Being faithful to the demands of this relatedness is justice. Hence, faith intrinsically implies justice

- Pluralism granted by FR is subjected to the deposit of faith and to the authority of the Pastors (FR 76). But in Panikkar’s perspective it should be submitted to the ultimate goal of the human being. In the context of John’s gospel this attains a special significance. There the emphasis is on believing in the Son that

leads to attaining eternal life. This believing is not basically a question of giving intellectual and much less oral assent to a set of propositions enshrined in the creed; but of responding to the faith (existential openness) in terms of one's discipleship of the Son.

- The *infused wisdom* (cf. A. Dulles, below) is related to faith understood in Panikkar's sense. Infused wisdom refers more to an enlightened state of existence than to a specific content. Such an enlightened state is part of the awareness of the openness to the Transcendence. Wisdom as such being an awareness (*prajna*) unlike knowledge (*jnana*) lacks a definite cognitive content. It is the mindfulness or *prajna* (a Buddhist term) of the state of existence.³⁵ It can be readily related to the awareness of Panikkar's sense of faith.

- Panikkar has defined faith in transcendental and existential categories, giving a rather negligible importance to its historical dimensions.³⁶ As J. B. Metz has pointed out, such an understanding can lead to an excessive individualism in the understanding and in the practice of faith, leaving little room for communitarian and historical aspects. This is where the ecclesial dimension that is so much central to Ratzinger's fundamental theology³⁷ is absent in Panikkar's depiction.

Wisdom and aesthetics

Albert Einstein after attending a concert by the violinist Yehudi Menuhin is reported to have said to the musician "Thank you, Mr. Menuhin; you have again proved to me that there is a God in heaven."³⁸ In a similar vein Richard Viladesau opines: "aesthetic experience seems to play a major role—at least for some people—in the exercise of the practical judgment for belief in God—perhaps a great deal more than the traditional 'proofs' of God's existence set forth in apologetic theology."³⁹ Aesthetic experience can be more persuasive than rational arguments in the religious realm. Wisdom and aesthetic experience are closely related. Wisdom is 'produced' in an aesthetic experience; and in its turn a 'wise expression' can give rise to a very enlightening aesthetic experience in the 'audience'.

Wisdom is of various types. Avery Dulles makes a distinction between *philosophical wisdom* (rational), *theological wisdom* (the articulated form of what is received in revelation) and *infused wisdom* which results from savouring (*sapere – sapientia*) the things known in faith.⁴⁰ The *infused wisdom* is of special interest and involves a unique type of reason. The *infused wisdom* is a combination of divine revelation, human contemplation and intuition. It is here that human discursive reason is at once included and transcended. Hence the *infused wisdom* is neither irrational nor a-rational; but meta-rational. It is the realm that offers the necessary space for the inclusion of both faith and reason and their mutual integration at a deeper level.

The original quest of philosophy understood as the ‘love of wisdom’ actually corresponds to that of a genuine religion. It is the personal transformation. It is in this sense that Justin the Martyr had found Christianity a true philosophy – a way of life that is based on salvific wisdom. It is only after Descartes that philosophy came to be known as a “knowing process by an unaided reason from any other non-rational sources”.⁴¹ It is also important to distinguish between wisdom as one of the intellectual virtues and wisdom as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. While faith accepts the divine truth as it is given in revelation, the Spirit’s gift of wisdom enables spiritual discernment in this process (FR 44).

In general Christian theological tradition fails to appreciate the histories of other peoples as capable of being locations of God’s revelation. Hence the discourse on general revelation is focussed excessively on texts such as Rom 1 and 2, John 1, and Acts 17, almost to the neglect of the narratives of Melchizedek king of Salem (Gen 14:18), Abimelech king of Gerar (Gen 20:3f), Pharaoh Neco (2 Chr 35:21-22) and Lemuel (Prov 31:1) etc., who fall outside the boundaries of the covenant community, and yet have God’s word functioning in their lives. In general Christian theology is impoverished to the extent that it separates the ‘redemptive’ from the ‘creational’ and prefers the former at the neglect of the latter; and prefers the ‘propositional’ at the cost of the ‘narrative’.⁴²

The issue of general revelation in the bible, among other things, is also related to the wisdom of people falling outside the covenant

community. For instance see the following textual references in the book of Proverbs: “The words of Agur son of Jakeh” (30:1-33), “the words of King Lemuel . . . that his mother taught him” (31:1-9). These names do not sound typically Israelite. Their presence indicates the recognition of God’s revelatory truth in the wisdom of Israel’s neighbours.⁴³

Scholars have pointed out a similar recognition, at least an implicit one, in the Lukan text of Acts 17. Paul, in this text is far from being manipulative just in order to get the approval of his audience. 17:28 actually cites poets Epimenides (“in him we live and move and have our being”) and Aratus (“For we too are his offspring”) in recognizing in the Athenians a desire to know the unknown God. What is more surprising is that the poets cited by Paul are not referring to some general, spiritual principles, but are very specific in their reference: Zeus. Epimenides composes the words of Minos, the son of Zeus: “They fashioned a tome for thee, O holy and high one – The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies! But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest for ever, for in thee we live and move and have our being.” (*Florae Semiticae* X).⁴⁴ The original text of Aratus which Paul cites, reads: “It is with Zeus that every one of us in every way has to do, for we are also his offspring” (*Phaenomena* 5).⁴⁵

Albeit this is not to suggest that Paul professes faith in Greek deities, but to affirm that he sees the Greek theological articulations as consisting of traces of the real experience of the one, true God. Paul indeed has left us sufficient cues for relating special revelation to general revelation. The apparent failure of the Christian theological tradition to build on this seems to be springing from the failure to see the vast range of the activity of the Spirit, perhaps beyond the visible Church confines. St Irenaeus of Lyons spoke of the Son and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father, active in history.⁴⁶ That is how he sought to posit a unity of God’s involvement in history in and through his Son and Spirit. Documents like *Dominus Iesus* and *Verbum Domini* (no. 15) assert that to conceive of two parallel salvation economies one related to the Logos (incarnate) and another (broader) related to the Spirit, is contrary to Catholic faith. But that precisely is the point: how to see the unity between these two in their action in the varied cultures and history of peoples – a daunting

task for speculative theologians, but certainly not an impossible reality for God!

The special role of “foolish” wisdom

In the biblical perspective, the “fear of the Lord” is the source of wisdom (Prov 9:10; Ps 111:10). For the modern world, knowledge is power, and wisdom, for all practical purposes, seems to be a lost entity. This is visible in the contemporary world, where the explosion of knowledge, which is bereft of wisdom has not been able to curb human degradation. Rightly then, “the future of humankind belongs not to the increase of sciences but to the rediscovery of wisdom, because only ‘wisdom gives life’ (Eccl 7:12)”.⁴⁷

However, as pointed out earlier, wisdom is of various kinds. Not all of them are helpful for the full blossoming of human reality. In this context Peter C. Phan makes a special case for a particular form of wisdom, which he calls “irony”, “fantasy” and knowledge illuminated by love.⁴⁸ This is the wisdom attributed to the Christian category of the ‘wise fool’ or the ‘holy fool’, what he calls *mōrosophia*.⁴⁹

He gives the following examples: “fool for Christ’s sake” in Christian tradition, the Sufi *majzub*, the *avadhuta*⁵⁰ in Hindu tradition, the “holy madness” (expressed in *koans*, and even certain forms of physical violence) of Zen tradition, even the court jester that critiqued the political affairs with impunity etc.⁵¹ Such forms of wisdom and its expressions can be subversive of the status quo, and hence those who possess them are feared and even brutally liquidated. Jesus and Socrates can be seen standing in this tradition. Their ‘insanity’ was simultaneously enlightening as well as subversive. Phan justifies the necessity of this sort of wisdom on the basis of the fact that reality is paradoxical and hence cannot be comprehended in terms of straightjacketed concepts. However the ‘foolish wisdom’ can take destructive forms and hence needs true love as the guiding principle.⁵² For “in the final analysis, knowledge is but the luminous radiance of love.”⁵³

This is demonstrated in the “wisdom of the cross”. The apparent powerlessness of the cross destroys the powers of darkness with

the power of self-giving love. Wisdom of the cross is certainly neither a passive acceptance nor a masochistic glorification of suffering as such; but is a faith-daring that is not scared of making specific options against the forces of evil and to pay the price. The faith-daring in this sense actually is daring love. Its options are the result of an unflinching commitment to the Reign of God, which makes one develop faith-based doubts. A faith-based doubt refers to the suspicion, prompted by one's faith commitment, about all that is anti-Reign, however 'sacrosanct' it may claim to be. This is because in the Biblical perspective it would be self-contradictory to understand commitment to the Reign, which is bereft of commitment to justice and love. Abraham Heshel has articulated this sharply. According to him, God's justice "is not an interference, but an *a priori* to biblical faith, that is self-evident; and not an added attribute to his essence, but given with the very thought of God. It is inherent in his essence and identified with his mercy."⁵⁴

Conclusion

"Knowledge of the Lord" as Is 11:9 presents, or the vision of 'God being all in all' as 1 Cor 15:28 articulates, is the ultimate goal of creation. It is analogous to the highest *jñāna* or *sārupya bhakti* that some Indian traditions speak of. There are unique expressions and depictions of similar visions in various traditions. Faith indeed culminates into such a beatific vision. Whether we understand faith in terms of propositions or as moral injunctions or simply as the existential givenness that drives the human person beyond every limit towards the Ultimate, the goal is the "knowledge of the Lord". Such 'knowledge' is already present in the human being in its potency form as the *sensus divinitatis*. It is part of what the Scriptures call the 'image of God' (cf. Gen 1:26f; Rom 1:20f; Jn 1:1-18; Col 1:15f).⁵⁵ It needs to be realized in fuller measure. It is more a unitive knowledge than a content that bears the characteristic of a subject-object duality. Reason, too, to the extent it is related to faith as FR insists, is a helpful means in this journey towards the Ultimate. In the historical interval one could encounter many wisdom systems. Not all of them nor the entirety of any one of them can be considered helpful towards the full blossoming of the entire creation. The discerning wisdom

that is needed in this context is churned out from a variety of sources: A life of commitment to the Reign, a faith-based contemplation on reality; reason, both personal and communitarian; dialogical relationship between one's own and other religious traditions; signs of the times encountered in the critical engagement with history etc. are some of these. In this way reason, faith, and human wisdom, when guided by an higher form of discerning wisdom, act as signposts in our historical engagement and pilgrimage towards the Ultimate.

Notes

1. "... [M]en and women are on a journey of discovery which is humanly unstoppable - a search for the truth and a search for a person to whom they might entrust themselves" (*Fides et Ratio* 33. Henceforth FR)
2. For instance it would not make much sense to bring in such a distinction especially in the *jòâna mârğa* schools of Asia or in the Hebrew biblical tradition.
3. For instance, the Atheistic philosophies of Karl Marx (and the bloody revolutions that it gave rise to in the later centuries), Nietzsche and the like; enormous blood shed caused by French revolution, which had clear anti-faith bias; modernity's uncritical faith in human rationality bereft of faith and the consequences that occurred in the 20th century such as Nazi holocaust etc.
4. Theodore T. Shimmyo makes this classification based on several scholarly studies. See his "Faith and reason: A unificationist view", in *Journal of Unification Studies*, 3 1999-2000, pp. 79-80.
5. See Battista Mondin, "Faith and reason in the Roman Catholic thought from Clement of Alexandria to Vatican II", in *Dialogue and Alliance*, 1 no 1 Spr 1987, p 18.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. p. 23.
8. There is a distinction between 'culture' and 'cultural reason'. The cultural reason being shaped by a culture (and vice versa; and in reality there is no reason that is not shaped by culture) is part of the culture but not the culture itself. It is this reason that preserves a culture and justifies the related cultural norms. It is the pervading

rationality of a culture. I don't mean to say that such reason is entirely liberated in any culture; nor is it entirely corrupt. Therefore there is a need for a mutual critique between faith and cultural reason. The cultural reason is not a monolithic whole even within a given culture; just as a given culture is not a monolithic whole. It is not even a fixed entity, but exists in a flux of change and constancy (*Evangelii Gaudium* 122). For instance: it is the same cultural reason in certain parts of India that upholds non-violence towards cows and at the same time justifies terrible violence against a *panchama*. It is the same cultural reason in the West that upholds individual's dignity and simultaneously promotes dehumanizing 'individualism'. The former expressions of these two cultural reasons can be in harmony with Christian faith/Gospel. The latter expressions in both the cases need to be critiqued. Indeed behind the 'use and throw culture' that *Evangelii Gaudium* speaks about, there is a cultural reason that simultaneously gives rise to a spirit of never ending innovations and discoveries, which can be evaluated positively. In fact *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 116 clearly hints at the possible harmony between positive aspects of cultures and the Gospel.

9. "Similarly the Church has existed through the centuries and has utilized the resources of different cultures in its preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ, to examine and understand it more deeply, and to express it more perfectly in the liturgy and in various aspects of the life of the faithful. Nevertheless, the Church has been sent to all ages and nations and, therefore, is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, to any one particular way of life, or to any customary practices, ancient or modern. The Church is faithful to its traditions and is at the same time conscious of its universal mission; it can, then, enter communion with different forms of culture"(*Gaudium et Spes* 58).
10. "The teaching of the Saviour is perfect in itself and has no need of support, because it is the strength and the wisdom of God. Greek philosophy, with its contribution, does not strengthen truth; but, in rendering the attack of sophistry impotent and in disarming those who betray truth and wage war upon it, Greek philosophy is rightly called the hedge and the protective wall around the vineyard"*Stromata* I, 20, 100, 1: SC 30, 124. Cited in FR 38.
11. Thomas Guarino, "Fides et Ratio: Theology and contemporary pluralism", in *Theological Studies*, 62 no 4 D 2001, p 690.

12. *Prologus*, 4: *Opera Omnia*, Florence, 1891, vol. V, 296. Cited in FR 105.
13. Thomas Guarino, op.cit., p. 686
14. Ibid. pp. 686-687.
15. Ibid., p. 691.
16. Ibid., p. 693.
17. Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization* (San Francisco, California: Ignatius, 2007), p. 29. Referred in Pablo Blanco Sarto, “Logos and Dia-logos: Faith, reason, (and love) according to Joseph Ratzinger“, in *Anglican Theological Review*, 92 no 3 Sum 2010, p. 508.
18. In a related way James Fowler treats development of faith as the development of ego (the self-understanding), which in turn is essentially a relational reality. See his perceptive article, which exhibits an interdisciplinarity of ontology, epistemology, psychology and theology – “Faith and the Structure of Meaning” in Christiane Brusselmans, ed., *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity*, (Morristown N.F.: Silver Burdett, 1980), esp. p. 11.
19. Raimundo Panikkar, “Faith: A constitutive dimension of man”, in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 8 no 2 Spr 1971, p. 232.
20. Ibid. p. 237.
21. Ibid. p. 232.
22. Ibid. pp. 237-238.
23. Ibid., p. 238.
24. Ibid. pp. 238-239.
25. In this context the comment on Is 7:9 (“If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all”) in *Lumen Fidei* is very enlightening: Standing firm in faith is necessary for Israel for being ‘established’ (LXX uses the verb *synete*) as a people, (LF 23, 24). Panikkar’s understanding of faith as orthopraxis, indeed refers to that which ‘establishes’ or builds us up according to what we are destined to be by God.
26. The assurance is rendered as ὑποστάσις (hypostasis) in the Hebrews text. Seeing the connection between Heb 2:1f and 11:1 Panikkar notes that “the faith as this hypostasis has its στάσις

(stand) in the hope for what is not yet and whose ὑπο (base), is found in what can never appear, in the radical apophatism of that which, in as much as it is that, can never have any epiphany because its φαινόμενον (phenomenon), is already the εἰκὼν (image), the λόγος (word)". See R. Panikkar, op.cit., pp.245-246.

27. Ibid., p. 239
28. I have dealt with this issue in my article, "Some Religious Anthropologies and Their Implications", in *Journal of Indian Theology* Vol VI, No.2 (May-August), 2013, pp. 27-51.
29. R. Panikkar, op.cit. p. 240.
30. Ibid., pp. 240-241
31. Ibid., p. 247.
32. Ibid., p. 246.
33. The Encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (29, 30) of Pope Francis rightly points out how faith is both, a 'hearing' (Word) and a 'seeing'. As he points out we see this combination vividly in John's gospel. In the Indian traditions too we have *darśana* (sight/ vision) and *śruti* (that which is heard) to denote the Reality of the Beyond impinging on us and transforming us.
34. Ibid. p. 248.
35. In Mahāyāna Buddhism *vijñāna* stands for reason, in so far it represents a mental activity, but *prajña* is mindfulness or an enlightened awareness. "The defining characteristic of *vijñāna*, says Suzuki, 'is dualism in the sense that there is one who sees and there is the other that is seen — the two standing in opposition.'" See Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. "Reason and Intuition in Buddhist Philosophy," in Charles Moore (ed.), *The Japanese Mind*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967), p. 66. "The principle of differentiation, [it] can never see *prajña* in its oneness" (Ibid. p. 67). On the other hand, *prajña* as an integrating principle, where "differentiation does not take place; what is seen and the one who sees are identical; it is the self-knowledge of the whole. Further, it is pure act, pure experience" (Ibid. pp. 65-67). All these citations are from: Angela Andrade, "Reason, intuition and action: A Shin Buddhist approach", in *Pure Land* (Berkeley: California), ns no 15 D 1998, p 108.

36. The communitarian character of faith is very much emphasised in LF: "Faith is necessarily ecclesial; it is professed from within the body of Christ as a concrete com-munion of believers. It is against this ecclesial backdrop that faith opens the individual Chris-tian towards all others." (no. 22)
37. "Faith is the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church, by which we obtain the privileged knowledge that we can reach through reflection and through trust. This verstehen – an understanding – takes as its starting point, stehen of being in the church. In the communion of the church – which is a reflection of the Trinity, all the truth of the faith comes into view." See Pablo Blanco Sarto, "Logos and dia-logos: Faith, reason, (and love) according to Joseph Ratzinger", in *Anglican Theological Review*, 92 no 3 Sum 2010, p. 506.
38. Albert Einstein, quoted in Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 104. Cited in Robert Johnston, "Discerning the Spirit in culture: observations arising from reflection on general revelation", in *Ex auditu*, 23, 2007, p 53.
39. Richard Viladesau, *Ibid.*, p. 107. Cited in Robert Johnston, *Ibid.*
40. Avery Dulles, "Faith, reason, and wisdom", in *Living Pulpit*, 9 no 3 Jl-S 2000, p 14.
41. Peter Simpson, "The Christianity of philosophy", in *First Things*, no 113 May 2001, p. 36.
42. Robert Johnston, *op.cit.*, p.55.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
44. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 64.
45. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 65.
46. *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 7, 4: PG 7, 992-993; V, 1, 3: PG 7, 1123; V, 6, 1: PG 7, 1137; V, 28, 4: PG 7, 1200.
47. Juergen Moltmann, "Science and wisdom", in *Theology Today*, 58 no 2 Jl 2001, p. 164.
48. We have this enlightening text from Pope Francis that emphasizes the guiding role of love and truth in our search for truth. We can as well say, love being the supreme virtue is the criterion for the au-

thenticity of wisdom: “Only to the extent that love is grounded in truth can it endure over time, can it transcend the pass-ing moment and be sufficiently solid to sustain a shared journey. If love is not tied to truth, it falls prey to fickle emotions and cannot stand the test of time... If love needs truth, truth also needs love. Love and truth are inseparable. Without love, truth becomes cold, impersonal and oppres-sive for people’s day-to-day lives. The truth we seek, the truth that gives meaning to our jour-ney through life, enlightens us whenever we are touched by love.” (LF 27)

49. See Peter C. Phan, “The wisdom of holy fools in postmodernity”, in *Theological Studies*, 62 no 4 D 2001.
50. *Avadhūta* is a Sanskrit term from some Indian religions or *Dhārmic* Traditions referring to a type of mystic or saint who is beyond egoic-consciousness, duality and common worldly concerns and acts without consideration for standard social etiquette. Such personalities “roam free like a child upon the face of the Earth”. An *avadhūta* does not identify with his mind or body or ‘names and forms’ (*nāmarūpa*). Such a person is held to be pure ‘consciousness’ (*çaitanya*) in human form. *Avadhūts* play a significant role in the history, origins and rejuvenations of a number of *Dhārmic* traditions such as Yōga, Vēdānta, Buddha dharma and Bhakti tradition (*parampara*) even as they are released from standard observances. Cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avadhuta> accessed on 8th July, 2013.
51. Peter C. Phan, op.cit., p.732.
52. Ibid., p. 750.
53. Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 81.
54. Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1992), p. 159.
55. Scott Oliphint, “Using reason by faith” in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 73, no 1 Spr 2011, p. 104f.