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## **Rationale for the Seminar**

### **Towards An Integral Approach to Religious Studies**

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### **Introduction**

Fifty years is a short span in the timeline of a nation or an institution. It is all the more true with regard to a worldwide institution like the Roman Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council impacted the Church in a decisive manner, especially in its documents and pastoral approach. Did that impact percolate to the rank and file of the church, and in a sustainable way? What does it look like after fifty years? Rather than evaluating the impact in a general way, an attempt is made in the following pages to look at one of the specific areas of its impact across inter-disciplinary lines, namely on the triptych of faith, reason and wisdom in their relatedness.

One of the major documents of the Council *Dei Verbum* (Divine Revelation) dealt with the relationship between revelation and faith, reason and faith, scripture and tradition, and the reception of the faith by the believing community etc. It was one of the first schemas to be introduced in the Council and one of the last ones to be voted on, as it was thoroughly revised and debated during the entire period of the council. The prolonged debate and discussion on the document shows the significance of the issues involved. This was a schema that was planned and prepared as per the original intent of the council and yet it underwent drastic changes precisely because the Council wanted to introduce a new vocabulary of a more dynamic approach, especially in its understanding of faith and revelation.

*Dei Verbum* rightly introduced a new vocabulary of dynamic understanding of faith as a personal response to the even more dynamic personal communication of God with humans. Faith certainly included wisdom as the mature response to the divine-human encounter. Similarly, reason as treated in the Council documents, encompassed wisdom as the climax of human endeavours and search. However in the Council documents wisdom is treated rather independently in several places. Did the Council Fathers think of wisdom as a different category, independent of faith and reason or as complementary of both? Probably there is room for research in this regard. Rather than a theoretical consideration of the issue, the JDV seminar entered upon a moderate enquiry into the inter-relatedness and inter-dependence of the triad of faith, reason and wisdom from an inter-disciplinary angle. One of the aims of such a study was to look for an integral approach to religious studies that combines faith, reason and wisdom traditions. This, we thought, was a fitting way to celebrate Vatican II in this year of faith.

## **In Search of Integration.**

The triptych of faith, reason, and wisdom has contributed immensely and differently to the advancement of human progress. However their contribution remained rather disconnected. Perhaps this could be one of the reasons for the fragmentation of societies, of cultures and of knowledge systems and the resultant violence. We chose to look at them closely and in their inter-connectedness. The emerging trends in these three areas of faith, reason and wisdom might provide us with a perspective for the future and for understanding the enormity of the fragmentation around us. One of the major concerns in our faculties of philosophy and theology is also to bring about an integral approach to religious studies. Much of the fragmentation of knowledge, and the resultant violence, are caused by the separation of the religious perspective (faith) from that of the secular (reason) to the detriment of both. An interdisciplinary approach to religious studies could minimize fragmentation of knowledge and provide an integrating tool for living.

We are living in an exciting period of the cosmic journey. We have journeyed with the universe for 13.5 billion years and have been evolving and living as humans for the last 7 million years. This gives us a new sense of inter-dependence and inter-relatedness and a new cosmic vision. Science teaches us, hypothetically though, that the universe began at a point in time and from a single point, and the metaphor used is that of a 'Big Bang'. From a theological point of view, one could say that "God expresses God's self in every aspect of created reality. So every person, every tree, every leaf, everything is a little Word of God: the Word of God being spoken in the vast spaces of the universe. And that's not metaphor. Nothing would come to be except as an expression of God's love". (Ilia Delio, <http://www.uscatholic.org/print/23530#sthash.CyX2knQr.dpuf>). If so, we can account for the cosmic intelligence and its potential for connectedness across the various spheres of life, and the wisdom that is operative in all creation. In our preoccupations with the immediate concerns, we miss the empowering richness of being connected with other dimensions of this great life force. We stay at the realm either of faith or of reason or of wisdom, and often neglect that they participate, albeit differently, in the same point of cosmic wisdom. The innate intelligence within creation at large can be accessed by insight, intelligence, intuition, and imagination. We are programmed for intelligent cooperation, not for individualistic competition; hence we can realign with the cosmic wisdom and discover the wholeness and goodness of God beyond fragmentations (O'Muruchu, 2008, cf. pp.61-63.) Probably the Indian terms of 'sraddha' and 'Prajna' come close to the holistic perspective that we are seeking.

What seems to be emerging is the desire for an integrating approach or perspective that does not stop with any of the triptych separately, rather views them in their interrelatedness. This integrating point may lie neither in faith, nor in reason nor in wisdom taken separately, but at the point of their intersection, of their inter-relatedness. Perhaps we should launch a project for a 'science of limits', science of the 'frontiers' where we discover our inter-relatedness at the inter-section of knowledge-spheres. That seems to be true with regard to the microcosm and macrocosm. A molecule is what it is, not because of protons or neutrons, but because of

both, in their relatedness. This seems to be the case with the macrocosm too. The Christian conception of God as trinity implies an eternal intersection among the persons of Trinity in an ambience of communion.

The incarnational meeting point at the borders of the human and the divine is the melting point where faith, reason and wisdom meet. The trinity of faith, reason and wisdom in their inter-relatedness announces that the real is at the frontiers. We are invited to stand at the periphery of faith and look at reason; to stand at the border of reasoning and behold the centre of faith; to stand at the frontiers of wisdom and execute faith. This intersection of borders might reveal to us an integrating epistemological tool for religious studies. Reality discloses itself at the periphery and at the core; at their intersection we discover new horizons and refreshing connectivity.

The ancient polarity between the objective-empirical and the subjective-intuitive cannot be sustained. As Ken Wilber argues, the evolutionary process is continuing in the humans through a dialectical process of human consciousness towards a new culture of integration. (Wilber, 1997, pp.73f). He holds that the kosmos laboured mightily for 13.5 billion years in every aspect in an extraordinary and all-encompassing process that hit upon humans. It cannot then cease operating – evolution for the rest of the cosmos and downfall for the humans. “If evolution is operating in the rest of the universe, then it must be operating in humans as well, which means human cultures might also evolve, which means progressively advanced forms of interaction must be emerging ... which runs smack into the contradiction known as Auschwitz”. (Wilber, 1997, p.68). Wilber argues that evolution is progressing through a culture of integration, and this integration is visible most in epistemology. Through the various philosophies and sciences, the objective-empirical and the subjective-intuitive approaches, we are moving towards an integral vision of reality. Any phenomenon can be approached in an interior and exterior fashion, and also as an individual and as a member of a collective. It is against a vast background of cultural practices and languages, meanings and contexts that one’s individual thoughts are shaped; the culture that one inherits, contains material and social components of technology, forces of production, written codes,

social systems and geopolitical locations. Wilber holds that human knowledge has four large camps: the individual-subjective camps of truthfulness, sincerity and integrity; the individual-objective side of truth, correspondence, representation and proposition. The collective-intersubjective world of justness, mutual understanding and rightness, and the collective-objective side of social systems, structures and functions - each of these is valid and cannot be dismissed. (Wilber, 1997, Cf. Introduction). An integral approach honours the entire spectrum of consciousness, the I-domain, the we-domain, and the it-domains; thus integrating art, morals, science, self, ethics and environment – the beautiful, the good and the true.

The Faith, reason and wisdom debate takes us into the origins of consciousness and into the beginnings of revelation that initiated and erupted into the evolutionary process. Such a revelatory beginning calls for an integral approach. The Second Vatican Council seems to have hinted at such an integrated approach when it said the “human mind is looking and loving what is true and good” and ‘our age, more than any of the past, needs such an ennobling wisdom’, that enables us to contemplate the mystery of God’s design”(GS 15). Perhaps the integration of faith, reason and wisdom might serve as the root-metaphor for our times and an epistemological tool for religious studies, beyond the fragmentation of knowledge systems.

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