

Editorial

Merging the Boundaries of Religion, Science, and Philosophy for Pedagogical Effectiveness

Religion, science, and philosophy, as they have evolved their independent domains over the years, have developed autonomously and, hence, have made significant impact upon human life. Each of these has continuously striven to dominate humanity at different periods in the development of human civilizations. In the course of time, however, as religion began to take control over human life, and as it realized the fact that independent operations of philosophy and sciences can result in difficult situations for matters religious (especially due to the scientific and critical approaches that these disciplines adopted about those aspects of religion which did not match with the explicit pronouncements made by philosophers and scientists). As religious leaders started to exercise undue influence (and many a time unchallengeable powers, due to political patronage) upon philosophical and scientific programmes and processes, there arose suspicion about religion and religious practices in the minds of both philosophers and scientists. This gradually led to the escalation of relationship among these three vital domains of human existence; in fact, it is this mutual distancing that played havoc upon human creativity, especially as each of these disciplines started to claim complete autonomy from each other, and began to function to the mutual exclusion and, sometimes, with mistrust and disrespect for the methods adopted by each other. These dynamics are well captured by Pope John Paul II, in his Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*: "As a result of the exaggerated rationalism of certain thinkers, positions grew more radical and there emerged eventually a philosophy which was separate from and absolutely independent of the contents of faith. Another of the many consequences of this separation was an ever deeper mistrust with regard to reason itself. In a spirit both sceptical and agnostic, some began to voice a general mistrust, which led

some to focus more on faith and others to deny its rationality altogether" (§45).

Fragmentary understanding of human person might be at the root of the exclusive divisions among various human endeavours. Although specialised subjects in human sciences have been capable of taking us deeper into the understanding of reality, undue emphasis on narrowly restricted specialisations has resulted in a divisive understanding of the very realities that human beings encounter in their lives. Probably, these divisions have become problematic as they fail to pay attention to the inner dimensions of the human person. In the modern thought, Cartesian dualistic conceptual framework has directly contributed to the deepening of dualistic understanding of reality and in making it one of mainstream approaches. Although many have disassociated with the Cartesian thought as a philosophical position, it has made lasting and dangerous inroads into human consciousness, as most of the religions also play with the same dualistic understanding of reality, as their theoretical and revelatory emphases can be made more forceful and effective only if placed against such a framework.

Further, in the modern and contemporary historical periods, we have encountered attempts both by philosophy and science to appropriate the whole gamut of religion to themselves. In other words, there were (and are) attempts to reduce or nullify religion and religious discourses as nonsensical or unintelligent, which happens due to the failure of philosophy and science to understand and appreciate the language of religion; instead, they attempted to read their own principles and dynamics, which are totally alien to religion and, as a result, found that religion cannot sustain itself; in fact, religion, as a human endeavour to approach the divine, exists and functions on its own terms. A genuine approach will try to understand and appreciate the method adopted by religion; if there are elements that are found to be problematic, it will be appropriate to address them and, thus, enhance the domain of religion than trying to nullify or reject the same.

Sciences break new grounds not always by proven experiment, although the latter is considered to be an essential aspect of a scientific position. Recent developments in physics, for example, indicate that scientists have already made a departure to entertain theories that are considered to be beautiful or logically more compelling even if experimental evidences are still lacking (as it happens, for example, among the proponents of string theory).¹ Although these attempts have been accused of blurring the boundaries between science and pseudo-science, there is a prospect that such moves could become innovative steps in exploring the unexplored domains by applying scientific principles. Although experimental evidence cannot be dismissed with, the new approaches could shed more light into the understanding of the physical reality through unconventional methods.

Such an approach may become necessary due to the limitations that we encounter in all the three domains, as they follow their own patterns which mutually exclude each other. As they all try to grapple with reality, ideally speaking, there should be common grounds, which should be capable of pooling the resources offered by the respective disciplines for the better understanding and handling of reality. However, the differences that we encounter in these domains will continue due to the very ‘fact of nature’, which is understood and approached from different vantage points. As approaches adopted by human beings differ, it is natural that each discipline identifies a set of ‘facts’, which are many a time suspiciously approached by others. As every discipline has a different set of basic premises and starting points, so also the tools employed being different, it is quite natural that they do not easily merge with each other’s points of view. It is the ‘fact of nature’, if understood from a more inclusive point of view, that can facilitate greater openness on the part of all types of sincere seekers of truth, whether they are moved by religious or rational motives.

¹Please see, for example, Stephen W. Hawking, *The Theory of Everything: The Origin and Fate of the Universe*, Beverly Hills, CA: Phoenix Books, 2005, 124-130.

At the same time, deeper the pursuit of truth progresses, more baffling would be the nature of reality unearthed. It is not because of the nature of these disciplines, but due to the very fact that deeper pursuit naturally brings forth aspects of reality hitherto unknown to humanity. Human mind, as it has progressed in its quest for understanding reality, is known to have encountered limitations in exploring the principles that underline the very nature; there are practical limits in human abilities to understand the principles and to probe the inner recesses of reality. Although each generation will try to go beyond the limits on their own, as it happens, instead of uncovering (*aletheia*) the whole reality, the subsequent generations realize that the limits are pushed further, and, hence, in need of an incessant effort to unveil the truth. This is possible in all domains: for example, religion facilitates the possibility of going deeper into the understanding of the ultimate reality, as generations continue to religiously or mystically explore it. The experiences and expertise of the previous generations become the starting point for the subsequent generations of seekers and they can, reasonably, make deeper religious explorations of the unfathomable reality to an infinite regress, if I may use such an expression (most religions would, however, indirectly deny this possibility, as they tend to attribute primacy and give a referential value to the earliest of the religious encounters and experiences and affirm them as 'foundational', the subsequent experiences being assessed against them).

If we were to look at the way sciences have progressed over the last one hundred years, we realize the same prospects with much more clarity and evidence. For example, the experiments on matter by physicists have moved from matter to atoms, from atoms to protons and neutrons, and further into the quarks within them; as this zooming in happens to understand the physical reality in greater details,² even physicists are bound to encounter domains that are 'grey' simply because the already

²Same is the case if the reverse is adopted and we begin to explore the cosmic realities in their totality.

defined concepts, definitions, and theories are insufficient to attest to the newer understanding unearthed. As these new dimensions are uncovered, it is natural that they encounter difficulties from among ‘experts’, whose positions have already been shaped by what was already known and theorised by earlier generations of scientists. Again, what is called forth is the necessity of openness among all those who are involved in genuine search for the true nature of reality, be it religious, scientific, or philosophical.

Science, most scientists claim, is a method to approach truth and to understand reality; so is religion and philosophy, although they differ in the nature and modality of making their method operational. It is true that some of these models have been effective in certain cases and some others not. Even some of the theories affirmed as having experimentally verified have been identified to be wrong at a later stage, as human ability to grasp reality goes through various phases and processes, most of which shedding further light into its understanding. Even objectivity and repeatability, identified as the core aspects of scientific method, may not suffice to ensure that one theory supersedes every other for ever; as human exploration of reality continues incessantly, it is natural that new aspects of reality are identified and, accordingly, positions are altered. This is the case with any human endeavour, including religion and philosophy. Therefore, while admitting the ability of all human disciplines, especially religion, science, and philosophy, in effectively handling reality and approaching truth with possible certainty, but within the ambit of their own divergent and limited approaches, we must leave the possibility for self-criticism and constant change open so that human ingenuity, as it unfolds in its encounter with the unfathomable reality, can take us further forward. The responsibility of all human disciplines, in this regard, is to become effective facilitators than being agents who would block this incessant process by way of excuses that would have credibility and justifiability only from their exclusive vantage points. Instead of creating roadblocks, each of these disciplines could become more effective facilitators if they could

(i) accept the fact that none of them is a complete and perfect method and (ii) learn and transform themselves by practising dialogical encounters, where (iii) constant transformation within their respective domains will be the rule than exception.

When a question pertaining to the 'religious' is asked, there is need for an answer that would be religious in its content; however, when a philosophical or scientific question about the 'religious' is asked, the approach needs to be different, as the answer should be capable of addressing the philosophical or scientific question in its full measure. This difference in approach that is proposed must be approached by science and philosophy, for example, when a religious question is asked. Instead of ridiculing religion for a different answer, which may not be acceptable to science and philosophy on their terms, it is important that all disciplines learn to respect the point of view of the other; religion should also equip itself to honour the domains of philosophy and science and their methodologies and principles, even if they tend to conflict with its own. Matters religious cannot be simply reduced to private emotions or personal feelings, which are devoid of any intelligible content and reasonable goals; there is certainly a core to religion, although it could be grasped only based on the terms of religion than the terms and conditions of philosophy and science.

Although human is rational, rationality cannot be exclusively restricted to logical rationality; reason may operate differently in different domains; further, as reason also evolves in and through the processes in which human beings participate, there could be new modes of rational operation that would emerge in the course of time; hence, denying one form of rational discourse to the total exclusion of all others will only do injustice to rationality and human ingenuity. Even physics, which claims to heavily rely on experimental evidences, had made significant progress not only by exclusively relying on proven experiments but also by reason employed intuitively, at least initially, without the support of evidences. It can be rightly called intuition, which is an ability to look into the inner recesses of reality, sometimes based on the already available evidences, but

certainly by making a leap into the inner core which remains unexplained until experimental evidence is supplied. For example, even Albert Einstein, whose Special and General Theories of Relativity have paradigmatically changed the way the whole universe is perceived and understood, has stated during his Spencer Lectures, in 1933, that “... pure thought can grasp reality, as the ancients dreamed.”³ Although many contemporary physicists may not subscribe to this position, it opens up an avenue to understand the theoretical basis of an experimental science, which also subscribes ultimately to the employment of reason to understand the reality; every tool employed for observation and measurement ultimately only aids reason in its pursuit of truth, as none of them can function on their own and, even if they function on their own, their ability to interpret the perceived truth must come from aided or unaided reason.

Although religious domain is predominantly a realm of experience (facilitated by human-divine encounters), religion is not averse to systematic approaches. If religion is looked at from a human point of view, especially as a human endeavour to grapple with the divine realm, systematisation of religious experience becomes necessary, especially for its coherent and reasonable communication both among the members of a specific religion and among the members belonging to different religious and non-religious identities. Such an approach is expected to make room for reasonable discourses in religious matters so that religions could make progress both in their self-understanding and in their mutual understanding of each other. However, those who do not want to promote furthering of religion for religious motives, but make use of the same for their ulterior motives, would insist on restricting religion to incoherent frameworks in the name of retaining and celebrating its mysterious character which defies human comprehension and any possible change or innovation.

³Albert Einstein, “On the Method of Theoretical Physics” in *Ideas and Opinions*, New York: Crown Publishing, 1954, 270.

In the wake of such developments encountered within a religion at one or another point of its historical development, science and philosophy can contribute significantly, especially in helping religions to be both self-critical and scientific. This is not to suggest that religion has to adopt the parameters of science and philosophy; but, as much as religion is a human endeavour, it should not shy away from employing human tools, especially if it could enhance its own existence, self-understanding, and ability to enhance the lives of people who have faith in their fundamental doctrines. Hence, instead of running away from science and philosophy, every religion must make reasonable use of their basic approaches. This would mean that religion, without being another science, could certainly adopt scientific approach within its domains, especially to gather better understanding of one or the other reality that it tries to grapple with. For example, when it comes to understanding the nature of the world, be it the beginning of the universe or the nature of the basic substratum, instead of blocking scientific investigations, religion could be a partner in promoting it so that humanity as a whole could gain from the results that emerge.

In the same manner, although every particular religion has its own preferred philosophical position, there is no harm in learning about the alternative philosophical theories proposed by other religions, sciences, or philosophies and organically integrate those element that are deemed to be organically consistent with its own position, thus, making itself better to serve humanity and its common good. This calls for ensuring that the fundamental experiential dimension of religion and the systematic exposition called for in exploring the realities that are religious or otherwise go hand-in-hand. It is natural that those who are deeply religious would feel more inclined towards the experiential component; they may even tend to think that their sacred domains are disturbed by the undue intervention from disciplines such as science and philosophy. However, instead of keeping aloof and camouflaging in the claims of untouchability, these religious persons, through proper initiation, should learn to associate and partner with scientists and philosophers to

ensure that they are positively supported and enriched by the expertise gathered by their respective disciplines, which together could enhance the religious domain and make it as relevant as science and philosophy.

There is a need for analytic and synthetic approaches to understand reality better and to lead it evolve further through human instrumentality. While the analytic approach will enable us to divide reality into as many divisions and subdivisions, *ad infinitum*, for arriving at better understanding, the same human mind can initiate another process of piecing together all that has been divided into parts so that a synthetic or more comprehensive picture could be arrived at. While some are more analytic, others are more synthetic; both have their advantages and disadvantages. Hence, it is important that these two approaches are not left to themselves but are seen as two integral parts of the same process. Although all human endeavours make use of these two approaches, religion, science, and philosophy fundamentally rely on them especially to make themselves operational in their respective domains. They have contributed immensely to the enhancement of human existence through their ability to reasonably integrate these aspects into their various processes. Their success would depend upon their ability to blend these approaches of analysis and synthesis in proper measure and with due diligence.

Religion, science, and philosophy differ in their methods; however, as we dive deep into their foundations, as these disciplines are only tools of human beings in exploring and understanding reality or the ultimate truth, behind their differences there is a deeper and unfathomable unity to which human beings continuously struggle to reach out. All the three, for their meaningful existence and effectiveness, need each other; each one needs to listen to the perspectives of the other so that one's own perspectives could be deepened and broadened. If this deeper unity is consciously pursued, it may lead to the emergence of a lasting sense of solidarity among human beings, facilitated and accentuated by different disciplines that human beings have developed to explore truth.

Development of different disciplines by humanity has led to the generation of categories and definitions. In fact, within the framework of each discipline, these categories and definitions facilitate better understanding and ability to handle realities with ease and convenience. However, as categories and definitions are mostly discipline-specific, strict adherence to them may cause lack of understanding and even misunderstanding, especially when certain categories and definitions are applied across disciplines; though they are helpful in human handling of reality, none of them would be foundational to reality as such. In many instances, disciplines which have developed exclusive categories and definitions may drift away from others. The strained relationship that we find among religion, science, and philosophy could be attributed to these dynamics. Hence, instead of rejecting differences that exist in the domains of categories and definitions, or conceptual employment of them, there is a necessity to open up dialogue among these disciplines, which can not only facilitate better understanding of the categories and definitions employed by each other, but could also lead to a more respectful attitude towards each other; moreover, the spirit of dialoguing, if it could be instilled among those who practise divergent or even exclusive methods, instead of unproductively fighting with each other and rejecting or ridiculing each other's contributions, subscribers of different disciplines could respect and accept each other and benefit from the ingenuity of all disciplines for the better advantage of humanity as a whole and better abilities to handle the reality by each specific discipline.

Those who could create a synthetic mind-set that can integrate the divergent approaches adopted by different disciplines will have to transcend the categorical and definitive distinctions; this is the mystical domain that cultivates a unitive consciousness, a state of existence, which, without categorically denying the distinctions, develops an all-inclusive mind-set that is immanent and transcendent at the same time.

From a practical point of view, there is a necessity of all these three human endeavours joining hands to empower the

downtrodden humanity, to take sides with the marginalized, and, thus, to establish a new paradigm of human existence in solidarity and communion. Such a goal could be successfully realized if experts and authorities engaged in these domains could go beyond the narrow boundaries traditionally adopted by each, and adopt a holistic outlook and collaborative approach both in attaining a comprehensive understanding of reality and in channelizing the resources and energies towards the goal of common good of humanity.

As the exploration of reality continues through the contributions of different disciplines such as religion, science, and philosophy, philosophy and religion can infuse a sense of value within the human beings. According to John Paul II, “the search for truth, even when it concerns a finite reality of the world or of man, is never-ending, but always points beyond to something higher than the immediate object of study, to the questions which give access to Mystery” (*Fides et ratio* §106). While philosophy can offer theoretical clarity and coherence as to the value system inculcated, religion can instil in them a sense of commitment to those values, especially by linking value consciousness with a sense of the divine received in revelation and possible rewards or punishments as they are laid out in the sacred scriptures and religious traditions, both together constituting the wisdom of generations of religious devotees.

Search for truth is the wisest of all pursuits; the wisest will search for truth in its fullness; hence, truest wisdom naturally leads us towards the wholeness of reality, which lies beyond the divisions that various disciplines have initiated for the convenience of handling reality. As the totality of reality is larger than the human mind that tries to handle it, mind always tries to restrict the reality handled. While this is needed when we take into account the very limits of human mind, the same human mind surges ahead making its own ongoing attempts to synthesize the bits and pieces of wisdom contributed by different disciplines, thus, ultimately aiming at the realization of the totality of truth. As totality includes all, the conceivable ultimate success of any such attempt would lie beyond every

division of reality and dichotomous relationships, which the same mind gives rise to.

Differences between religious beliefs and scientific theory can be overcome in human consciousness, as their boundaries are of human origin; hence, the same human ingenuity needs to be employed to ensure that those domains which can be interfaced for the common good of humanity must be indicated to the new generation students and researchers and they must be promoted to move along those less travelled roads that would facilitate better and lasting integration of the basic dynamics of these domains.

Instead of evading or running away from controversial issues that would touch upon religion, science, and philosophy, youngsters must be gradually initiated into 'objectively' understanding the issues involved, in analysing them with the available critical tools, and in making their own synthetic or integral conclusions which would be helpful for the holistic growth of humanity. This could be better facilitated by availing and opening up students' horizons to a wide range of resources connected to these domains. It is important that they are given personal attention when they are initiated into these resources, especially as they are divergent in their approaches and methodologies. Hence, greater care must be employed in the personal accompaniment offered so that a critical as well as creative approach could be animated in each candidate.

It is with such a hope that *Journal of Dharma* comes up with its final issue of 2015 exploring the interaction and interfacing between "Religion and Rationality." Six essays that we bring together in this issue attempt in a variety of ways to show that there are possibilities of going beyond the domains normally earmarked for one or the other disciplines. In fact, the invitation is to see the interface that emerges from a closer reading of religious, scientific, and philosophical approaches adopted in order to delve deep into the inner recesses of reality. Such an interfacing conceives of a new integral pedagogical approach, which is hoped to enhance the inner dynamics of each of these disciplines and their mutual relationships.

In the first article, “‘The Familiar Witches’ Brew’: Towards an African Philosophy of Religion,” Patrice Haynes, supported by a detailed analysis of philosophy of religion programmes as they are being researched and taught at the undergraduate level, exposes the ‘whiteness’ and Eurocentrism of the curriculum and proposes the necessity of developing an intercultural curriculum to make the whole exercise of higher education in religion more meaningful and effective. By recommending the practice of ‘conceptual decolonization’, Haynes hopes to renegotiate teaching philosophy of religion in the post-colonial context which will have due place accorded to various models of conceiving and theorizing religious practices and in philosophizing matters religious.

The next entry, “The Why and What of Philosophy of Religion: Towards a New Hermeneutic Phenomenology for Pedagogical Practice,” by Duane Williams seeks to question the typical approach taken by philosophy of religion, and offers a new one in its place. This essay makes a case for the ‘religious’ to be understood and accepted on its own merit, than unduly relying on the strength of a philosophy that is employed as a tool in analysing and exposing its inner reality. Analysing and rejecting the speculative approach offered by Heidegger, which is contrasted with the mystical thought of Johannes Scheffler, and drawing on the pedagogical practices from his own classroom practices, Williams proposes a more effective alternative, namely, phenomenological hermeneutic approach to do philosophy of religion.

Chae Young Kim, in his article “Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Bernard Lonergan on Faith Experience: A Call for Interpretations,” draws attention to preliminary evidence of both affinities and differences in the work of Smith and Lonergan and to the relevance of their work to the contemporary challenge of religious and cultural diversity. With this strong foundation and dwelling on the relevance of faith as the kernel of religious existence, Kim identifies fresh efforts to interpret their respective works on the basis of human faith experience, which he believes will better facilitate transcendence over sectarian divisions and

development of an inclusive approach in responding to the fact of religious pluralism.

“Does God Have a Future?” by Anto Amarnad categorically affirms that the true God is above human comprehension and beyond human control. As the horrors encountered, for example, at Auschwitz dismissed traditional God and ‘Death of God’ provided a new world of freedom, there emerged an attitude of surrendering to secular rationality and science. Rejecting the postmodern positions along these lines, Amarnad holds that getting back to God will be the greatest agony and ecstasy in searching for an answer to the question ‘Does God have a future?’

Thomas Kollamparampil, in his essay on “Global Humanity and Theological Perspectives from an Eastern View,” analyses ‘Syriac Orient’, the surviving heir to the Semitic Judeo-Christian legacies, especially against the ‘Greek East’ and ‘Latin West’, both of which are indebted to a far prior set of Christian foundations based on the same Semitic Judeo-Christian legacies evolved through the Old and New Testament worldviews. Together with the Greco-Roman thrust of Christianity, the ‘Syriac Orient’, according to Kollamparampil, preserved and made flourish such Semitic Judeo-Christian legacies very prominently in the history of Christian theology and spirituality. Hence, he proposes that salvific divine pedagogy and the Christian *paideia* for salvific modes of life demand constant learning from history and historical developments.

In the final article, “The ‘Other’ and Its Demand for Relatedness: Taylor’s Response to the Moral Crisis of Modernity,” Joshy V. Paramthottu analyses the secular philosophical position of Charles Taylor in order to provide insights into the understanding of modernity, rationality, morality, and religiosity. As there is a growing tendency to undermine the importance of religion, Paramthottu re-emphasizes the importance of *being related to the Other* for an authentic definition of modern human being for which Taylor’s *philosophical frame* is significant and relevant. Hence, against a purely *secular* and *monologic* view, which is destined to fail, the author brings forth the desire for the *supernatural* and *altruistic*

aspirations which would root and enhance authentic religious practice.

All these indicate that, in the context of interfacing between religion and rationality, there is need for a new approach to learning and intellectual formation, especially of young minds. We need to create a new environment in the classroom which can cater to differing points of views with regard to religion, science, and philosophy and their interfacing. Students must be guided to understand both the differences in the approach adopted by these different disciplines and their commonalities and their effective bonding that can be established by careful analysis and synthesis carried out by every student of these disciplines. It is hoped that students would fare better in interfacing religion and rationality if they are offered during their studies of religion and other subjects (1) guided initiation, (2) dialoguing within the classroom setting involving students and experts who devote their lives to actual religious practice, (3) research based on sources as well as religious practitioners, (4) curriculum development with enough flexibility, (5) proactive involvement of students in the application of the curriculum as well as in its ongoing revision for more effectiveness, (6) ongoing critical assessment, (7) facilitation of extensive networking, and (8) emphasis on long-term impact in evolving, establishing, and maintaining an immanent as well as transcendent religious consciousness that in practice (9) welcomes an inclusive approach.

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