

FVG DECLARATION

On 13.3.1980, several religiously interested individuals met in Antwerp. From their conversation it became apparent that there was a genuine need for a university level institution dedicated to the comparative study of religions and related sciences.

On 30.4.1980, they established the founding of the International Association Faculteit voor Vergelijkende Godsdienstwetenschappen - FVG (Faculty for Comparative Study of Religions). Its foundation and constitution are recognised by Royal Decree, dated 20. 6. 1980 (published in the Belgian Official Gazette 8.6. 1980), 17.2. 1989 (Scientific Research). The FVG is also recognised by the Ministry of Social Affairs (10.8. 1993 with reference to the Royal Decree of 28. 6. 1969) as an educational institution of the third level.

Art. 2 of the said Constitution runs as follows:

The objective of the Association is to launch, to organise and to manage at international university level the comparative study of religions.

All present and future members declare solemnly that the Faculty for Comparative Study of Religions (FVG) will not and never be submitted to any doctrinal system.

The most absolute tolerance will bind and lead for all relations between members and all those concerned with the Faculty.

PRINCIPLES STATEMENT

World events at present demonstrate the ever-increasing contact between the various world-religions and between man's differing cultural patterns as determined by these religions.

An average intellectual at the most has some idea of the main traits of these faiths, but he usually lacks any insight into these different forms of spirituality, as they are actually experienced.

True, religion is studied as a science at academic level. However, it is apparent that universities founded on denominational principles emphasise their own religious beliefs as a matter of course. Other faiths are then treated mainly from one's own consciously or unconsciously exclusive and proselytising angles. In non-denominational institutions, religious works may be the object of linguistic or historical study, but they are never really considered in the light of man as a religious being and his attitude to life.

The FVG is therefore organising in daytime courses in a four-year cycle at international and university-level (OIC 30.06.1980, art. 2) a thorough study of the world-religions but, simultaneously also of the so-called local and primitive religions, as well as to a certain extent, the peri- and para-religious phenomena.

The FVG's distinguishing feature is expressed in its educational project.

The Faculty for comparative study of religions has the intention:

To gain insight in the multitude of religions, world conceptions and philosophies without any exclusion or bias. This means:

1. That it does not limit its research to the world religions but also pays attention to religious minorities with local significance.
2. That it takes an independent position towards every ideology in the conviction that religions cannot be studied from the viewpoint of one single religion.
3. In order to realize this one-of-a-kind insight the faculty has developed its own

methodology. Given the importance of the direct contact with the religions and philosophies, one aims to provide education by appointing teachers belonging themselves to the different philosophies, who are able to provide information "from the inside". This offers a guarantee for equivalence and pluralism. Teaching from their own religion and culture they, next to the knowledge of theoretical doctrine, offer insight in the practical experience as well. As such they give concrete form to what otherwise would remain too much of an abstraction. This 'testimony' however may not lead to proselytising acts.

4. By teaching every philosophy and religion independently one from the other as equal parallels, no theologically or philosophically convergent viewpoint is taken; philosophies and religions are rather being approached empirically as an expression of human behaviour. In that sense the contents of theology may become object of scientific research of the religions as well.

5. In correspondence with its denomination of 'faculty FOR comparative study of religions', it does not count the concrete comparison at contents level under its educational objectives by not teaching this as a separate course. What it rather aims to achieve is providing the student with the necessary material and tools without trying to turn into science the comparative aspect at contents level from above. The search for correspondences and differences is however elementary for the elaboration of the subject-matter and essentially contributes to the student's formation and the student has to go into his or her own being different. Paradoxically this not only leads to a better 'notion' of the other but also to a rediscovery and revalorization of the own cultural and philosophical habits. As such, the student acquires an attitude of 'active tolerance'.

6. Except being an educational institution, the faculty wants to be a forum, an actual meeting place where people from different cultures come together breathing a same spirit and aspiration, namely to get to know each other. As such the faculty hopes to make people competent in leading an efficient intercultural and interreligious dialogue in order to adapt themselves in a flexible way to the different socio-cultural domains.