

Linguistic Relativism and Revisability of Dogmas

WILMER TRIA

The aim of this article is to illustrate a particular influence of contemporary philosophy to dogmatic theology: the *reformability* of dogmas. Dogmatic evolution is factual, but no philosophical literature provides an account of such changeability. In Catholic circles, one philosophical system stands out as a *philosophia perennis*, scholasticism. This has traces from the medieval period. One of the problems this philosophy has claimed to solve is the problem of universals. Concepts are universals and refuse to change. From that time on until today, dogmas are held to be engulfed in concepts that are immutable. History and experience, however, continue to reveal that change is a fact and revisions are real ecclesiastical events. Twentieth century philosophy provides an outstanding account of these revisions.¹

To develop the article, I shall start with the description of the situation in the middle ages to explain why in the Church such immutability of concepts developed. Secondly, I shall cite some contemporary thinkers that have contributed to the reversal of outlook. Thirdly, I shall present the changing views of the Church on Dogmatic Theology and the different arguments for the possible adoption of linguistic relativism.

¹ For a thorough discussion on contemporary Epistemology, see W. Tria, "Implications of the New Philosophy of Science to Contemporary Epistemology" in *Hingowa* 1/1:75-94. The article contends that T. Kuhn's revolutionary philosophy of sciences contributed a great factor in the significant changes in the epistemology of the latter part of the century.

I. MEDIEVALS AND THE UNIVERSALS

1. The Church in the Middle Ages

One of the best sources of broadening one's philosophical perspective is a historical view. A brief description of the situation of the medieval times would be relevant in our succeeding discussion, especially on the real issue on the problem of universals and the genesis of a static understanding of concepts, whether empirical, moral or dogmatic. To the medievals, the word is the mind.² There is but one language for one reality. But how did they acquire such mentality?

a) Scholastic Philosophy and Theology on the Eucharist.³

Our present dogmatic formulations are essentially scholastic. The language that we use to explain transubstantiation, for instance, belonged to scholasticism, a philosophical system of the thirteenth century. The scholastics asked questions such as: At what point in the mass did the sacrifice take place? Was it at consecration or communion? How were the bread and wine changed into the body and blood of Christ? According to Thomas Aquinas, the sacrifice took place at the consecration!⁴ To the second question, his reply was, transubstantiation.⁵ It was a change of substance, not in accidents. This, however, cannot be explained without accepting the scholastic's doctrine

² This was the issue of the realists against the nominalists, particularly of William of Champeaux against Peter Abelard. Because of the prevalence of the realists, writing and rewriting became the primary preoccupation of the medievals, especially of the monks. Paleographical research reveals that there was only one language important for the medievals, that is, Latin. See J. John, "Latin Paleography" *Medieval Studies* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992) p. 4.

³ Of the sacraments, the Eucharist best exemplifies scholastic influence in theology. A good source book of a historical treatment of this sacrament is J. Martos' *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1966) pp. 233-306.

⁴ *ST* III, q. 75, a. 2. Quoting a text from St. Ambrose's *De Sacramentis*, St. Thomas writes: *Licet figura panis et vini videatur, nihil tamen aliud quam caro Christi et sanguinis post consecrationem credenda sunt.*

⁵ *ST* III, q. 75, a. 4. He writes: "Nam tota substantia panis convertitur in totam substantiam corporis Christi, et tota substantia vini in totam substantiam sanguinis Christi. Unde haec conversio non est formalis, sed substantialis. Nec continetur inter species motus naturalis, sed proprio nomine potest dici transubstantiatio." The term

of hylemorphism.⁶ Jesus is not physically present, but metaphysically present. He is not perceived by the eye but by the mind illuminated by faith.

If bread and wine transubstantiate, it could remain unchanged even until communion if the minister made a mistake! Thus, in the succeeding centuries (14th and 15th), the concentration was more on the rubrics and the validity of the sacraments. Silly questions were asked, such as: How shall the hands be lifted by the priest? Sensible practices also became popular, such as the adoration of the host and the devotion to the blessed sacrament. The feast of the *Corpus Christi* started in France. There were news about bleeding hosts and eucharistic cures. People walking rushed to churches during the elevation of hosts because it was believed that it will save one from death or it will give him luck in business.⁷

While faith and devotion developed, abuses also took place. Several serious problems occurred. The demand for votive masses increased the number of altar priests who were ordained to say masses for the souls in purgatory. At times, there were a hundred priests in a single church! More so, instead of a weekly mass, it was offered many times a day. Due to the practice of private masses, the readings were no longer proclaimed or heard, communion was not distributed. What was important was not the Sunday but the weekday masses offered for the souls in purgatory. In spite of the number, the prophetic mission greatly declined. Masses were not offered for the living, but for the dead. These events led to reformation!

b) Protestant Reform

"How can we reform the mass?" the protesters asked. First, we ought to do mass due to the command: "Do this in memory of me."

"transubstantiatio" was first used by Hildebert of Tours early in the thirteenth century and within decades it was in common usage at the University of Paris.

⁶ This doctrine originated from Aristotle. See Met. 1042a1-1044a14. This doctrine was later on developed in the scholastic tradition. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Book VIII L.1:C 1681-1767 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* 54,1-10.

⁷ J. Martos, pp. 277-278.

However, we have to reform it. The following were the steps taken:⁸ a) change the language from Latin to German; b) communion to the laity should be given (at least once a year); c) superstitions must be suppressed; d) sacred hosts should not be reserved; e) instead of Mass, the sacrifice was to be called 'the Lord's supper'.

Luther said that Jesus himself commanded us: 'Take and eat'. Mass is an offering for the people and not to God. Therefore, no priest or intercessor was necessary. The Mass is a sign that our sins have been forgiven through Christ's death on the cross. Mass text speaks of the blood "...which shall be shed for the forgiveness of sins." Hence, the center of the mass was shifted to the eating of the bread. Instead of transubstantiation, Luther preached about consubstantiation. It was both bread and body. Other reformists, though had different views. To Calvin, Jesus was really present. To Zwingli, Christ's presence was psychological. There was no uniform theology even among the Protestants.

c) Catholic Solidification.⁹

Catholic theologians and philosophers made their rejoinder. The Mass is a sacrifice. Communion is receiving the sacrament. Jesus is really present in the bread and wine as his body and blood. His presence is not merely spiritual or psychological, but real and metaphysical. They held transubstantiation. They urged the Catholics to have faith in the sacred mystery and worship it with great devotion. It has to be received frequently with great care (that there must be no sin). There is no need to receive both species. Christ is wholly present in each particle. Christ offered a sacrifice of his body and blood to God the Father to perpetuate the meaning of the cross and for the atonement of sins. Therefore, mass is a true sacrifice and it must be offered by a priest.

Through the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the direction of Pius V, the Roman Missal was produced in 1570 for the sake of uniformity in liturgy. This missal would be used from that time until the convocation of the Second Vatican Council in 1960. The Catholic

⁸ See J. Martos, pp. 233-306.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 284-290.

dogmas were also defined. Hence, the gospel of Christ was once and for all formulated so forcefully that it would survive any demands for change.

d) The Objective of the Council of Trent

From the cited example, one can surmise that the objective of the council was to petrify the teachings of the Church. It tried to define dogmas through immutable concepts and publish them for uniformity. The formulation itself is revealing that it aimed at punishing anyone who did not wish to share one interpretation of faith. Recall the practice of religious suppression, such as the period of the great inquisition. No error was allowed. No doubt had to be entertained. Everybody was required to profess the same faith.¹⁰ However, is *petrification* the correct interpretation of "upon this rock I will build my church"?

Scholastic philosophy played a great role in the formulation of dogmatic theology in medieval times and up to this day. This Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition is claimed to have the immutability of concepts which is the key element in its epistemology.¹¹ Holding a realist position, the only escape from skepticism is the presumption of the knowability of reality, that is, the intersubjectivity of objects. Objects are abstracted which produces universals. Knowledge can only be true if concepts are universals and permanent. Philosophy and theology in the middle ages took the supposition that concepts, whether liturgical, moral or dogmatic, are universals.¹² Yet this is a presupposition. The discussion on the universals was limited to whether they exist or

¹⁰ This is the legislation found in "Decree on General Reform" (1563) urging all prelates to make a profession of faith and of obedience to the Roman See. In the so-called "Tridentine Profession of Faith," one finds the summary of the essential doctrinal elements declared by the Council of Trent against the background of the errors of the Protestant Reformation.

¹¹ Socratic search for definitions, Platonic theory of forms, and Aristotelian conception of universals are arguments for the possibility of knowledge. Gail Fine insists that their arguments, most especially of Aristotle, are not semantic, but epistemological. See Gail Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) pp. 25, 46, 70, 72-73, 79, 81, 93, 194, 251, and 268. Aristotle's universals are the basic objects of knowledge and they are everlasting and unchangeable.

¹² The problem of universals is a fascinating paradox that was discovered and often discussed in Europe's Middle Ages. Eastern scholarship also addressed

not.¹³ Note that there was no critical epistemology in the middle ages. God-themes were thoroughly discussed, but not the knowledge of them. The problem of universals is an ancient problem of the one and the many. Note, too, that medieval thought was dominated by Latin scholars. Philosophers from Aristotle to Boethius entered the pages of medieval history in Latin. With the use of only one language, the problem of language, concepts, and meanings would certainly not be expected. One word would have one meaning, one concept, one thought, applicable to all instances.

Though philosophy provides a structure to theology, it is the situation, the *Sitz-im-Leben*, or the sociological context that keeps the relevance and meaning of its teachings. With the coming of the renaissance, the national languages became important. Situations then began to change.

2. The Copernican Revolution and the Shift of Philosophy to Epistemology

Times indeed have changed. The greatest setback to humankind was its experience with Copernicus (1473-1543) and Galileo (1564-1642). These scientists discovered that, for almost seventeen centuries, humanity had been deceived by the geocentric theory proposed by Ptolemy (90-168 AD)! It is the sun, rather, which sits at the center of the universe. The Ptolemaic system, modern philosophers realized, was actually based on the works of Aristotle. If Aristotle could err, and Scholastic philosophy and the Catholic teachings were heavily indebted to him, what was the guarantee that scholasticism and Catholic theology would not commit mistakes? The Pope himself, indeed, made a mistake when he condemned Galileo. Such experience led philosophers to pay more attention to epistemology instead of God and authority.

this problem in the Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist traditions. It addressed the nature of reality and its components.

¹³ Essentially the problem could be stated as follows: Is anything I know just a material thing, or a spiritual thing or in my mind? Is "cup" just the holder of my coffee, made of ceramic and bound to the laws of entropy? Or is it a function — like when I shape my hands into a cup for drinking water from a stream? Could it be just a spiritual essence residing in eternity? Or is it just some mind-game or construct that I impose upon reality? Ultimately, is it material, symbolic, or an idea(l)?

From Descartes to Kant and from Kant to Kuhn, investigations have been more liberal, free from church scrutiny, and more analytical in its approach.

Epistemic ideologies proliferated then. Modern schools of thought became more critical and analytical. The problem of knowledge has moved to the center of human intellectual inquiry comprising the vast issues on logic, science, politics, morals, etc.¹⁴ The rise of the different philosophical thoughts allowed the modern thinkers to raise questions about truth and certainty. The significance of epistemological problems continues to win the attention of the twentieth century philosophers. But from the realist's account in the middle ages to the empiricist's of the early part of the century, all are greatly criticized today. All these accounts are labeled as belonging to the correspondence theory of truth. More theories mushroomed. Euclidean geometry lost its appeal with the coming of dynamical systems. Rather, relativism is gaining more ground, successfully giving accounts of the plurality of religions and cultures. The concept of truth is relativised. Philosophy today prefers process than state, becoming rather than being. The growing tension between the absolutists and relativists has challenged some Catholic theologians to rethink the propositions of the church and to rediscover her history. The go-signal was the *aggiornamento* of John XXIII in 1960, three hundred ninety years after Trent!

II. LINGUISTIC RELATIVISM: ARE CONCEPTS UNIVERSALS?

The concept of "concept" has been entangled in so many philosophical controversies in the Western philosophical tradition. To Aristotle, it was a universal abstracted from the sense experience.¹⁵

¹⁴ Take for instance the following literature in modern philosophy: Descartes' *Discourse on the Method, Rules for the Direction of the Mind*; Pascal's *The Art of Thinking and Pensees*; Malebranche's *On the Search for Truth*; Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*; Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*; Leibniz's *New Essays on Human Understanding*; Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781, *Critique of the Judgment*, *Critique of Practical Reason*; Fichte's *Essay towards a Critique of All Revelation*; Hegel's *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

¹⁵ Aristotle frequently insists that the possibility of knowledge requires the existence of universals. See for instance Met. 1086b5-6. In Phys. 224b5-16, Aristotle

To psychoanalysts, it was a subjective reaction to sense experience. To the modern empiricists, it was a composite of sense impressions. Yet, even if it is among the most controversial, it is fundamental to philosophy, especially to epistemology.

Today, several theories of concept proliferate and the interest towards them enters even other disciplines.¹⁶ Our particular interest is its entry to dogmatic theology. According to the medieval realist thinkers, concepts were universals, thus, immutable and unchangeable.¹⁷ Modern thinkers, both from the rationalist and the empiricist traditions, thought the same, except for some modifications made by Kant and Hegel.¹⁸ The following survey will help to show that concepts are not universals and they do not refuse to change. Concepts are historical and they change from one period of history to another.

1. Kuhn's Empirical Concepts

Concepts that refer to the world of scientists are empirical concepts. Among those philosophers of science who have thoroughly

says that *eide kai pathe* do not move or change *kath hautō*, but Aristotle admits that they can change *kata sumbebekos*, in so far as things are in change. See G. Fine, p. 251, n. 35.

¹⁶ P. Thagard, *Conceptual Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 13.

¹⁷ Even after the revival of Christian Philosophy in the nineteenth century, philosophers like Mercier, Gilson and Maritain remained realists to the core. See for instance D. Mercier, *Criteriologie generale* (Louvain: 1899) and *Origins of Contemporary Psychology* trans. by W.H. Mitchell (New York, 1918); E. Gilson, *Christianity and Philosophy* trans. by R. McDonald (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939); J. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge* trans. by G. Phelan et al. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959).

¹⁸ The rationalists and empiricists agree on the requirement of immutability of knowledge. Except for the skeptics, they believe that knowledge is possible, and it must be true and unchangeable. Kant, however, in his attempt to synthesize the two traditions, distinguishes the *phenomena* from the *noumena* of reality. The product of scientific knowledge is phenomena or appearance. Reason, however, attempts to know what is attainable by science, that is, the *noumena* or the *Ding-an-sich*. He allowed the changeability of the *phenomena*, though he thought that there is only one *phenomena* that corresponds to the *noumena*. Hegel, on the other hand, in his attempt to synthesize Fichte's subjectivism and Schelling's objectivism, postulated the process of dialectics which is dynamic to explain history and the history of ideas. The *Vorstellung* changes but the *Begriff* does not. For Kant and Hegel, therefore, concepts change.

developed a theory of empirical concepts is Thomas Kuhn.¹⁹ Kuhn may even be considered as one of the important contemporary epistemologists.²⁰ He was influential to the revolution in the historiography of science when he developed themes like paradigm shifts, scientific revolutions and incommensurability thesis in his celebrated book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*²¹ published in 1962. His theory of concepts is derived mainly from his philosophy of science. Contrary to the orthodox philosophy of science, he held that science is colored by historical, sociological and psychological elements. In the 1920s, logical positivists thought that observations are pure, data are neat facts and, therefore, empirical concepts are ahistorical, unchangeable and can be represented by logical symbols. Logical empiricists, for instance, believed in "raw," "untainted," "ahistorical," "pure" facts. Kuhn, however, like Feyerabend (1958) and N. Hanson (1958), believed that observations are theory-laden.²² Concepts, therefore, are laden with historical, sociological and psychological elements and, therefore, change from one scientific episode to another.

¹⁹ Kuhn's theory of empirical concepts are found in: "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?" *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) pp. 231-278; or in *The Essential Tension*, pp. 266-292; "Metaphor in Science" in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. A. Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917) pp. 409-419; "Response to Commentaries" PSA 1982, *Proceedings of the 1982 Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, ed. P.D. Asquith and T. Nickles (East Lansing: Philosophy of Science Association, 1983) pp. 712-716; "Possible Worlds in History of Science" *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts and Sciences*, ed. S. Allen, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989) pp. 9-32. Other authors have a similar theory of empirical concepts. See for instance W. Sellars, "Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them," *Philosophy of Science* 1948/15: 287-315; "Inference and Meaning," *Mind* 1953/62: 313-388; *Science, Perception and Reality* (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), and; "Conceptual Change," *Essays in Philosophy and its History* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1974) pp.172-188.

²⁰ See W. Tria, *The Epistemology of Thomas Kuhn* (Rome: Tipografica Leberit, 1995). Hereafter cited as ETK. In this work, I have pointed out that Kuhn's epistemology is a modification of Kant's. Kant's approach is non-genetic while Kuhn's is genetic. Kuhn's epistemology, therefore, welcomes growth of knowledge and gives merit to bodies of knowledge found in scientific communities and cultures. See ETK, pp. 139-144.

²¹ Hereafter cited as SSR.

²² See P. Feyerabend "An Attempt at a Realistic Interpretation of Experience" in *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society*, 58:143-170 and N. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

That empirical concepts change is one of the topics discussed in detail by Kuhn in the succeeding articles after the SSR. According to his writings in the early seventies, empirical concepts are immediate products of perception. As products of perception, however, they cannot be universals. They have particular attributes. First, he distinguishes stimulus from sensation. 'Much neural processing takes place between the recipient of the stimulus and the awareness of sensation.'²³ This sensation or perception is schematized by the learned similarity relations in the perceptual space to produce the sense datum language, also called 'bits of language'.²⁴ A series of differentiation takes place between perception and the learned similarity relations to produce the basic vocabulary or the empirical concept.²⁵ The relation between perception and language, therefore, is not linear, but involves a process of differentiation. This differentiation or dialectical process takes place in the perceptual space. Concepts, therefore, do not respond simpliciter to nature. Two individuals may use the same word, yet have two different concepts on the same thing!

From 1979 onwards, Kuhnian epistemology became linguistically oriented. Conceptual change is no longer a regrouping in the perceptual space, but in the lexicon.²⁶ Such organization is called lexical taxonomy. First, the student learns empirical concepts by analogy or metaphor-like process. Learning by metaphors has a double role, namely: the ostension of examples and the ostension of words. Through repetition, one can have an adequate knowledge of concepts. Learning by exemplars, however, is open-ended and inexplicit. Since one learns concepts not by definitions but by analogy, learned concepts are not

²³ SSR, pp. 192-193.

²⁴ P. Hoyningen-Huene, *Reconstructing Scientific Revolutions: Thomas S. Kuhn's Philosophy of Science*, translated by A. Levine (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993) pp. 95.

²⁵ A detailed analysis on the distinction between two kinds of perception and two kinds of learned similarity relations in my doctoral dissertation *The Epistemology of Thomas Kuhn*, pp. 107-131. In this article, I intentionally avoided the distinctions for reasons of brevity and directness in the arguments. It is enough to point here that the trip from stimulus through perception, learned similarity relations to empirical concepts is not unidirectional but may be construed as a dialectical process of differentiation and transformation. See also P. Hoyningen-Huene, p. 95.

²⁶ T. Kuhn, "Possible Worlds in History of Science" *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts and Sciences*, ed. S. Allen. pp. 49-51.

universals and immutable. Further, this also implies that the knowledge of nature becomes dependent on language. The way of seeing the world is importantly contingent on language. Until it has been acquired, one does not see the world at all.

Kuhn's epistemology is holistic,²⁷ contributing something to the new understanding of the nature of concepts. According to him, the learning of concepts cannot be done by isolated concepts. The learning of empirical concepts is acquired from concepts in relation to other concepts. He calls this local holism.²⁸ Concepts are learned not by piecemeal but in clusters. A term is dependent on another term, and one cannot learn its use without learning simultaneously the use of the other. Kuhn cites the example of Newtonian terms like 'mass', 'force', and 'acceleration'. 'Force' can only be learned with 'mass' and 'acceleration'.

The history of concepts then does not develop by linear progress. Take for instance the case of the classical atom conceived previously to be indivisible, and the theoretical atom in 1880, which was divisible and was measured to be 1/millionth times smaller than what the naked eye can see; the classical motion considered by Aristotle as natural and the Newtonian motion which was gravitational; the Newtonian mass (quantity) and the Einsteinian mass (energy); Euclidean and Riemannian triangles.

These are examples of empirical concepts with the same terms but with entirely different meanings. Paradigm is provisional, open-minded, and allows itself to be corrected and be replaced by a new incompatible alternative. Concepts find their meaning within the given paradigm. Outside the paradigm, no empirical concepts are significant. Therefore, during scientific revolutions, concepts change

²⁷ The beginnings of holistic epistemology can be attributed to W.V.O. Quine's theory of web or network of beliefs. See *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* (1953). W. Sellars also holds a holist view on learning concepts. According to him, the grasping of a single concept requires the grasping of an entire body of concepts. See W. Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality* (New York: Humanities Press, 1963) pp. 147-148. Holistic epistemology, however, was the thesis of Plato in Parmenides. True knowledge can be attained in the whole relational structure of ideas. See H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (New York: Crossroad, 1986) p.389.

²⁸ T. Kuhn, "Rationality and Theory Choice" *Journal of Philosophy* 1983/80: 566.

as paradigms shift.²⁹

2. A. MacIntyre and Ethical Concepts

In 1966, Alasdair MacIntyre published *A Short History of Ethics*. He is one of those contemporary thinkers who have been greatly influenced by the New Philosophy of Science, especially by T. Kuhn himself. MacIntyre applied the new historiography to Ethics, four years after the publication of the SSR.

a) *The Need for History*

According to MacIntyre, ethics has been taught as if it were ahistorical, as if out of the blue, there came a set of moral principles.³⁰ Rather, ethical concepts developed and they are best understood by going back to their history.³¹

Moral concepts have the following characteristics. First, "moral concepts change as social life changes."³² The Greek *dikaiosune*, for instance, has greatly changed from one social context to another.³³ They

²⁹ Or when conceptual schemes change, concepts also change. See T. Kuhn, "Possible Worlds in History of Science" *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts, and Sciences*, p. 31; "The Road Since Structure", *PSA 1990: Proceedings of the 1990 Biennial Meetings of the Philosophy Association*, vol. 2, p. 5. From a thorough discussion of conceptual changes, see P. Thagard, *Conceptual Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). This book includes conceptual changes in chemistry, biology, geology, physics, psychology and a comparative study of conceptual changes between children and scientists.

³⁰ A. MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1966) p. 1.

³¹ Attempts to present ideas from the historical perspective did not principally start with Kuhn and MacIntyre, but from authors of the first half of the century like W.D. Ross, A.J. Ayer, R.T. Gunther and so on. For a comprehensive study of concepts from the historical perspective, see *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Selected Studies of Pivotal Ideas*, ed by P. Wiener, vols. I-IV (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968).

³² A. MacIntyre, p. 1.

³³ For his thorough description of the changing conceptions of justice, see also A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) pp. 244-455. Regarding ancient conceptions of justice, see also G. Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, vols. I-II, ed by D.W. Graham (Princeton, N.J:

are different because there are two different forms of social life to which those terms belong. There are only two kinds of concepts that do not change at all, namely: a) the highly specialized concepts, e.g. geometry; and, b) the highly general concepts necessary to any language by complexity, e.g. *and*, *or*, and *if*. Moral concepts do not fall into either of these two concepts.³⁴ Second, though they belong to different social milieu, two different moral concepts still have relations. They overlap. Thus, *dikaiosune* and justice are not totally irrelevant to each other. Third, a concept involves behavior. To alter concepts is to alter behavior.³⁵ Socrates was condemned by the Athenians. Hobbes' *Leviathan* was condemned in 1666 by the English Parliament. Philosophical books were burned by the Nazis. These condemnations have only one reason: the refusal to change the accepted behavior. Therefore, two concepts of two sociological milieu mean two kinds of behavior. The sophists loved rhetorics and pretension. Socrates loved silence and the acceptance of ignorance.

What is the proper attitude in reading history? MacIntyre takes Kuhn's. One cannot approach the past without pre-conception. However, he must adopt a hypothetical patronage in understanding the past. One must avoid thinking that the whole point of the past was to culminate with us.

b) The Philosophical Concept of Good as a Case³⁶

According to MacIntyre, social change renders the concept which had defined the moral framework of an earlier world problematic. In Greek literature, for instance, there is the transition from the Homeric through the Theognid corpus to the Sophists. Homeric society defines

Princeton University Press, 1995). In vol. II, pages 69-103, he discusses the differences between Plato's and Aristotle's conception of justice. According to Aristotle, it both meant comprehensiveness and as a name for social virtue, "the virtue of which each has his own", a view from the standpoint of the recipient (pp. 71-73) while for Plato, it is "doing one's own", a view from the standpoint of the agent (p. 77). The different standpoints are significant. Plato sees it as a duty, while Aristotle sees it as a right.

³⁴ A. MacIntyre, p. 2.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

³⁶ A. MacIntyre, pp. 5-13.

man the way he discharges his allotted social function. In its society, there are kings, warriors, judges, shepherds. In its lexicon, there are concepts such as "authoritative," "courageous," and "just." The good was *agathos*. It was a predicate of a moral quality specifically attached to the role of the Homeric nobleman. One is called *agathos* if he is brave, skillful and successful in work and in peace. Wealth and leisure are at once necessary for the development of these skills.

The present concept of good is quite different. It includes the idea of commending, such as: it is good to be brave, or it is good to observe diet. *Agathos*, however, cannot be used in that sense. The word is only applicable to a nobleman. Moreover, the present concept of good does not necessarily include being courageous! In the Homeric age, however, to say "good but not courageous" would be unintelligible. To be good is to be courageous at all times.

Agathos tells hearers what sort of conduct to expect from the person. We ascribe dispositions to the agent in the light of his behavior in past episodes. For instance, 'John is *agathos*'. There are two implications, namely: (1) He is courageous, clever, and kingly; and (2) He fought, plotted and ruled with success. In such cases, the use of the concept is evaluative.

I fail to be *agathos* if and only if I fail to bring off the requisite performances. Today, we say: "He was a good soldier, but he died in battle." In the Homeric society, he cannot be *agathos* because he died immediately in battle. This whole family of concepts presupposes a certain sort of social order. In the Homeric society, there is the hierarchy of functions. This is the Homeric moral order. The slave, in this case, becomes a thing, not a person.

In the poems of Theognid of Megara, *agathos* and *arete* can no longer be defined in terms of the fulfillment in a recognized way of a recognized function. The situation during this time was that there was no longer a single and unified society in which evaluation can depend on established criteria of this kind. *Agathos* (good) and *kakos* (bad) are descriptive of social position. Or they may acquire an even more radical extension of meaning. For instance, "Many *kakoi* are rich and many *agathoi* are poor, but we will not take the wealth in exchange for our *arete*, for the one remains with a man always, but possessions pass from one man to another." 'Good' now means for the Theognid the nobleborn!

They are no longer evaluative. In the Homeric age, the chieftain is *agathos* if he does his function well. In the age of Theognid, one is an *agathos* if he comes from the line of a chieftain. *Arete* now denotes, not those qualities relevant to the execution of a particular function, but certain human qualities which may be divorced from function altogether. *Arete* is no longer a quality that refers to function, but to the person. Though one is not skillful, he could still have an *arete*. A slave can never be an *arete*.

In the Homeric society, the dominant qualities are those that refer to functional roles, e.g. skill, cunning or shrewdness, courage, etc. When we attempt to answer the question: "What qualities do you want for a man?," the answer always depends on the social set-up. In the Theognid society, however, the dominant qualities are those that refer to the person, e.g. of royal blood.

Moral concepts, like empirical concepts, are learned not by definition but by ostension of examples. A person being initiated into a community receives instructions from a moral teacher who already belongs to a linguistic group, with his own set of standards of recognized list of values. Learned concepts, therefore, are learned ends, rules and virtues which may differ from the other linguistic groups.³⁷ Therefore, moral concepts, like empirical concepts, are historical and they change as social environment changes.

3. Aristotle's Concept of 'Concept' Revisited: *De Interpretatione*

Now spoken sounds are symbol of affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place – signs of affection of the soul – are the same for all; and what these affections are likeness of – actual things – are also the same (DI, 16a3-9).

³⁷ See A. MacIntyre, p. 266. He writes: "Within each of these moralities (Aristotelianism, primitive Christian simplicity, the puritan ethic, the aristocratic ethic of consumption and the traditions of democracy and socialism) there is a proposed end or ends, a set of rules, a list of virtues. But the ends, the rules, the virtues, differ... Between the adherents of rival moralities and between the adherents of one morality and the adherents of none, there exists no court of appeal, no impersonal neutral standard."

Are concepts really universals in the texts of Aristotle? Modern theorists of meaning would say negative. In his article "Aristotle on Language and Meaning," Gyekye takes the quoted passage as "the only passage of some length in the known works of Aristotle which contains a theory of meaning."³⁸ Gyekye starts with some etymological considerations. The 'spoken sound' (to en te phone) means 'significant spoken sound' (*phone semantike*: DI 16a19, 16b26), although not all spoken sounds are significant (16c26). Aristotle admits that a sound may be significant in one linguistic community and may not be significant in another. The significance of the sound, he would admit, is conventional. The spoken sounds are the words of the language.

'Affection' (*pathemata*) could also mean 'impressions' or 'happenings'. The 'affection in the soul' could mean 'mental experiences' or 'ideas in the mind'. 'Signs' (*semeia*) could also mean 'marks' or 'indications'. Gyekye believes that the term is used interchangeably with 'symbols' (*sumbola*). *Semainein* means to 'signify', 'to indicate', or 'to mean' (16b6, 16b28; Cat. 1b25; Meth. 1006b1-8). *Omoiomata*, translated as 'likeness', could also mean 'representations', 'reflections', or 'images'. Lastly, actual things are originally *pragmata*.

According to Gyekye, there are three elements in Aristotle's theory of meaning: (1) words, which naturally differ from one linguistic community to another; which primarily or directly signify (2) mental experiences or ideas in the mind (these ideas are the same for all people even if they use different words to refer to them); the ideas in the mind are representations or images of (3) things which are also the same for all people. In short, words are signs, directly of ideas (mental entities) and indirectly, by means of the ideas, of things. In another passage, Aristotle says: "We use words as symbols in place of things."³⁹

We are particularly interested here with Aristotle's 'affections of the soul'. Are they concepts in the mind? Aristotle admits that they are. Immediately following the quoted passage, Aristotle uses the expression 'concepts in the soul' or 'ideas in the soul' using the Greek term *noemata* instead of *pathemata*. In Parmenides, Plato admits that

³⁸ K. Gyekye, "Aristotle on Language and Meaning" *International Philosophy Quarterly*, 1974/14:71.

³⁹ Not all words. Aristotle considers conjunctions, such as 'or', 'and', 'but' as nonsignificant sounds. (*Poetico* 1456b38)

"each of these forms is a thought (*noemata*) that can exist only in the soul." (132b4-5) 'Affections of the soul', therefore, are ideas in people's minds and are private entities. But how can they be the same for all people? Gyekye suspects that Aristotle is concerned with giving an account of the relative success in communication.⁴⁰ Aristotle thinks that people attach the same meanings to words as others do. Why do we understand each other? What is behind those words that make two people understand each other? Aristotle believes that, though mental ideas are private, it is possible for two people who look at the same object to have the same image of it and to reveal the sameness of description of that object. Behind the same words are the same concepts, ideas, or mental images. At this point, however, a question can be asked. Are these words only for sensible objects or for non-sensible objects as well? The text tells us only about *pragmata*, the actual thing or the sensible substance! 'Affections of the soul,' therefore, can be compared to the present-day understanding of empirical concepts, concepts which refer to physical realities. Contemporary theorists view empirical concepts as mental entities which are largely learned from the experience of the external world (*pragmata*).

There is only one significant difference that we can identify between the ancient and the contemporary considerations of concepts. The present-day concepts suffer change whereas Aristotle's 'affections' are similar for all people. According to Gyekye, Aristotle's theory of meaning is not problematic if speakers belong to the same linguistic community. But do people of different linguistic communities have the same concepts? Do different words still signify the same mental ideas? Today, historically oriented epistemologists are particularly interested in the problem of conceptual changes in the history of ideas. According to Thagard, the central question in epistemology is: What are concepts and how do they change?⁴¹

Although ancient tradition continues to insist that the universals are the principle of knowledge, the text quoted above showed us an Aristotelian theory of concepts, the approach of which is not ontological but semantical. Such consideration gives us the hint that Aristotle's theory of concept is not contradictory to contemporary

⁴⁰ K. Gyekye, p. 72.

⁴¹ P. Thagard, pp. 3-9.

theories regarding conceptual changes. These concepts though are derived from the sensibles, thus, empirical concepts! Of all the ancient writers, only Aristotle considers that which is abstracted from the sensibles as concepts with the *pragmata* as their objective correlates. It is just unfortunate that Aristotle did not explicitly develop the possibility of conceptual change. One may even say that he never thought empirical concepts to change. The reason, however, is obvious. He did not share the same historical distance with contemporary epistemologists.

From the above survey, concepts, whether empirical or moral, are historically and culturally determined. Symbols or words may withstand the test of time, but the concepts or the family of meanings behind those symbols or words change from one period of history to another, depending on what types of world or what types of nature the particular linguistic community decides to attach to these symbols and words. This school that denies the universality of concepts shall be called in this paper linguistic or conceptual relativism. More discussion on this will be made later. Meanwhile, dogmatic concepts shall be examined and checked whether they suffer change, too.

III. THE REVISABILITY OF DOGMAS

Dogma is revelation as interpreted by the Church. Can dogmas be revised?⁴² There are two extreme positions among theologians. On the one hand, there are the archaists who deny any development in dogmas. They hold that the apostolic faith, as set forth in the Bible, admits no further doctrinal evolution. On the other hand, there are the evolutionistic rationalists who believe that doctrines continuously evolve. Nothing essential in them is permanent. The irrelevant past is to be discarded.⁴³

⁴² The issue on the revisability of dogmas has been thoroughly discussed by Avery Dulles in his book *The Survival of Dogma* (New York: Image Books, 1973).

⁴³ This is similar to the overthrow of outdated scientific theories by incompatible new ones. To Kuhn, the overthrow principle applies only to scientific theories due to the incommensurability of competing paradigms. He does not apply the principle to theories of other disciplines, such as philosophical and theological ones. To these, more than one school can exist at the same period.

There are changing views of the church on dogmas. In the later part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Church teachings seemed to claim that dogmas were held to be true expressions of faith to all peoples at all times. In *Pastor Aeternus* (1870) of Vatican I, for instance, dogmas are said to be irreformable by their nature, because their source is the Pope who is infallible. Note, however, that it only meant that dogmas are not subject to review by any higher authority. In *Mortalium Animos* (1928), Pius XI taught that dogmas at various times are equally certain and equally to be believed. In the encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), dogmas are held to be true expressions of the mysteries of faith.

Vatican II, however, has a more liberal tone. In *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964, Decree on Ecumenism), the Church declared her desire to dialogue with other churches. It believed that the teachings handed down by the apostles were received differently in different forms. From the very beginnings of the Church, the development varied from region to region and also because of differing mentalities and ways of life. Doctrinal formulations are, in some instances, culturally conditioned and, therefore, not suited to all times and places. "Correct formulations of faith are not completely adequate to express the richness of Christ, which are unfathomable, and conveys a sense of hope and aspiration for future formulations which might achieve a deeper realization and a clearer expression of those riches."⁴⁴ Vatican II is aware that the modern world has acquired a new mentality with its fast pace of development. Theologians are challenged to work out new ways and expressions in order to present the faith understandable to today's world.

This liberality is likewise ascertained by John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (1979). He states: "Be responsible for the truth that Christ revealed. Fidelity is a constitutive quality. The Church should adhere strictly to divine truth. Being responsible for that truth means loving it and seeking the most exact understanding of it. Pluralism of methodology may be permissible, but the fundamental unity in the teaching of faith and morals must be ensured." (RH, 19) In this encyclical, he speaks about the objective truth

⁴⁴ W. Henn, "The Hierarchy of Truths of Christian Unity" *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis: Commentarii de re theologica et canonica*, LXVI, p. 116.

revealed to us by God, but he obviously believes in an inevitable pluralism of methodology.

Recently, in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), he writes: "Certainly, the Church's Magisterium does not intend to impose upon the faithful any particular theological system, still less a philosophical one. Nevertheless, in order to preserve and faithfully expound the Word of God, the Magisterium has the duty to state that some trends of theological thinking and certain philosophical affirmations are incompatible with revealed truth."⁴⁵

1. Theological Arguments for the Revisability of Dogmas according to Henry Bouillard:

Christian truth never subsists in a pure state. By this we do not mean that it must inevitably be presented mingled with error, but that it is always embedded in contingent notions and schemes which determine its rational structure. It cannot be isolated from these. It cannot be liberated from one system of notions only by passing into another... thus, the divine truth is never accessible prior to all contingent notions. Such is the law of incarnation.⁴⁶

Revelation is always interpretative. Since its origin is divine, it is absolute. However, since it is dressed of contingent concepts that belong to its own particular cultural background, it is relative. The Bible itself is a case in point. According to B. Hinze, there is but one revelation, yet there are several traditions in the Bible.⁴⁷ To K. Rahner, there is a definite lexicon involved in the doctrines which express the Church's profession of faith. That lexicon is influenced by historical, psychological and sociological factors.⁴⁸ A change of mental frame work would make accepted concepts problematic.

⁴⁵ *Veritatis Splendor*, 29. [Hereafter cited as VS].

⁴⁶ H. Bouillard, quoted in A. Dulles, *The Survival of Dogmas* (New York: Image Books, 1973) p. 193.

⁴⁷ B. Hinze, "Narrative Contexts: Doctrinal Reforms" *Theological Studies* 51/3: 419.

⁴⁸ K. Rahner, "Pluralism in Theology and the Oneness of the Church's Profession of Faith" *The Development of Fundamental Theology, Concilium* 46 (New York: Paulist Press, 1969) p. 114.

Only a particular lexicon provides faith a definite content intelligible to a particular culture. Hence, pluralism must be allowed. Rahner suggests that the church should provide more room for different theologies and philosophies, giving them the responsibility of making sure that they remain in accord with the Church's creedal profession.⁴⁹ Both K. Rahner and the *Veritatis Splendor* hold the view that, as a teacher of faith, the Church remains the judge who weighs the different views and even declares a specific theology which is incompatible with her profession of faith.⁵⁰

For the past centuries, the aim of missions was plantatio ecclesiae, understood as the export of European ecclesiastical concepts, theology, and piety into missionary territories. This was brought about by the period of European colonialism. This European dominance, however, collapsed in this century. According to Bernard Lonergan, the classicist's notion of culture as a universal and permanent human product normative for all peoples and all times is now suspect.⁵¹ Culture is now understood as a nexus of meanings constituted by free and responsible incarnate subjects, differing from peoples to peoples, and susceptible to development and decay.⁵² "Theology's task ... is a critical and imaginative mediation between Christian faith (*fides quae*) and human culture. Of course, there is no such thing as the Christian faith by itself (*fides qua*), existing pure and unalloyed in the depth of one's heart in some pre- or a-linguistic state."⁵³ Dogmatic concepts, therefore, are historically transmitted, culturally conditioned, embodied in myths and rituals, formulated in terms understandable to the people of a certain time and place.

⁴⁹ K. Rahner, p. 117.

⁵⁰ K. Rahner, p. 117. See also VS, 29.

⁵¹ B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972) p. xi.

⁵² P. Phan, "Cultural Diversity" *Louvain Studies* 1994/19-3:199.

⁵³ P. Phan, 1994/19-3:202.

2. Philosophical Arguments for Relativism

There are several forms of relativism: subjective relativism, objective relativism, conceptual relativism, and so on.⁵⁴ Subjective relativism admits solipsism and voluntary arbitrariness. Objective relativism denies any objective world or grounds for possible communication. By relativism, we only refer to what was mentioned earlier, cultural, conceptual or linguistic relativism. This type of relativism does not connote arbitrariness. Evolutionistic rationalism implies arbitrariness. One can simply decide one perspective of truth from another without any grounds or reasons. Cultural relativism, however, admits and postulates the existence of the absolute truth, the ultimate point of reference. It admits that there are supracultural elements in dogmatic concepts. What relativism asserts is the inability of whatever human expression to completely represent the absolute. To postulate the absolute is necessary to account for the relative success in communication. One culture can communicate to another culture. Dogmatic truths are transcultural because of the postulated existence of a common ground, but dogmatic concepts are cultural, and therefore, find their meaning only in a definite cultural context.

At this point, I wish to bring back the Kuhnian model to illustrate cultural relativism in understanding pluralism and identify the principles underlying it. In his earlier writings, Kuhn speaks of two worlds. He follows the Kantian distinction between the *Ding an sich* and the *Erscheinungswelt*.⁵⁵ The World One (W1) is the world-in-itself or the *Welt an sich*. It is the indeterminate and the indescribable world. He cites three of its characteristics, namely: unchangeability, unknowability, and inaccessibility.⁵⁶ The *Welt an sich* is the world outside the epistemic subject, uninfluenced by observation and theory. Kuhn also calls this the postulated immutable world in the *Postscript*.⁵⁷ This world is only assumed for epistemological reasons, that is, to avoid individual and social solipsism.

⁵⁴ See Maurice Mandelbaum, "Three Forms of Relativism" *The Monist* 62: 403-428 and M. Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp. 236-240.

⁵⁵ See ETK, pp. 93-105.

⁵⁶ ETK, p. 94.

⁵⁷ SSR, p. 193.

The World Two (W2) changes during scientific revolutions or paradigm shifts. This is the phenomenal world or the *Erscheinungswelt*. It is paradigm-dependent so that when the paradigm changes, the world itself changes with it.⁵⁸ Kuhn, however, departs from Kant when he said that there was a multitude of phenomenal worlds. During crisis, when candidate paradigms proliferate, phenomenal worlds also proliferate. Two competing paradigms are two incommensurable phenomenal worlds. This plurality is consistent with Kuhn's denial of neutral-observation language which he substitutes with theory-laden observations. The *Welt an sich* is inaccessible and there can be no single phenomenal world, but a multiple possible reconstruction of the unknown world. Moreover, this phenomenal world is both natural and conceptual.⁵⁹ He insists that this world is still the actual world of the scientists and the world where the actual spoken language applies. These two aspects can be distinguished, but they are inseparable. When the phenomenal world changes, conceptual change also occurs.

In the particular linguistic community, the core value is the *nomos*,⁶⁰ that which is shared by all the members of a cultural community. It is the factor that facilitates communication. Christians communicate better among fellow Christians because of the *nomos* who is Jesus Christ. To achieve relative unity, therefore, Christians must be Christocentric. Yet Christians can still communicate with other religions, such as Islam or Buddhist religions, with relative success because of the *physis*.⁶¹ It is universally recognized by philo-

⁵⁸ SSR, p. 111.

⁵⁹ ETK, pp. 105-107. Kuhn published three important articles on the theme that the phenomenal world also refers to the shared language. See "Metaphor in Science" *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. A. Ortony (Cambridge University Press, 1979) pp. 409-419; "Rationality and Theory Choice" *Journal of Philosophy* 1983/80:563-570; and "Possible Worlds in History of Science" *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts and Sciences*, ed. A. Allen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989) pp.9-32.

⁶⁰ The Greek term means 'convention'. It is, therefore, similar to Kuhn's concept of paradigm, i.e. that which is shared by a community.

⁶¹ The Greek term means 'nature'. In Kuhn's epistemology, it is the *Welt an sich*, the unchangeable world. He adds, however, two other characteristics, inaccessibility and indescribability which are, for me, problematic. Further distinctions can be made, the discussion of which would not be necessary in this article.

sophers and theologians as the Absolute, and by believers, as the source of revelation. It is the core value true to all contemplative creatures. A single and uniform expression of it is impossible. In *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II advised moral theologians to "seek for the most adequate formulation for universal and permanent moral norms in the light of different cultural contexts."⁶² Strictly speaking, John Paul II means that the formulation of a *nomos* that will be accepted by all Catholic believers is possible. Any attempt, however, to seek for permanent and unchangeable moral norms is vain. The more universal it is, the more it becomes trite and meaningless.⁶³ The more contextualized a teaching is, the more powerful and effective it is in its prophetic function. Take, for instance, the universal norm of "do good and avoid evil." In itself, it is devoid of the list of particulars entailed in the concepts "good" and "evil."

What are the grounds for accepting relativism? Similar to the mind of the Magisterium, cultural relativism is against individualistic ethic "wherein each individual is faced with his own truth, different from the truth of others."⁶⁴ This is the case of arbitrariness in subjective and objective relativism. With the absence of the absolute, one can easily decide which truth to adopt. But, does the Vatican reject linguistic relativism? Is that rejection expressed in her publication of a universal catechism, the Catechism of the Catholic Church? But why did she not say the Catechism of Humanity? Moreover, why did she approve the Filipino Catechism under the title *A Catechism for Filipino Catholics*? Is this not a recognition by the Vatican of the existence of a linguistic community, a community that has its own language and culture?

⁶² VS, 53.

⁶³ See K. Popper, "Truth, Rationality and the Growth of Knowledge" *Conjectures and Refutations* (London: Routledge, 1991) pp. 229-230. According to him, "truth is not only the aim of science: what we look for is interesting truth." He appropriately quotes a nursery rhyme that runs this way: Twice two equals four: 'tis true, but too empty, and too trite. What I look for is a clue. To some matters not so light." Gadamer also claims that "the universal concept that is meant by the meaning of the word is enriched by the particular view of an object." See H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) p. 388.

⁶⁴ See VS, 32.

3. Some Problems of Relativism

Every form of relativism denies the universality of laws. Precepts are changeable to some extent. *Veritatis Splendor* argues that, though man exists in a particular culture, man is not exhaustively defined by that same culture.⁶⁵ Indeed, man transcends cultures. The fact that man can belong or adapt to any culture, or that he can be multilingual, i.e. that he can live in another linguistic community, proves that he is not a product nor a slave of a particular culture. It is his divine orientation, his human nature that transcends all cultures. It is that which is permanent and uniform to all men. To the extreme relativists, nothing is actually shared in common. Moderate relativism, such as cultural relativism, however, admits that human nature, natural law included, is the *Welt an sich* or the *phusis*. The basic human experience does not change even if dogmas of faith and moral change. This experience is shared by every rational creature.

Conclusion

Can we absolutely claim that Christ is the only way, the only truth, and the only life for all peoples? Perhaps, the resurrected Christ has as yet so much mysteries to reveal. Can we not experience his presence in the Imams, Gurus, Brahmins and Lamas? An Asian religious experience is definitely different from a European one, as renaissance mentality is different from the Medieval. If national languages were significant for the renaissance, religious and cultural diversities are likewise significant for the Asian. Diversity, after all, is not regretful. It is a test of authentic harmony. According to an expert on the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference* (FABC) :

FABC does not lose its grounding in the Christ experience. God's self-revelation in and through Jesus the Christ is for us Christians "the way and the truth" of the perception of God's saving presence in history. But an Asian Christian cannot interpret this in an absolutising or exclusivistic way because the Asian religious psyche resonates with the pluralism of reality.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See VS, 53.

⁶⁶ Sebastian Painadath, S.J., "FABC'S Theology of Dialogue", in *Partners* (Dec. 1997) 2/2:7.

Shall we expect a time when there shall be only one expression of faith shared by all peoples? Hardly. Expressions and interpretations will continue to multiply as languages, cognition, and social frameworks continue to evolve. I, therefore, strongly advocate the idea that every community that exists or will exist, will always be one with its own lexicon. That lexicon is a product of *nomos*, paradigm, or shared mental framework. And that I or everyone else who may belong to it must faithfully hold fast to its *nomos*. The *nomos* serves two purposes, namely: it facilitates communication and it serves as the way, the truth, and the life to the Absolute. The Hindus, the Buddhists, the Taoists and other religions of the world have their respective *nomos*, the way to the Absolute.

Cultural or linguistic relativism, I suggest, is a philosophical system that accommodates dialogue. It is a model of open-mindedness. And open-mindedness is the keynote to deepen one's faith. To think that there is only one expression of faith that comes from one linguistic community that has exclusive access to the Absolute is the source of communication breakdown. Inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogues will not succeed in such a classicist framework. As John Paul II, in his letter to Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, on the occasion of the creation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, wrote: "I have considered the Church's dialogue with the cultures of our time to be a vital area, one in which the destiny of the world at the end of this twentieth century is at stake."⁶⁷ □

⁶⁷ *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 28, 1982, 7.