

Paradigm Shifts and Religious Tolerance

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The dictionary defines the word *tolerance* as “sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one’s own.”¹ In the following pages we take religious tolerance as synonymous to *religious freedom* or religious liberty. The term religious freedom does not mean a person can be irreligious if he wants to. That would be subjectivism. Rather it means “the liberty of men to be religious and conform to the practices of the churches in which they firmly believe.”² We will look here at the religious phenomena from a philosophical viewpoint.

On December 7, 1965 Paul VI promulgated the Vatican II “Declaration on Religious Freedom “ (*Dignitatis Humanae*). In his commentary on the text, John Courtney Murray, the principal architect of the document, says:

The Declaration first defines religious freedom in terms of its object or content. The moral claim that every man makes on others—on individuals, groups, political or religious powers—is that they refrain from bringing coercion to bear on him in all matters religious. This claim is twofold. First, no man is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his personal beliefs; second, no man is to be forcibly restrained from acting in accordance with his beliefs. The affirmation of this latter immunity is the new

¹ Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 1241. J. V.

² Langmead Casserly, “The Need to Affirm Religious Freedom,” in John Courtney Murray (ed.), *Religious Liberty: An End and a Beginning* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966), pp. 136-37.

thing, which is in harmony with the older affirmation of the former immunity.³

This declaration reflects a change in the categories in the thinking of the Church's magisterium. In a more scientific terminology, it is due to a *paradigm shift*. This declaration would have been unthinkable centuries back.

We believe that freedom of religion or religious tolerance is due to paradigm shifts. The shifts enabled theologians to think differently from their predecessors. This change occurs not only in theology but also in the physical sciences and other social sciences.

The Meaning of Paradigm Shifts

The dictionary defines paradigm as "an outstandingly or typical example or archetype."⁴

In his monumental study, Thomas S. Kuhn, physicist and historian of sciences, has shown an interdisciplinary way that science does not really grow cumulatively but rather by way of "revolutions."⁵

The word *paradigm* is used in two different senses. First it "stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community."⁶ Secondly, "it denotes one sort of element in that constellation, the concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science."⁷ The first meaning is sociological while the second is philosophical.

How does a paradigm shift happen? A few individuals begin to perceive reality in ways *qualitatively* different from their predecessors

³ Walter M. Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966), p. 678.

⁴ *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v., p. 853.

⁵ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, second edition, enlarged (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁷ *Loc. cit.*

and contemporaries, who are practicing "normal science." Normal science "means research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice."⁸

For example, Ptolomaic astronomy (which claimed that the sun and the whole universe revolved around the earth) gave way to Copernican astronomy when the former paradigm could not explain problems of astronomy such as the planetary positions.⁹ A small group of pioneers sense that the existing scientific model which is riddled with anomalies and therefore unable to solve emerging problems. These anomalies create a crisis. The crisis of the old paradigm leads to a new one, "a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications."¹⁰

The change of paradigm is also a change of world view. It is "as if the professional community had been suddenly transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well."¹¹ It is as if scales fell from their eyes or as if scientists had a lightning flush that enabled them to see the solution of a problem in a new way.¹²

As the existing paradigm increasingly blurs, the new one begins to attract more and more scholars, until the old problem-ridden paradigm is eventually abandoned.

The natural sciences now have a new-paradigm thinking; it has its counterpart in theology.¹³

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹³ Fritjof Capra and David Steindl-Rast with Thomas Matus, *Belonging to the Universe*, Explorations on the Frontiers of Science and Spirituality (NY: HarperCollins Publishers 1991).

In our opinion, the following are paradigm shifts which have led to religious freedom.

Paradigm Shift in the Concept of the Human Person

The idea of the dignity of the human person took centuries to evolve. Since the time of recorded history, authoritarian regimes like Assyria and Egypt used brute force on its people. Those in authority assumed that they had the right to the lives of people under them. The Roman lords could kill their slaves as if they were non-humans. The feudal Japanese lords also believed that they had the right to take the lives of people below their social rank.

The Europeans during the first millennium thought of Europe as the only world. Europe was Christian and its inculturated Christianity was the thing expected for everyone else. After the Age of Discovery, the Europeans did not look at the rest of mankind as like themselves. Some missionaries in the Americas doubted whether the natives had human souls to be saved. In the name of sports white hunters organized hunting expeditions to shoot and kill the natives in the jungles of South America.

The case of white settlers in Australia can be comparable to Hitler's extermination of millions of Jews in Europe. The native Tasmanians were the first settlers of Australia, before the aborigines pushed them out. The white settlers gave these people poisoned food, blankets with typhoid germs. The hunters organized hunting raids to kill the Tasmanians. Today the Tasmanians are an extinct people.

After Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) theory of evolution came in vogue, the white colonizers rationalized their position. They considered the aborigines and tribal peoples as those who evolved just after the apes, and therefore less human. On the other hand, the white people thought of themselves as fully human.

In the sixties the United States still considered the blacks as inferior to the whites. The case of South Africa is even more recent.

Because of this philosophy of inequality, the white men instituted slavery as a valid institution. We know its consequences.

The seeds of human dignity also had its development.

The French and American revolutions had made the common citizens equal to the aristocracy before the law. The Industrial Revolution was fast bringing self-respect and security, even if not plenty, to the masses of Europe and America. Modern communications and universal education had awakened the traditional down-trodden three-fourths of populations everywhere in the West. This revolution was primarily sociological and civilizational, not a religious, phenomenon. Mankind, only indirectly influenced by Christ, had come of age. It recognized its natural freedom.¹⁴

The alleged inequality between humans had its effect in religion. Catholic and Protestant leaders led their people to bloody wars and massacres because of religious differences. Heretics were burned on the stake for not returning to the one "true" faith. In short there was religious intolerance.

Religious freedom came to be practiced in the United States. It developed from the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Likewise historical circumstances thought of religious freedom as a policy better than playing favorites. Enlightenment philosophy stressed the importance of the individual as unique.

If man was this kind of being, then he possessed as an individual a set of special natural rights. They were natural because they were grounded in the reality of the universe itself; they were dependent only upon nature.¹⁵

Related to the shift of paradigm in human dignity is the development of the respect for the human conscience. When Christianity became a state religion, the state suppressed non-Christian religions. Like Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzenus, Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), during his early years as bishop, "opposed to all State force as a weapon against religious deviation."¹⁶ But he slowly changed his opinion for practical reasons although he maintained his view that religion should be free.

¹⁴ Pius Augustin, *Religious Freedom in Church and State*, A Study in Doctrinal Development (Baltimore: Helicon Press, Inc., 1966), p. 314.

¹⁵ Jerald C. Brauer, "Religious Freedom as a Human Right," in *Religious Liberty*, p. 50.

¹⁶ Augustin, *Religious Freedom*, p. 68.

If by practicing their religion the pagans and heretics were indulging in even subjectively sinful behavior, then suppressing them is no more damaging to true freedom than to prevent by sincere perverted minds from indulging in adultery. As a matter of fact Augustine, in all sincerity, appeals to precisely this analogy.¹⁷

The use of force on heretics may be compared to the parents' use of force on a child. When the parents punish the child, their purpose is to make the child see truth. It is only later that the child realizes the benefit of stripes. The use of force should be done out of love. Augustine gives an example.

If anyone saw his enemy, overcome by fever, hastening headlong over a precipice, would he not then render evil for evil more if he should permit him to proceed than if he should see to it that he be seized and bound up?¹⁸

Concerning religious dissenters, he said: "Christ does not prevent us from repressing heretics, shutting their mouths, depriving them of freedom of speech, reunion or association, but he forbids us to put them to death."¹⁹

Augustine did not approve of torture or death as a way of religious persuasion. Although his view had a Christian intention, it influenced future abuse in the context of church-state relations. St. Augustine "was really the greatest single apologist for State suppression of religious error."²⁰ His view on the State use of force on religion went unquestioned until the eleventh century. We can therefore understand the abuses of the Inquisition which aimed at protecting Christian unity against the attempts of heretics and of schismatics.

However, it took centuries later in the person of St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274 A.D.) to take the contrary view. He began by commenting on the epistle to the Romans (14:14) in the case of converts who believe erroneously that the eating of ritually unclean food is not

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁸ Quoted in Augustin, *ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

allowed. Paul decides that those who violate their conscience in eating ritually "unclean" food commit sin. Aquinas used the Aristotelian concept of conscience in defending that a person must follow even an erroneous conscience.²¹

For Aquinas conscience is an application of one's knowledge. "If the conscience happens to err in its judgment, this does not vitiate the whole action. The act takes on its moral character from the will's adherence or non-adherence to the verdict of the conscience." The reason acts on a syllogistic manner. Its premise is the person's inborn general knowledge of right and wrong of "do-able" things (*synderesis* or *bait* in Tagalog). The minor premise is an examination of the facts and circumstances while the conclusion is the judgment of conscience.

While Augustine attached guilt to the following of an erroneous conscience, Aquinas taught the opposite. While Augustine said that the conscience has a spark of the divine or supernatural, Aquinas said that the conscience is natural.

Aquinas therefore left a legacy that "future ages would be able more to readily forgive invincible error in regard to religious truth."²⁴ The use of intimidation or physical force on convinced heretics would be unworthy. In other words, respect for the conscience hinges on respect for the human person.

The time was right to correct the past errors of history. Vatican II therefore:

...declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed. Thus it is to become a civil right.²⁵

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128. See *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 19, a. 5.

²² Augustin, *Religious Freedom*, p. 129.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

²⁵ *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.

"Only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness,"²⁶ the Vatican II said, talking of the dignity of the human person.

Paradigm Shift in the Idea of Truth

In the Platonic and Neo-Platonic doctrine, the spiritual is superior to the material. This meant that the spiritual and the material formed a whole system in hierarchic order. The nearer one is to the spiritual source, the clearer the vision. On earth, the Pope —Christ's vicar— enjoyed the fullness of power (*plenitudo potestatis*) in both the temporal and spiritual orders. Giles of Rome, who followed this line of thought, said that:

...as the inferior bodies are ruled by the higher, and the whole substance of the body is ruled by the spiritual, which itself is ruled by God, thus also in the Church the temporal and inferior rulers are governed by the higher, and the whole temporal power is ruled by the spiritual, principally by the Supreme Pontiff.²⁷

This also included the king, who was supposed to be more enlightened than his subjects. But the Pope —to use a modern expression— had a "hot line" to the Holy Spirit.

At the end of the middle ages the Church's position might be summed up briefly in the following manner. The Pope is the supreme head of Christendom with the right and power even to unseat kings if the good of the spiritual demands it. The king's exclusive power over purely secular matters is rather freely admitted but moral reasons justifying interference by the Pope are wide in scope and vague in nature. Secondly, the Church must be free of the prince in her spiritual activities. She is, then, supreme and free in the spiritual realm and the prince must listen to her voice.²⁸

In short it was a theocratic sacral world view where religion permeated all aspects of life and of thought from the sacred to the profane.

²⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, 17.

²⁷ Augustin, *Religious Freedom*, p.118.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Besides the philosophical reason, the union of church and state had also its practical side.

Religion needed and wanted close support from the State, and the State, in turn, relied heavily on the political strength always present in religious support. Crude communications, relative ignorance of other possibilities, and the comparatively undeveloped level of society, all tended to effect a minimalization of the system's disadvantages in the face of sheer necessity.²⁹

In this Platonic paradigm the main concern was *idea* (or *being*) later in Thomistic times. Both in Augustine, Aquinas and the scholastics, truth was viewed as eternal and static. Theology tended to be deductive in its method, abstract and idealistic in content. The timeless dogma were applied to concrete situations.

We find this approach in the textbooks of theology which presented religious truths in form of theses. Because they were supposedly eternal, dogmas were presented as timeless, and therefore not bound to history. The model was the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Vatican II considers revelation as dynamic because it is God's intervention through history. The Church "constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her."³⁰ We are supposed to look at the signs of the times as possible ways in which God speaks. In *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II admits that "the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one."³¹ That is why the teaching of theology should be presented in the historical fashion.

Vatican II also accepts the "rightful independence of earthly affairs":

If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy.³²

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

³⁰ *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), 8.

³¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 5.

³² *Gaudium et Spes*, 36.

The change of theological thinking concerning divine truth caught up in the paradigm shift which has occurred in epistemology. In the terms of Capra, Matus, and Steindl-Rast, the shift has been from partial truths to the whole. The whole and the part are inseparable. There has been a shift from truth as timeless to truth as dynamic, historically conditioned or in the state of process. Truth is more than a cerebral formulation but holistic to include the nonconceptual, and approximative.

When applied to religious tolerance, the partners of dialogue are aware that they do not possess all the truth, that truth has many aspects. Religious intolerance can also be blamed on the either-or philosophy which has characterized traditional Western thought. The either-or mentality tends to be authoritarian and does not allow the other side to exist. Perhaps that is why religious persecution occurred in Europe. But if truth is thought of in both/and terms, then it allows pluralism of religious persuasion.

Paradigm Shift in the Model of the Church

An example of paradigm in the sociological sense is the triumphalism of the pre-Vatican II Church. The Church, still with Constantinian privileges and 'medieval' categories, viewed itself as a perfect society. 'Perfect' taken in the sense that it has all the means to attain its end. It had an organizational structure (dioceses, parishes, religious organizations with particular purposes like schools, charitable institutions, missions). It had a code of values (unquestionable, even blind obedience to authority, the clerics as superior to the lay people, etc.), a sense of hierarchy, a dress code, symbols, etc. It trained its young members to serve and pursue its shared societal goals. Its structure served as a "constellation of group commitments."³³ In short triumphalism was the core of pre-Vatican II Church culture.

In the philosophical sense, triumphalism is based on a certain type of philosophy and theology, as explained earlier in the section on truth.

³³ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, pp. 181-87.

The Two-Sword Theory of the Middle Ages understood that Christ, the Lord of Christianity, appointed two powers (symbolized by two swords in Lk. 22:38) in governing the world. The secular sword rested with the emperor while the spiritual sword was in the hand of the Pope. Canonists and theologians interpreted the theory one-sidedly in favor of the Pope, namely, that the church owned both swords and that the emperor held one for and in the name of the Church.

Boniface VIII, who was Pope from 1294 to 1303, dreamed of a "universal theocratic western state under papal leadership."³⁴ He said that there is no salvation nor remission of sins outside the Catholic Church. He even went further: "We declare, say, define and proclaim that to submit to the Roman Pontiff, is, for every human creature, an utter necessity of salvation."³⁵

But Vatican II no longer insists of the Church as a perfect society. On the contrary it admits that as a pilgrim, it is also sinful and waits for its fulfillment in the Last Day.³⁶

Now the emphasis is no longer on the conversion of non-Christians. It has changed its theology with the emphasis of the Kingdom of God over the Church as priority. The new emphasis is on the interplay between proclamation and interfaith dialogue. Pope John Paul II showed leadership when he prayed with the world's religious leaders during the World Day Prayer for Peace in Assisi on 27 October 1986.

Conclusion

What we have been pointing out is that religious tolerance today flows from the paradigm shifts. These paradigm shifts are not only

³⁴ August Franzen and John H. Dolan, *A History of the Church*, trans. by Peter Becker, (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), p. 226.

³⁵ "Porro, subesse Romano Pontifici omni humanae creaturae declaramus, dicimus, omnino esse de necessitate salutis." Denziner-Schoemmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, # 877. For more details on "outside the Church no salvation?" see Hans Kueng, *Freedom Today*, trans. by Cecily Hastings (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), see pp. 117-123.

³⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, chapter VII.

true to physical sciences but also to theology.³⁷ The paradigm shift in theology is also applicable to philosophy.

Because religion is a part of culture, it is inseparable from a people's way of life. If religion is limitedly defined in cerebral terms, then one can cast off religion and put on a new one as if it were a piece of clothing. But for most people, religion is inseparable from birth and from a concrete society in general. A Thai who wanted to become a Christian was asked by his relatives: "You mean you will become a foreigner?"

At present Christians number only one-third of the world's population. Statisticians project that Islam will outrank Christians in the third millenium. When Christ said that his followers are a "little flock" (Lk. 12:32), perhaps that minority status will be till the end of the world. In the other metaphor of Christians as the salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13), the goal is not to make all the earth salt but only to affect its flavor.

The new paradigms will foster more understanding and peace in a world of religious pluralism.

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³⁷ Capra and Steindl-Rast with Matus, *Belonging to the Universe*. For an overview, see the *Appendix* of this article.

APPENDIX

(From *Belonging to the Universe*, pp. xi-xiv. See note no. 13 for details.)

***New-Paradigm Thinking
in Science***

by Fritjof Capra

The old scientific paradigm may be called Cartesian, Newtonian, or Baconian, since its main characteristics were formulated by Descartes, Newton, and Bacon

The new paradigm may be called holistic, ecological, or systemic, but none of these adjectives characterizes it completely.

New-paradigm thinking in science includes the following five criteria — the first two refer to our view of nature, the other three to our epistemology.

1. Shift from the Part to the Whole

In the old paradigm it was believed that in any complex system the dynamics of the whole could be understood from the properties of the parts.

In the new paradigm, the relationship between the parts and the whole is reversed. The properties of the parts can be understood only

***New-Paradigm Thinking
in Theology — A paraphrase***

by Thomas Matus and
David Steindl-Rast

The old theological paradigm may be called rationalistic, manualistic, or Positive-Scholastic, since its main characteristics were formulated in theological manuals based on Scholastic proof texts.

The new paradigm may be called holistic, ecumenical, or transcendental Thomistic, but none of these adjectives characterizes it completely.

New-paradigm thinking in theology includes the following five criteria —the first two refer to our view of divine revelation, the other three to our theological methodology.

**1. Shift from God as
revealer of Truth to
Reality as God's Self-
Revelation**

In the old paradigm, it was believed that the sum total of dogmas (all basically of equal importance) added up to revealed truth.

In the new paradigm the relationships between the parts and the whole is reversed. The meaning of individual dogmas can be

from the dynamics of the whole. Ultimately, there are no parts at all. What we call a part is merely a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships.

2. Shift from Structure to Process

In the old paradigm it was thought that there were fundamental structures, and then there were forces and mechanisms through which these interacted, thus giving rise to processes.

In the new paradigm every structure is seen as the manifestation of an underlying process. The entire web of relationships is intrinsically dynamic.

3. Shift from Objective Science to "Epistemic Science"

In the old paradigm scientific descriptions were believed to be objective, i.e., independent of the human observer and the process of knowledge.

In the new paradigm it is believed that epistemology—the understanding of the process of knowledge—is to be included explicitly in the description of natural phenomena.

understood only from the dynamics of revelations as a whole. Ultimately revelation as a process is of one piece. Individual dogmas focus on particular moments of God's self-manifestation in nature, history, and human experience.

2. Shift from Revelation as Timeless Truth to Revelation as Historical Manifestation

In the old paradigm it was thought that there was a static set of supernatural truths which God intended to reveal to us, but the historical process by which God revealed them was seen as contingent and therefore of little importance.

In the new paradigm the dynamic process of salvation history is itself the great truth of God's self-manifestation. Revelation as such is intrinsically dynamic.

3. Shift from Theology as an Objective Science to Theology as a Process of Knowing

In the old paradigm theological statements were assumed to be objective, i.e., independent of the believing person and the process of knowledge.

The new paradigm holds that reflection on nonconceptual ways of knowing—intuitive, affective, mystical—has to be included explicitly in theological discourse.

At this point there is no consensus about what the proper pistemology is, but there is an emerging consensus that epistemology will have to be an integral part of every scientific theory.

At this point there is no consensus on the proportion in which conceptual and non-conceptual ways of knowing contribute to theological discourse, but there is an emerging consensus that non-conceptual ways of knowing are integral to theology.

4. Shift from Building to Network as Metaphor of Knowledge

The metaphor of knowledge as building —fundamental laws, fundamental principles, basic building blocks, etc.— has been used in Western science and philosophy for thousands of years.

During paradigm shifts it was felt that the foundations of knowledge were crumbling.

In the new paradigm this metaphor is being replaced by that of the network. As we perceive as a network of relationships, our descriptions, too, form an interconnected network representing the observed phenomena.

In such a network there will be neither hierarchies nor foundations.

Shifting from the building to the network also implies abandoning the idea of physics as the ideal against which all other sciences are modeled and judged, and as the main source of metaphors for scientific descriptions.

4. Shift from Building to Network as Metaphor of Knowledge

The metaphor of knowledge as building —fundamental laws, fundamental principles, basic building blocks, etc.— has been used in theology for many centuries.

During paradigm shifts it was felt that the foundations of doctrine were crumbling.

In the new paradigm this metaphor is being replaced by that of the network. As we perceive reality as a network of relationships, our theological statements, too, form an interconnected network of different perspectives on transcendent reality.

In such a network each perspective may yield unique and valid insights into truth.

Shifting from the building to the network also implies abandoning the idea of a monolithic system of theology as binding for all believers and as the sole source for authentic doctrine.

5. Shift from Truth to Approximate Descriptions

The Cartesian paradigm was based on the belief that scientific knowledge could achieve absolute and final certainty.

In the new paradigm, it is recognized that all concepts, theories, and findings are limited and approximate.

Science can never provide any complete and definitive understanding of reality.

Scientists do not deal with truth (in the sense of exact correspondence between the description and the described phenomena); they deal with limited and approximate descriptions of reality.

5. Shift in Focus from Theological Statements to Divine Mysteries

The manualistic paradigm of theology suggested by its very form as "summa" or compendium that our theological knowledge was exhaustive.

In the new paradigm, by greater emphasis on mystery, acknowledges the limited and approximate character of every theological statement.

Theology can never provide a complete and definitive understanding of divine mysteries.

The theologian, like every believer, finds ultimate truth not in the theological statement but in the reality to which this statement gives a certain true, but limited expression. □