Meaning and Metaphor in Theology

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The title of this paper would appear to suggest that it belongs to a fairly familiar area of discussion in the philosophy of religion – the discussion of 'religious language' – to which the late Bishop of Durham, Dr Ramsey, made many notable contributions. The appearance is somewhat misleading. Of course the present paper must clearly be concerned with religious language; but the centre of its concern is not religious language in general but in particular the language which it is the business of the Christian theologian to interpret, in the first place Biblical language, and in the second place the language of interpretation itself, theological language. Even this formulation – religious language in general, biblical and theological language in particular – might be misleading if it were taken to imply simple inclusion. It may turn out that the apparently broader, more fundamental discussion of religious language relies in fact on assumptions which are open to criticism deriving from the apparently narrower and secondary discussion of biblical and theological language.

The approach to be adopted here might be indicated in a less formal, more personal way. Until recently, at least, Roman Catholic theology identified itself as primarily dogmatic, in a tradition which was plainly continuous with the scholastic theology of the thirteenth century. If one were asked to name a typical R. C. theologian even a few years ago, some figure like Karl Rahner would seem an obvious candidate. There is a sense in which Rahner is still the most prominent R. C. theologian, but this seems to me due to the fact that he has no real successors in the curious situation in which R. C. theology now finds itself: that the tradition in which it was active has now unmistakably collapsed, and that it is no longer clear with what style, idiom, assumptions it should continue to practise. The present paper, by a Roman Catholic theologian, arises from a need to sketch some kind of unifying perspective within which theological activity, still recognizably Roman Catholic, can continue, in the hope that this might be of some interest to theologians, whether Roman Catholic or not, who are prepared to recognize the legitimacy of investigations of this sort: investigations into the ultimate categories of theological interpretation and the possibility of dogmatic Christianity.

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I propose to introduce the discussion of the problem historically, by giving some account of St Thomas Aquinas *on* Pseudo-Dionysius *on* the Divine Names, *de divinis nominibus*. This is the primary context for what has become the vastly over-worked topic of analogical predication in the philosophy of religion. By my repetition of the word "on", I am trying to suggest that the field of discussion is properly a tradition of interpretation: a biblical tradition, itself to be seen in *traditionsgeschichtlich* terms, successively reinterpreted by Pseudo-Dionysius and St Thomas. We may choose where we ourselves stand in relation to this tradition: either outside it as primarily historians or within it as extending the tradition in and through a discontinuity in the tradition. I hope to show that it is possible to identify a continuity in the tradition, in spite of a breach which at first sight would seem to prohibit any further extension of the tradition.

Both Pseudo-Dionysius and St Thomas conceived of what we would now call their theological activity as the interpretation of the Scriptures. Pseudo-Dionysius insists that he draws his account of the divine names exclusively *ek ton hieron logion* of the Scriptures, and in his commentary St Thomas follows him without hesitation:

> No one can think or speak of what is known to a single knower unless it is manifested by that knower. Now it belongs to God alone to know himself perfectly just as he is. Therefore no one can speak or think truly about God except by God's revelation; and this revelation is contained in the Scriptures.

Unlike St Albert in his commentary on the *de div. nom.* at this point, St Thomas surprisingly makes no reference to any natural knowledge of God here, though of course he does allow in the *Summa Theologiae* that the same matters are dealt with by philosophical theology and that theology which belongs to *sacra doctrina,* under different lights. St Thomas's position is at once more complex and more simple than it is sometimes made out to be. As the Five Ways show, St Thomas has no difficulty in supposing that philosophical argument can lead to the identification of some metaphysically determined X which "all men call 'God'"; but this name 'God' which men use to invoke him they do not derive from philosophical argument but from their religious traditions, in particular the tradition of biblical revelation with which St Thomas is primarily concerned. Thus the epistemological basis of theology for St Thomas can be determined in three connected, more or less equivalent ways: as First Truth (*Veritas prima*); as the articles of faith; and as the canonical scriptures. The expression 'First Truth' is of course a metaphysical one; the expression 'articles of faith' is a logical one, identifying the first principles of the logical order of

theology as a science; and the expression 'canonical scripture' is an empirical-ecclesiastical one. There is no doubt that St Thomas thought of the metaphysical expression as the primary one: even the God of revelation, the God who reveals himself, is conceived of in metaphysical terms — which is not to say that these metaphysical terms still have the same *definite* content as they would have if they were being used purely metaphysically, on the basis of philosophy alone. Because these terms are being used to refer to the God of revelation, their content is *indefinite.* St Thomas can identify *sacra doctrina* and *sacra scriptura* because he is guided, both explicitly and also, with a certain sense of the obviousness of it, tacitly, by a 'literal' determination of what God *must* be: the Being who is spoken of in metaphysical terms, terms which are now 'transferred' to the God of revelation, and yet are not 'metaphors'.

What we have to see is the way in which for Pseudo-Dionysius, followed in this apparently by St Thomas, the *Scriptural* names of God seem to include, without any special distinction, names of God which would seem to derive immediately from created nature. There can be no doubt that Dionysius, and St Thomas after him, thought themselves to be expounding a *Scriptural* revelation of God. Thus, however remarkable it may seem to us, the vision of Isaiah 6 is offered as an example of the way in which "by God's goodness, intelligible realities are veiled about (*circumvelantur*) by sensible ones, as when the Scriptures speak of God and the angels under the likeness of sensible realities". It is the Apostolic logia, by way of Scripture or of liturgical tradition, which are held to confer symbolic and revelatory power on the sensible world. The world which is offered to our senses is made transparent by the light of verbal revelation. A list of Scriptural divine names proposed by Dionysius include the following: good, beautiful, wise, lovable, eternal, existent, mind, intellect, powerful, as well as fire, water, cloud, stone, rock. It seems that Dionysius, and, with some important modifications, St Thomas, see the revealed names of God in Scripture as at least sometimes doing no more than pick out a revelatory significance with which items in the created world are already charged; for the two authors, there seems to be a single seamless 'veil' between our perception and the transcendent truth of God.

It may not be irrelevant to suggest that there is an intuition of the pervasive presence of the transcendent reality of God here which has found a variety of expressions, some of them more pantheistic than others. The English Buddhist monk Sangharakshita, in his *Survey of Buddhism,* p. 410, alludes to Tennyson's "Flower in the crannied wall, I pluck you out of the crannies; — Hold you

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here, root and all, in my hand, Little flower – but if I could understand What you are, root and all, and all in all, I should know what God and man is", when he is discussing that school of Buddhism known as the Avatamsaka or Hua Yen Tsung (7th c. China), which interprets the non-duality of things in terms of their unobstructed mutual interpenetration. For Dionysius and St Thomas, in their different ways, we may say that the transcendent presence of God in the created world does not depend upon its being made known by revelation, though it can only be made known by revelation; revelation discloses a presence which is already there. Metaphysics is the appropriate doctrine for analyzing ontological presence, the presence of *esse*, being; hence theology – *sacra doctrina* – is inevitably metaphysical. Metaphysical ways of talking about God are the only appropriate ways, although the epistemological basis for so talking must be revelation, God metaphysically referred to as First Truth.

Now such a view of revelation and metaphysics depends more or less explicitly on a view of language and reality, some aspects of which in Pseudo-Dionysius and St Thomas we may now glance at. In particular we may consider two ways in which, according to St Thomas in his commentary, Pseudo-Dionysius holds that the Scriptures tell us about God in virtue of some likeness in created things. Firstly, there is a likeness (*similitudo*) due to the participation of created things in God; thus all good things are from the first Good and all living things from the source of Life. But secondly, there is a likeness in virtue of something transferred (*translatum*) to God from creatures. So God is called a lion, a rock, or the sun; and here God is named symbolically or metaphorically, *symbolice vel metaphorice.*

The key-phrase here is 'symbolically or metaphorically'. The 'or' (*vel*) conceals a fairly deep division between the Platonisms of Pseudo-Dionysius and St Thomas; and both Platonisms are fairly remote from any view of metaphor, symbol, language and reality which we could comfortably hold today. Relying on the copious indices of Chevallier's *Dionysiaca,* it may be said with some confidence that *metaphora* occurs nowhere in the Greek or in any of the Latin versions of Pseudo-Dionysius's works. Why then does it seem obvious to St Thomas that 'symbolice' and 'metaphorice' are equivalent?

I shall not attempt here to go into this question in historical detail, but one aspect of its complexity needs to be mentioned. *Metaphora* in Latin does not seem to have been the usual translation of Greek *metaphora;* this was rather 'translated' by *translatio;* so in Quintillian's Institutes and the standard translation by Boethius of Aristotle's Topics. As far as the Poetics or the Rhet-

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oric are concerned the Latin translations are dated too late in the thirteenth century to throw light on St Thomas's usage. The point of interest here, as Chenu has shown, is that the translation of *metaphora* by *translatio* led to mutual interference with the translation by *translatio* of Pseudo-Dionysius's *anagoge,* the ascent to the transcendent. To speak *translative,* then, at least in a theological context, is *inevitably* to transfer meaning from the visible to the invisible sphere, by an elevation from sensible to intelligible and immaterial reality; and this use of *translatio* and *translative* is taken for granted by St Thomas.

To be very brief here, it may be said that St Thomas's confident equation of *symbolice* and *metaphorice* arises from his metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions: it was obvious, it could not be otherwise. We may note here, by way of parallel, his use of *imago,* which would correspond to Greek *eikon:* the Son is the *imago* of the Father, the eucharistic sacrifice is the *imago* of the Passion of Christ — but so is the altar. As in medieval and especially thirteenth-century iconography generally, 'symbolism' gives way to 'allegory'. It seems likely that for Pseudo-Dionysius 'symbols' belong to the same conceptual world as ikons, which although made by human hands are invested by consecration with the presence of a divine reality (we may note his use of the language of the mystery-cults here). Thus symbols, whether words or rites, are 'fictions', constructed by the sacred writers or ministers, and yet communicate ontologically *with* the divine reality by participation, and communicate this reality *to* the initiate. For Pseudo-Dionysius, symbols belong to a single continuous hierarchical chain of ontological participation, which includes cosmos, hierographer or hierophant, and initiates; but for St Thomas, the symbol (now = metaphor) is partially detached from this chain and is treated by the theologian as a product of the human mind, although sacred writer and theologian still belong to an undivided cosmos of divine creation.

This detachment of the symbol from the chain of participation into a kind of secondary circuit takes place for St Thomas by way of a metaphysical analysis of the act of knowledge and a logical analysis of language. Very briefly here, St Thomas both takes for granted and establishes his own presupposition that the literal sense of language (and we may say the literal sense of the world) can be unambiguously defined in metaphysical terms. Even God can be spoken of *proprie,* literally, but analogically, not *aequivoce,* equivocally, because of a similitude of participation between creatures and God which can be in certain cases extracted from the creaturely mode of being (*modus essendi*) by an appropriate negation of the *mode of signification (modus significandi)* of our lang-

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uage. The 'certain cases' are those in which materiality or corporeality is not inseparably part of the *modus essendi* or *significandi;* in this case all we have is metaphor. For St Thomas it is possible to lay down conditions for 'proper' or 'literal' talk about God in two stages: (1) in general, 'proper' and 'metaphorical' language can be unambiguously distinguished, on the basis of a metaphysical vision of the world as 'nature' and 'substance'; (2) in particular, proper and metaphorical language *about God* can be distinguished unambiguously on the basis of the dual manifestation of the world as sensible-material and spiritual-intelligible. So St Thomas can peacefully expound a Scriptural text metaphysically without any sense of hermeneutic discontinuity in the same sort of way as many modern readers can comfortably use 'existentialist' language to interpret the Scriptures. It is perhaps worth noting that Jewish tradition, in Philo and Maimonides, proceeds in the same manner, with Buber, perhaps, as a modern representative of a different style.

All that has been said up to this point, with unavoidable compression, and yet lengthily, has been meant to serve as an introduction to the real topic of this paper. Supposing that it is no longer possible to identify metaphysically an X which all men call God, how any longer in our God-talk, our theological discourse, are we to distinguish between 'literal' and 'metaphorical' language, especially since there is no longer any general criterion for distinguishing literal and metaphorical language even outside theology? The question bears on the word 'God' itself: should it be regarded as belonging to literal or to metaphorical language?

In terms of the remarks made at the beginning of this paper, it seems as though the loss of a unifying metaphysical order into which revelation could be unambiguously projected must imply the abandonment of dogmatic Christianity in the sense in which that has been understood in the Roman Catholic tradition. It is plain enough that anxieties of this kind are widely and perhaps legitimately felt by ecclesiastical authority. However, an alternative seems to be at least hypothetically possible: not so much the construction of some alternative version of metaphysics as an unambiguous and all-embracing description of the world, but some account of the multiple manifestation of the real in meaning, an ontology of meaning. The continuity here – and this seems essential to me – would be the concern to retain the ontological claim of dogmatic statements, their claim to declare the really real. In what follows I should like to indicate some ways in which this hypothesis of an ontology of meaning may be pursued, and to suggest some possible theological consequences. It is no doubt presumptuous enough even to envisage such an hypothesis and absurd to suppose that much can be said about it and its consequences in

a few minutes; nevertheless in what follows I shall throw out some remarks in the hope of critical discussion.

I shall begin, fairly arbitrarily, by discussing some arguments in Chomsky's *Language and Mind*. That this choice is arbitrary – that in the approach adopted here one might have begun somewhere else – already indicates not only a confessed lack of mastery of the topic; it should also be taken as an expression of doubt whether 'mastery' of meaning in the sense of being able to provide a systematic exposition of it, say in some treatise on semantics, might ever be possible or appropriate. I would have the same doubt about, or even suspicion of, a treatise on the metaphysics of being. However, let us look at Chomsky. "Knowlege of a language", he says, "involves the ability to assign deep and surface structures to an infinite range of sentences, to relate these structures appropriately, and to assign a semantic interpretation and a phonetic interpretation to the paired deep and surface structures.... A person who knows a specific language has control of a grammar that *generates* (that is, characterizes) the infinite set of potential deep structures, maps them on to associated surface structures, and determines the semantic and phonetic interpretations of these abstract objects.... An infinite class of deep structures ... can be generated by very simple rules that express a few rudimentary grammatical functions, if we assign to these rules a recursive property – in particular, one that allows them to embed structures of the form [s...]s within other structures". These connected formulations sum up fairly representatively, I believe, Chomsky's position in the late sixties, and I am in fact quoting from an enlarged edition of 1972. Having control of a language is to have that 'competence' of the native speaker of a language which enables him to form and to understand sentences which he has never met before. It is on the basis of this view, what he calls a Cartesian or rationalist linguistics, that he attacks the behaviourist or empiricist theory of language in terms of habits and dispositions. The argument consists in showing that the complexity of even the simplest linguistic performance could not be explained merely by the acquisition of habits, but that there must be some *a priori* capacity, a set of principles or 'universal grammar', which makes it possible for every individual to construct the grammar which controls the use of his native language.

I have no difficulty whatever in allowing that Chomsky is on the side of the angels here. The absurdities of the empiricist theory of meaning, a version of which, I am fairly confident, most of us take for granted in the same way as we assume we can identify what is 'primitive', emerge very clearly when the theory is given any sort of explicit formulation. What seems open to question is Chomsky's formulation of what constitutes this competence and

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its mode of operation: how competence issues in performance. No one, I think, least of all anyone unfamiliar with post-Chomskyan linguistics, will have failed to notice the 'register' of Chomsky's own statements quoted a couple of minutes ago. This is evident enough from the vocabulary — key-words in their context like 'structure', 'assign', 'infinite class', 'map', 'rules', 'functions', 'recursive property'. Chomskyan linguistics seems to be Cartesian not only because it posits an innate competence, but because it characterizes this competence and the associated performance in formalist, quasi-mathematical terms. Linguistics becomes a theoretical construction in the same kind of way as mathematical physics, with the same kind of relation between abstract theoretical formulation and empirical verification. I don't want to deny that this approach might be instructive; but I cannot see that it does justice to the most interesting aspects of language and meaning. An interesting example of terminology and theory is the quoted phrase 'recursive property'. In fact recursiveness has its proper home in the logical foundations of mathematics. In its application in linguistics, it appears to refer to the possibility of structural repetition in language, e.g. 'Jack and John and Harry and ...'. This is harmless enough; but it is this version of recursiveness which is supposed to elucidate talk about the 'infinite class of sentences' potentially available to the native speaker, that is, to represent formally the competence of the native speaker, his power to create new sentences. However important this kind of creativeness by repetition — 'embedding' — may be, it clearly has only the remotest connection with what is interestingly creative in language use — for instance, in metaphor.

There is another feature of Chomsky's argument which raises interesting questions. The complexity of linguistic performance cannot be explained empirically, so it is said; there must be rules and structures of an innate kind. Exactly the same argument can be used to justify the application of information or communication theory in biology. Of course it may be said that no argument is required to justify this application, that the success of this approach especially in molecular biology is more than enough to justify it; as the *Times* scientific correspondent put it a few days ago, DNA has become a household word. To quote a couple of examples. Here is R. L. Gregory, in a deservedly popular book on *The Eye and the Brain:* "What the eyes do is to feed the brain with information coded into neural activity — chains of electrical impulses — which by their code and the patterns of brain activity, represent objects". And on the 'genetic code', from Oliver Gillie's *The Living Cell:* "The three basic processes of genetic information transfer are: replication, transcription and translation ... This is

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how the genetic information is passed on — but how is it stored, or encoded, in the nuclear-acid molecules? Egyptologists were fortunate in having the Rosetta Stone to help them decipher ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. But molecular biologists could look to no simple key to the genetic code. Instead they had to develop powerful experimental techniques to do the same job". The point of the comparison with Chomsky is that both rely on the same presuppositions about the nature of hypotheses which explain complex behaviour by reduction to structures which are capable of mathematical analysis (Crick and Watson used the X-ray diffraction studies of DNA made by Maurice Williams). 'Code' does not seem to be one of Chomsky's notions; but it is a commonplace of linguistics, and the connections are made explicitly by Roman Jakobson in a recent study of *Main Trends in the Science of Language,* where he speaks of 'the Saussurian duality of *langue* and *parole,* or, to use a modern, less ambiguous terminology, 'code' (Saussure's *code de la langue*) and 'message' — alias 'competence' and 'performance'." Jakobson himself, one of the most civilized of modern linguists, uses the notion of 'code' in a remarkable essay on 'Linguistics and Poetics', and Lévi-Strauss relies on it for his analysis of myth. One might perhaps recall that the decipherment of hieroglyphics was a comparison explicitly made by Freud in his work on the interpretation of dreams.

These scattered instances, which could of course be multiplied indefinitely, should be enough to show how pervasive the notion of code is in our culture, even before some at least of these areas were unified formally by Wiener in his cybernetics. What may be pointed out here is that the code is a version of *similitudo,* likeness, even when, in one of its most powerful types, in computer theory and telecommunications ('pulse code modulation'), the likeness is no longer 'analogue' but 'digital', i.e. the message is coded into binary, yes-no, 1 - 0, digits or bits. The basic principle of a code is that there should be two articulate systems in one-one correspondence with each other by a set of rules, such that reversible transformations from one system to another are possible; we may see this as the ultimate formulation of what is to count as 'literalness'. It seems odd that it was only recently, in 1970, that a non-Chomskyan linguist, M. K. Halliday, pointed out that the notion of code was inappropriate for the description of natural languages: in natural languages there is only one articulate 'system', unless we are to imagine a system of 'thoughts' in our heads, awaiting transformation into words and sentences.

To cut a very long story short, I should like to propose the following route to an ontology of meaning. First, we recognize that code theories have in fact unified very diverse areas of the

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world of our experience. Secondly, we practise upon the structuralist presupposition that meaning is embodied in structures capable of formal, quasi-mathematical analysis that sort of critique which Wittgenstein practised in his later work on his own picture-theory of meaning. Thirdly, once at home in the indefinitely extensible and variable multiplicity of meaning in a Wittgensteinian world, we pay due regard to the genesis of that world as process, praxis and activity. The genesis of biological life can only reductively be explained in terms of information transfer regulated by a genetic code. Meaning is the process of praxis by which the world to which man belongs becomes the world which belongs to man. It is not the extension of language, by metaphor or in any other way, which is the puzzle. It is literalness which needs to be explained as a particular type of the praxis of meaning, not only in the construction of artificial languages and codes, but as a way of life. What is the *Sitz im Leben* of literalness? On the view being suggested here, metaphor is the typical linguistic expression of the praxis of meaning, which could itself be described as an ontological 'metaphor'. The 'transference' of one world into another realized in the activity of human existence and behaviour: cosmos becoming environment: so 'metaphor' not only as a mode of language but as a mode of life.

It is time to look at some of the consequences such a view of meaning might have for theology. In the first place, it seems to preserve the ontological claims of Christian doctrine, its claim to declare the really real. However, it does so by locating the point of manifestation of the real not in substances but in the process and praxis of meaning, the *history* of the individual and of mankind, by which — to repeat — the world to which man belongs becomes the world which belongs to man. On the other hand, such a view of meaning can no longer support the demonstrable identification of an X which all men call God, an identification made on the basis of a metaphysical unification of the world. The paradigm of meaning proposed here is designed to let variety and novelty of meaning serve as the primary and leading function of meaning. I should be happy to allow that some analogue of metaphysical identification may be indicated by the phrase, 'the Meaning of meaning', which all men call God; it would have to be understood that the phrase would have in itself no unique analyzable 'structure' of meaning, but would have to be re-construed over and over again in the course of the history of the individual and of mankind. It would be like the word 'real' in the light of what I have found the memorable remark of Dr F. R. Leavis in his book on D. H. Lawrence:

'Real', of course, is not a word of immediately determinable force, but it is a necessary word here, and it gets its definition

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concretely in the enactment of the drama.

In the same way, the phrase 'the Meaning of meaning' could serve to guide a life-long pursuit of what all men call 'God'. It would have the advantage of 'locating' God *prior* to any distinction of literal and metaphorical. It seems to me proper to recognize that 'literalness' can only be uniquely defined for an artificial language, and that for natural languages the distinction between literal and metaphorical must always be a relative opposition within the conventions and the assumptions of a given linguistic community, a given culture: it could be seen partly as a distinction of 'register'.

There is one last implication of the view proposed here which I should like to explore. St Thomas's identification of an X which all men call God takes place of course within *sacra doctrina*, that teaching which is continuous with *sacra scriptura* and forms an interpretation of it; St Thomas takes it for granted that men are already invoking God and calling upon him. But what happens in his theology is that God is identified as the subject of theology and theology is held to be organized as a body of statements about God. This view has persisted as the largely unexamined assumption of most reflection today about 'God-talk' in the philosophy of religion. The problem to which writers address themselves is 'How can we talk about God?' It is taken for granted that God must be the *subject* of assertions, and that the point of the investigation is to establish some coherent doctrine of God, say some version of monotheism. What I want to draw attention to here is the gap between calling upon God and making statements about God, 'God' as predicate and 'God' as subject. We may put ourselves the question, 'Do Christians need a doctrine of God?'

If only to weaken our common assumptions, it may be worth recalling some remarks of the late Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard in his classic account of the religion of the Nuer, a tribe in the Southern Sudan. The basis of Nuer thought about God seems to be that while *kwoth* (the Nuer word which seems to correspond to 'God' and can be used about the hooting of a Nile steamer) is predicated of all sorts of things and events, it is rarely that anything is predicated of *kwoth*. To quote: "Though one can say of rain or pestilence that it is God one cannot say of God that he is rain or pestilence ... The situation could scarcely arise, God not being an observable object, in which Nuer would require or desire to say about him that he is anything". Bearing these remarks in mind, suppose we ask ourselves what happens when we hear or read the word 'God' in translations of the Old Testament, what account we might give of the word to an interested inquirer who wants to find out about God. A beautiful example of what I suggest regularly happens is found in one of the modern authors to whom I turned

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for help, Ringren's article on *elohim* in the *Theol. Wb. zum AT*, where he begins his substantive account (note that there is a separate article on *el* by F. M. Cross): "In order to reach an at least approximate definition of the concept of 'God' (eine jedenfalls annähernde Definition des Begriffs 'Gott'), we must set out from the texts where *elohim* (or *el*) is found in opposition to something else or where the Godhead (Gottsein) of some being is denied". Even if we set aside the rather quaint assumption that a definable concept of God is to be found, we cannot ignore the assumption that there is a unified conception of God in the Old Testament, to be contrasted with, say, Baal-religion within the Old Testament itself, or Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Canaanite religion outside the Old Testament (these are reviewed by Ringren in the first part of his article). I only use Ringren to bring to the surface tacit assumptions we ourselves might hold, assumptions which a sophisticated Old Testament scholar might dismiss, while still retaining the much wider assumption that there is a unified Christian conception of God to be contrasted with other conceptions in other religions. Is there any theological, dogmatic support for such an assumption? Can't a Christian hold that it isn't necessarily the case that he has to provide a consistent account of his use of the word 'God', even perhaps that it is absurd to suppose that he can? But then doesn't the whole of Christianity collapse?

What I want to propose here is a suggestion to which it is difficult to provide a really clinching counter-example and which yet seems to provide a kind of discipline for reading the Old Testament; I might call the suggestion 'consistent Yahwism'. Here the point would be *always* to refer any *elohim* language predicatively to Yahweh, on the general lines of the Deuteronomist *Yahweh, hu ha-elohim,* most dramatically in the dispute between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Notice that I am not arguing for the view that on the basis of a neutral and objective assessment of all the Old Testament evidence (the 2,600 instances of *elohim,* e.g.) it is clear that ... etc. I should have to account in a balanced way for the E traditions of the Pentateuch and the so-called Elohistic psalter. What I am suggesting is a discipline, a sort of meta-scriptural rule for reading the praxis of Old Testament *elohim*-language which doesn't actually do violence to it. What is going to be one's primary reference all the time is Yahweh, not *elohim,* not some monotheistic universal God of philosophical theology. And of course Yahweh needn't be philosophically consistent, in fact couldn't be. The Old Testament is to be read — so I am proposing — not as about God who is called Yahweh, but about Yahweh who is frequently and variously addressed as *elohim,* who has *elohim* predicated of him, even in such common turns of phrase as *Yahweh*

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eloheka.

Once again, I am not suggesting that 'consistent Yahwism' is to be extracted by scholarly analysis of the Old Testament; what I am suggesting (taking up some intriguing remarks in A. C. Charity's book *Events and their Afterlife*) is that a *Christian* reader of the Old Testament would do well to see the proper name 'Yahweh' as the (certainly anthropomorphic!) anticipation of the personal name 'Jesus', and to focus whatever growing experience of the divine he may have on that personal name so that at the *end* of each cycle of his growth he may address Jesus, like Thomas at the end of the Fourth Gospel, *ho Kurios mou kai Theos mou.* Then the proper perspective of Christian revelation would not be 'God (with a capital G = the transcendent X) is revealed as Trinity', but 'Jesus shows us the Father (*ho Theos* = God with a capital G = the Father)'. And what could be more metaphorical than 'father' in such a context — the Father *beyond* God?

Here again I should like to make a non-Christian reference, taken from Zaehner's introduction to his edition of the *Bhagavad Gita.* Drawing on the tradition of interpretation represented by Ramanuja, opposed to the absolute monism of Shankara, he quotes from the *Mundaka* Upanishad: God 'is the divine Person, *purusa,* who is beyond the beyond, *parat-param'*, 'higher than the high', as Radhakrishnan translated it. Jesus' revelation of the Father exhibits a *new sort* of transcendence.

So what I am proposing here is a reading of the Bible which focuses on Yahweh-Jesus, which allows Yahweh-Jesus to become the key to the indefinitely expansible experience of the divine. Jesus became the key by the significant shape of his life and destiny, what we have called above the ontological metaphor of his praxis of meaning, culminating in the metaphor of the Resurrection, in which 'life' has been given a uniquely new meaning, accessible only in its repetition in the ontological metaphor of faith. Christian dogma records the history of the projection of that original metaphor into the literal world of a metaphysical order, and needs to be respected as such; after all, we can now recognize that metaphysical order for the creative metaphor it once was: but it cannot take the place of the original metaphor, the full sense of which will only be disclosed in the transfiguration of the world, when God is all in all, all the world a divine metaphor.

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