

5 - Problems of Religious Language

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The Peculiarity Of Religious Language

Contemporary work in the philosophy of religion has been much occupied with problems created by the distinctively religious uses of language. The discussions generally center around one or another of two main issues. One, which was familiar to medieval thinkers and which is being actively investigated with new philosophical techniques today, concerns the special sense that descriptive terms bear when they are applied to God. The other question, which also has a long history but which has been given fresh sharpness and urgency by contemporary analytical philosophy, is concerned with the basic function of religious language. In particular, do those religious statements that have the form of factual assertions (for example, "God loves mankind") refer to a special kind of fact—religious as distinguished from scientific fact—or do they fulfill a different function altogether? These questions will be discussed in the order in which they have just been mentioned. It is obvious that many, perhaps all, of the terms that are applied in religious discourse to God are being used in special ways, differing from their use in ordinary mundane contexts. For example, when it is said that "Great is the Lord ...," it is not meant that God occupies a large volume of space; when it is said that "the Lord spake unto Joshua," it is not meant that God has a physical body with speech organs through which he set in motion sound waves which impinged upon Joshua's eardrums. And when it is said that God is good, it is not meant that there are moral values independent of the divine nature, in relation to which God can be judged to be good; nor does it mean (as it commonly does of human beings) that he is subject to temptations but succeeds in overcoming them.

There has clearly been a long shift of meaning between the familiar secular use of these words and their theological employment. It is also clear that in all those cases in which a word occurs both in secular and in theological contexts, its secular meaning is primary in the sense that it developed first and has accordingly determined the definition of the word. The meaning that such a term bears when it is applied to God is an adaptation of its secular use. Consequently, although the ordinary, everyday meaning of such words as "good," "loving," "forgives," "commands," "hears," "speaks," "wills," "purposes" is relatively unproblematic, the same terms raise a multitude of questions when applied to God. To take a single example, love (whether *eros* or *agape*) is

expressed in behavior in the speaking of words of love, and in a range of actions from love-making to the various forms of practical and sacrificial caring. But God is said to be "without body, parts, or passions." He has then, it would seem, no local existence or bodily presence through which to express love. But what is disembodied love, and how can we ever know that it exists? Parallel questions arise in relation to the other divine attributes.

The Doctrine Of Analogy (Aquinas)

The great Scholastic thinkers were well aware of this problem and developed the idea of analogy to meet it. The doctrine of "analogical predication" as it occurs in Aquinas (1) and his commentator Cajetan, (2) and as it has been further elaborated and variously criticized in modern times, is too complex a subject to be discussed in detail within the plan of this book. However, Aquinas's basic and central idea is not difficult to grasp. He teaches that when a word, such as "good," is applied both to a created being and to God it is not being used univocally (i.e., with exactly the same meaning) in the two cases. God is not good, for example, in identically the sense in which human beings may be good. Nor, on the other hand, do we apply the epithet "good" to God and man equivocally (i.e., with completely different and unrelated meanings), as when the word "bat" is used to refer both to the flying animal and to the instrument used in baseball. There is a definite connection between God's goodness and man's, reflecting the fact that God has created man.

---[1] Summa Theologica, Part I, Question 13, Art. 5; Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 1, Chaps. 28-34. [2] Thomas De Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, The Analogy of Names, 1506 (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2nd ed., 1959). ---

According to Aquinas, then, "good" is applied to creator and creature neither univocally nor equivocally but analogically. What this means will appear if we consider first an analogy "downwards" from man to a lower form of life. We sometimes say of a pet dog that it is faithful, and we may also describe a man as faithful. We use the same word in each case because of a similarity between a certain quality exhibited in the behavior of the dog and the steadfast voluntary adherence to a person or a cause that we call faithfulness in a human being. Because of this similarity we are not using the word "faithful" equivocally (with totally different senses). But, on the other hand, there is an immense difference in quality between a dog's attitudes and a man's. The one is indefinitely superior to the other in respect of responsible, self-conscious deliberation and the relating of attitudes to moral purposes and ends. Because of this difference we are not using "faithful" univocally (in exactly the same

sense). We are using it analogically, to indicate that at the level of the dog's consciousness there is a quality that corresponds to what at the human level we call faithfulness. There is a recognizable likeness in structure of attitudes or patterns of behavior that causes us to use the same word for both animal and man. Nevertheless, human faithfulness differs from canine faithfulness to all the wide extent that a man differs from a dog. There is thus both similarity within difference and difference within similarity of the kind that led Aquinas to speak of the analogical use of the same term in two very different contexts.

In the case of our analogy "downwards," true or normative faithfulness is that which we know directly in ourselves, and the dim and imperfect faithfulness of the dog is known only by analogy. But in the case of the analogy "upwards" from man to God the situation is reversed. It is our own directly known goodness, love, wisdom, etc., which are the thin shadows and remote approximations, and the perfect qualities of the Godhead that are known to us only by analogy. Thus, when we say that God is good, we are saying that there is a quality of the infinitely perfect Being that corresponds to what at our own human level we call goodness. In this case, it is the divine goodness which is the true, normative, and unbroken reality, whereas human life shows at best a faint, fragmentary, and distorted reflection of this quality. Only in God can the perfections of being occur in their true and unfractured nature: only God knows, loves, and is righteous and wise in the full and proper sense. Since God is hidden from us, the question arises of how we can know what goodness and the other divine attributes are in him? How do we know what perfect goodness and wisdom are like? Aquinas's answer is that we do not know. As used by him, the doctrine of analogy does not profess to spell out the concrete character of God's perfections, but only to indicate the relation between the different meanings of a word when it is applied both to man and (on the basis of revelation) to God. Analogy is not an instrument for exploring and mapping the infinite divine nature; it is an account of the way in which terms are used of the Deity whose existence is, at this point, being presupposed. The doctrine of analogy provides a framework for certain limited statements about God, without infringing upon the agnosticism, and the sense of the mystery of the divine being, which have always characterized Christian and Jewish thought at their best. The conviction that it is possible to talk about God, yet that such talk can be carried to its destination only on the back of the distant analogy between the Creator and his creatures, is vividly expressed by the Catholic lay theologian, Baron von Hugel (1852-1925) . (3)

He speaks of the faint, dim, and confused awareness that a dog has of its master, and continues as follows. The source and object of religion, if religion be true and its object be real, cannot, indeed, by any possibility, be as clear to me even as I am to my dog. For the cases we have considered deal with realities inferior to our own reality (material objects, or animals), or with realities level to our own reality (fellow human beings), or with realities no higher above ourselves than are we, finite human beings, to our very finite dogs. Whereas, in the case of religion—if religion be right—we apprehend and affirm realities indefinitely superior in quality and amount of reality to ourselves, and which, nevertheless (or rather, just because of this), anticipate, penetrate, and sustain us with a quite unpicturable intimacy. The obscurity of my life to my dog must thus be greatly exceeded by the obscurity of the life of God to me. Indeed the obscurity of plant life—so obscure for my mind, because so indefinitely inferior and poorer than is my human life—must be greatly exceeded by the dimness, for my human life, of God—of His reality and life, so different and superior, so unspeakably more rich and alive, than is, or ever can be, my own life and reality.

(4) Religious Statements

As Symbolic (Paul Tillich) An important element in the thought of Paul Tillich is his doctrine of the "symbolic" nature of religious language. (5) ---[3]

Friedrich von Hugel's principal works are the two volumes of *Essays and Addresses* and *The Mystical Element in Religion and Eternal Life*, each of which is a major classic on its subject. [4] Friedrich von Hugel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion, First Series* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. and London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1921), pp. 102-3. [5] This is to be found in Tillich's *Systematic Theology and Dynamics of Faith*, and in a number of articles: "The Religious Symbol," *Journal of Liberal Religion*, II, No. 1 (Summer, 1940); "Religious Symbols and our Knowledge of God," *The Christian Scholar*, XXXVIII, No. 3 (September, 1955); "Theology and Symbolism," *Religious Symbolism*, ed. F.E. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955); "Existential Analyses and Religious Symbols," *Contemporary Problems in Religion*, ed. Harold A. Basilius (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1956), reprinted in *Four Existentialist Theologians*, ed. Will Herberg (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., Anchor Books, 1958); "The Word of God," *Language*, ed. Ruth Anshen (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957).

For a philosophical critique of Tillich's doctrine of religious symbols, see William Alston, "Tillich's Conception of a Religious Symbol," *Religious*

Experience and Truth, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1961), which volume also contains two further essays by Tillich, "The Religious Symbol" and "The Meaning and Justification of Religious Symbols." ---Tillich distinguishes between a sign and a symbol. Both point to something else beyond themselves. But a sign signifies that to which it points by arbitrary convention—as for instance, when the red light at the street corner signifies that drivers are ordered to halt. In contrast to this purely external connection, a symbol "participates in that to which it points." (6) To use Tillich's example, a flag participates in the power and dignity of the nation that it represents. Because of this inner connection with the reality symbolized, symbols are not arbitrarily instituted, like conventional signs, but "grow out of the individual or collective unconscious" (7) and consequently have their own span of life and (in some cases) their decay and death. A symbol "opens up levels of reality which otherwise are closed to us" and at the same time "unlocks dimensions and elements of our soul" (8) corresponding to the new aspects of the world that it reveals. The clearest instances of this twofold function are provided by the arts, which "create symbols for a level of reality which cannot be reached in any other way," (9) at the same time opening up new sensitivities and powers of appreciation in ourselves.

Tillich holds that religious faith, which is the state of being "ultimately concerned" about the ultimate, can only express itself in symbolic language. "Whatever we say about that which concerns us ultimately, whether or not we call it God, has a symbolic meaning. It points beyond itself while participating in that to which it points. In no other way can faith express itself adequately. The language of faith is the language of symbols." (10) There is, according to Tillich, one and only one literal, non-symbolic statement that can be made about the ultimate reality which religion calls God—that God is Being-itself. Beyond this, all theological statements— such as, that God is eternal, living, good, personal, that he is the Creator and that he loves his creatures—are symbolic. There can be no doubt that any concrete assertion about God must be symbolic, for a concrete assertion is one which uses a segment of finite experience in order to say something about him. It transcends the content of this segment, although it also includes it. ---[6] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers), p. 42. [7] *Ibid.*, p. 43. [8] *Ibid.*, p. 42. [9] *Ibid.*, p. 42. [10] *Ibid.*, p. 45. ---

The segment of finite reality which becomes the vehicle of a concrete assertion about God is affirmed and negated at the same time. It becomes a symbol, for a symbolic expression is one whose proper meaning is negated by that to which

it points. And yet it also is affirmed by it, and this affirmation gives the symbolic expression an adequate basis for pointing beyond itself. (11) Tillich's conception of the symbolic character of religious language can— like many of his central ideas—be developed in either of two opposite directions and is presented by Tillich in the body of his writings as a whole in such a way as to preserve its ambiguity and flexibility. I shall, at this point, consider Tillich's doctrine in its theistic development, indicating in a later section, in connection with the view of J.H. Randall, Jr., how it can also be developed naturalistically. (12) Used in the service of Judaic-Christian theism, the negative aspect of Tillich's doctrine of religious symbols corresponds to the negative aspect of the doctrine of analogy. Tillich is insisting that we do not use human language literally, or univocally, when we speak of the ultimate. Because our terms can only be derived from our own finite human experience, they cannot be adequate to apply to God; when used theologically, their meaning is always partially "negated by that to which they point." Religiously, this doctrine constitutes a warning against the idolatry of thinking of God as though he were merely a greatly magnified human being (anthropomorphism). Tillich's constructive teaching, offering an alternative to the doctrine of analogy, is his theory of "participation."

A symbol, he says, participates in the reality to which it points. But unfortunately Tillich does not define or clarify this central notion of participation. Consider, for example, the symbolic statement that God is good. Is the symbol in this case the proposition "God is good," or the concept "the goodness of God"? Does this symbol participate in Being-itself in the same sense as that in which a flag participates in the power and dignity of a nation? And what precisely is this sense? Tillich does not analyze the latter case—which he uses in several different places to indicate what he means by the participation of a symbol in that which it symbolizes. Consequently, it is not clear in what respect the case of a religious symbol is supposed to be similar. Again, according to Tillich, everything that exists participates in Being-itself; what then is the difference between the way in which symbols participate in Being-itself and the way in which everything else participates in it? The application to theological statements of Tillich's other "main characteristics of every symbol," (13) summarized above, raises further questions. ---[11] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 239. [12] See pp. 76-77. [13] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, p. 43. ---Is it really plausible to say that a complex theological statement such as "God is not dependent for his existence upon any reality other than himself" has arisen from the unconscious, whether individual or collective? Does it not seem more likely that it was carefully formulated by a philosophical theologian?

And in what sense does this same proposition open up both "levels of reality which are otherwise closed to us" and "hidden depths of our own being"? These two characteristics of symbols seem more readily applicable to the arts than to theological ideas and propositions. Indeed, it is Tillich's tendency to assimilate religious to aesthetic awareness that suggests the naturalistic development of his position, which will be described later (pp. 76-77).

These are some of the many questions that Tillich's position raises. In default of answers to such questions, Tillich's teaching, although valuably suggestive, scarcely constitutes at this point a fully articulated philosophical position.

Incarnation And The Problem Of Meaning It is claimed by some that the doctrine of the Incarnation (which together with all that follows from it distinguishes Christianity from Judaism) offers the possibility of a partial solution to the problem of theological meaning. There is a longstanding distinction between the metaphysical attributes of God (aseity, eternity, infinity, etc.) and his moral attributes (goodness, love, wisdom etc.). The doctrine of the Incarnation involves the claim that the moral (but not the metaphysical) attributes

of God have been embodied, so far as this is possible, in a finite human life, namely that of the Christ. This claim makes it possible to point to the person of Christ as showing what is meant by assertions such as "God is good" and "God loves his human creatures." The moral attitudes of God toward mankind are held to have been incarnated in Jesus and expressed concretely in his dealings with men and women. The Incarnation doctrine involves the claim that, for example, Jesus' compassion for the sick and the spiritually blind was God's compassion for them; his forgiving of sins, God's forgiveness; and his condemnation of the self-righteously religious, God's condemnation of them. On the basis of this belief, the life of Christ as depicted in the New Testament records provides a foundation for statements about God. From God's attitudes in Christ toward a random assortment of men and women in first-century Palestine, it is possible to affirm, for example, that God's love is continuous in character with that displayed in the life of Jesus. (14) ---[14] For a criticism of this view, see Ronald Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox* (London. G. A. Watts & Company Ltd., 1958), Chap. 5. ---

The doctrine of the Incarnation is used in relation to the same problem in a somewhat different way by Ian Crombie. "What we do [he says in the course of an illuminating discussion of the problem of theological meaning] is in essence to think of God in parables." He continues as follows: The things we say about

God are said on the authority of the words and acts of Christ, who spoke in human language, using parable; and so we too speak of God in parable—authoritative parable, authorized parable; knowing that the truth is not literally that which our parables represent, knowing therefore that now we see in a glass darkly, but trusting, because we trust the source of the parables, that in believing them and interpreting them in the light of each other, we shall not be misled, that we shall have such knowledge as we need to possess for the foundation of the religious life. (15)

Religious Language As Non-cognitive

When we assert what we take to be a fact (or deny what is alleged to be a fact) we are using language cognitively. "The population of China is 650,000,000," "This is a hot summer," "Two plus two equal four," "He is not here" are cognitive utterances. Indeed, we can define a cognitive (or informative or indicative) sentence as one that is either true or false. But there are other types of utterance that are neither true nor false, because they fulfill quite a different function from that of endeavoring to describe facts. We do not ask of a swearword, or a command, or the baptismal formula, or a sonnet whether it is true. The function of the swearword is to vent one's feelings; of the command, to direct someone's actions; of "I baptize thee ...," to perform a baptism; of the sonnet, to evoke emotions and mental images.

The question arises whether theological sentences, such as "God loves mankind," are cognitive or non-cognitive. This query at once divides into two:

1. Are such sentences intended by their users to be construed cognitively?
2. Is their logical character such that they can, in fact, regardless of intention, be either true or false?

The first of these questions will be discussed in the present and the second in the following chapter. There is no doubt that as a matter of historical fact religious people have normally believed such statements as "God loves mankind" to be not only cognitive but also true. Without necessarily pausing to consider the difference between religious facts and the facts disclosed through sense perception and the sciences, ordinary believers within the Judaic-Christian tradition have assumed that there are religious realities and facts, and that their own religious convictions are concerned with such. Today, however, a growing number of theories treat religious language as non-cognitive. Two of these theories, of somewhat different types, will now be described. ---[15] "Theology and Falsification," *New Essays in Philosophical*

Theology, eds. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, pp. 122-23. See also Ian Crombie's article, "The Possibility of Theological Statements" in Faith and Logic, ed. Basil Mitchell (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957). ---A clear statement of the first type comes from Professor J.H. Randall, Jr. in his book, The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion. (16) His exposition indicates, incidentally, how a view of religious symbols that is very close to Tillich's can be used in the service of naturalism. (17) Randall conceives of religion as a human activity which, like its compeers, science and art, makes its own special contribution to man's culture. The distinctive material with which religion works is a body of symbols and myths. "What is important to recognize [says Randall] is that religious symbols belong with social and artistic symbols, in the group of symbols that are both non-representative and non-cognitive. Such non-cognitive symbols can be said to symbolize not some external thing that can be indicated apart from their operation, but rather what they themselves do, their peculiar functions." (18)

According to Randall, religious symbols have a fourfold function. First, they arouse the emotions and stir men to actions; they may thereby strengthen men's practical commitment to what they believe to be right. Second, they stimulate cooperative action and thus bind a community together through a common response to its symbols. Third, they are able to communicate qualities of experience that cannot be expressed by the ordinary literal use of language. And fourth, they both evoke and serve to foster and clarify man's experience of an aspect of the world that can be called the "order of splendor" or the Divine. In describing this last function of religious symbols, Randall develops an aesthetic analogy. The work of the painter, the musician, the poet, teaches us how to use our eyes, our ears, our minds, and our feelings with greater power and skill. ... It shows us how to discern unsuspected qualities in the world encountered, latent powers and possibilities there resident. Still more, it makes us see the new qualities with which the world, in cooperation with the spirit of man, can clothe itself. ... Is it otherwise with the prophet and the saint? They too can do something to us, they too can effect changes in us and in our world

They teach us how to see what man's life in the world is, and what it might be. They teach us how to discern what human nature can make out of its natural conditions and materials They make us receptive to qualities of the world encountered; and they open our hearts to the new qualities with which that world, in cooperation with the spirit of man, can clothe itself. ---[16] Published in Boston by the Beacon Press, 1958. [17] Randall himself, in a paper

published in 1954, in which he presented the same theory of religious language, said, "The position I am here trying to state I have been led to work out in connection with various courses on myths and symbols I have given jointly with Paul Tillich. ... After long discussions, Mr. Tillich and I have found we are very close to agreement." *The Journal of Philosophy*, LI, No. 5 (March 4, 1954), 159. Tillich's article which develops his doctrine of symbols most clearly in the direction taken by Randall is "Religious Symbols and our Knowledge of God," *The Christian Scholar* (September, 1955). [18] Randall, *The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 114. ---They enable us to see and feel the religious dimension of our world better, the "order of splendor," and of man's experience in and with it. They teach us how to find the Divine; they show us visions of God. (19) It is to be noted that Randall's position represents a radical departure from the traditional assumptions of Western religion. For in speaking of "finding the Divine" and of being shown "visions of God," Randall does not mean to imply that God or the Divine exists as a reality independently of the human mind. He is speaking "symbolically." God is "... our ideals, our controlling values, our 'ultimate concern'"; (20) he is "... an intellectual symbol for the religious dimension of the world, for the Divine." (21) This religious dimension is "... a quality to be discriminated in human experience of the world, the splendor of the vision that sees beyond the actual into the perfected and eternal realm of the imagination." (22)

This last statement, however, is enlivened by a philosophic rhetoric which may unintentionally obscure basic issues. The products of the human imagination are not eternal; they did not exist before man himself existed, and they can persist, even as imagined entities, only as long as men exist. The Divine, as defined by Randall, is the temporary mental construction or projection of a recently emerged animal inhabiting one of the satellites of a minor star. God is not, according to this view, the creator and the ultimate ruler of the universe; he is a fleeting ripple of imagination in a tiny corner of space-time. Randall's theory of religion and of the function of religious language expresses with great clarity a way of thinking that in less clearly defined forms is widespread today and is, indeed, characteristic of our culture. This way of thinking is epitomized in the way in which the word "Religion" (or "faith" used virtually as a synonym) has largely come to replace the word "God." In contexts in which formerly questions were raised and debated concerning God, his existence, attributes, purpose, and deeds, the corresponding questions today typically concern Religion, its nature, function, forms, and pragmatic value. A shift has taken place from the term "God" as the head of a certain group of words and locutions to the term "Religion" as the new head of the same linguistic family.

There is, accordingly, much talk of Religion considered as an aspect of human culture. As Randall says, "Religion, we now see, is a distinctive human enterprise with a socially indispensable function of its own to perform." (23) In many universities and colleges there are departments devoted to studying the history and varieties of this phenomenon and the contribution that it has brought to man's culture in general. Among the ideas treated in this connection, along with cult, priesthood, taboo, and many others, is the concept of God. For academic study, God is thus conceived as a subtopic within the larger subject of Religion. ---[19] Randall, *Knowledge in Western Religion*, pp. 128-29. [20] *Ibid.*, p. 33. [21] *Ibid.*, p. 112. [22] *Ibid.*, p. 119. [23] *Ibid.*, p. 6. --- At a more popular level Religion is widely regarded, in a psychological mode, as a human activity whose general function is to enable the individual to achieve harmony within himself and with his environment. One of the distinctive ways in which Religion fulfills this function is by preserving and promoting certain great ideas or symbols that possess the power to invigorate men's better aspirations.

The most important and enduring of these symbols is God. Thus, at both academic and popular levels God is, in effect, defined in terms of Religion, as one of the concepts with which Religion works rather than Religion being defined in terms of God, as the field of men's varying responses to a real supernatural Being. This displacement of "God" by "Religion" as the focus of a wide realm of discourse has brought with it a change in the character of the questions that are most persistently asked in this area. Concerning God, the traditional question has naturally been whether he exists or is real. But this is not a question that arises with regard to Religion. It is obvious that Religion exists; the important queries concern the purposes that it serves in human life, whether it ought to be cultivated, and if so, in what directions it may most profitably be developed. Under the pressure of these concerns, the question of the truth of religious beliefs has fallen into the background and the issue of their practical usefulness has come forward instead to occupy the center of attention. In the perspective of history, is this pragmatic emphasis a surrogate for the older conception of objective religious realities, a substitute natural to an age of waning faith? Such a diagnosis is suggested by the observations of the agnostic, John Stuart Mill, in his famous essay on *The Utility of Religion*. If religion, or any particular form of it, is true, its usefulness follows without other proof. If to know authentically in what order of things, under what government of the universe it is our destiny to live, were not useful, it is difficult to imagine what could be considered so.

Whether a person is in a pleasant or in an unpleasant place, a palace or a prison, it cannot be otherwise than useful to him to know where he is. So long, therefore, as men accepted the teachings of their religion as positive facts, no more a matter of doubt than their own existence or the existence of the objects around them, to ask the use of believing it could not possibly occur to them. The utility of religion did not need to be asserted until the arguments for its truth had in a great measure ceased to convince. People must either have ceased to believe, or have ceased to rely on the belief of others, before they could take that inferior ground of defence without a consciousness of lowering what they were endeavouring to raise. An argument for the utility of religion is an appeal to unbelievers, to induce them to practice a well meant hypocrisy, or to semi-believers to make them avert their eyes from what might possibly shake their unstable belief, or finally to persons in general to abstain from expressing any doubts they may feel, since a fabric of immense importance to mankind is so insecure at its foundations that men must hold their breath in its neighbourhood for fear of blowing it down. (24) Mill's words refer to mid-nineteenth-century England, which happens to have had much in common religiously with contemporary American society. One also recalls the critical remark of Bertrand Russell (likewise a nineteenth-century rationalist, although he happily lived on into the second half of the twentieth century), "I can respect the men who argue that religion is true and therefore ought to be believed, but I can feel only profound reprobation for those who say that religion ought to be believed because it is useful, and that to ask whether it is true is a waste of time." (25) Comparing this current emphasis upon utility rather than truth with the thought of the great biblical exemplars of faith, we are at once struck by a startling reversal. There is a profound difference between serving and worshiping God and being "interested in Religion." God, if he is real, is our Creator. He is infinitely superior to ourselves, in worth as well as in power. He is One "... in whose eyes all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." On the other hand, Religion stands before us as one of the various concerns that we may, at our own option, choose to pursue.

In dealing with Religion and the religions, we occupy the appraiser's role; and God is subsumed within that which we appraise. There need be no bearing of one's life before divine judgment and mercy. We can deal instead with Religion, within which God is an idea, a concept whose history we can trace, and which we can analyze, define, and even revise. He is not, as in biblical thought, the living Lord of heaven and earth before whom men bow down in awe to worship and rise up with joy to serve. The historical sources of the now prevalent and perhaps even dominant view of Religion as essentially an aspect of human

culture are fairly evident. This view of Religion represents a logical development, within an increasingly technological society, of what has been variously called scientism, positivism, and naturalism. This development is based upon the assumption engendered by the tremendous, dramatic, and still accelerating growth of scientific knowledge and achievement that the truth concerning any aspect, or alleged aspect, of reality is to be found by the application of the methods of scientific investigation to the relevant phenomena. God is not a phenomenon available for scientific study, but Religion is. There can be a history, a phenomenology, a psychology, a sociology, and a comparative study of Religion. ---[24] J.S. Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1875), pp. 69-70. [25] Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957), p. 172 (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1957), p. 197. ---

Hence, Religion has become an object of intensive investigation and God is perforce identified as an idea that occurs within this complex phenomenon of Religion. Another Noncognitive Analysis Of Religious Language Another theory of the function of religion which, like Randall's, asserts the non-cognitive character of religious language, has been offered by R. B. Braithwaite. (26) He suggests that religious assertions serve primarily an ethical function. The purpose of ethical statements is, according to Braithwaite, to express the speaker's adherence to a certain policy of action; they express " the intention of the asserter to act in a particular sort of way specified in the assertion ... when a man asserts that he ought to do so-and-so, he is using the assertion to declare that he resolves, to the best of his ability, to do so-and-so." (27) Thereby, of course, the speaker also recommends this way of behaving to others. Religious statements, likewise, express and recommend a commitment to a certain general policy or way of life.

For example, **a Christian's assertion that God is love (agape) is his indication of "... intention to follow an agapeistic way of life."** (28) **Braithwaite** next raises the question: when two religions (say Christianity and Buddhism) recommend essentially the same policy for living, in what sense are they different religions? There are, of course, wide divergences of ritual; but these, in Braithwaite's view, are relatively unimportant. The significant distinction lies in the different sets of stories (or myths or parables) that are associated in the two religions with adherence to their way of life. It is not necessary, according to Braithwaite, that these stories be true or even that they be believed to be true. The connection between religious stories and the religious way of life is "... a psychological and causal one. It is an empirical

psychological fact that many people find it easier to resolve upon and to carry through a course of action which is contrary to their natural inclinations if this policy is associated in their minds with certain stories. ---[26]

R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955). Reprinted in *The Existence of God*, ed. John Hick (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), and *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. J. Hick (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970).

Other philosophers who have independently developed non-cognitive analyses of religious language which show a family resemblance to that of Braithwaite are Peter Munz, *Problems of Religious Knowledge* (London: Student Christian Movement Press Ltd., 1959); T. R. Miles, *Religion and the Scientific Outlook* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959); Paul F. Schmidt, *Religious Knowledge* (New York: The Free Press, 1961); and Paul Van Suren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963). [27] Braithwaite, *Nature of Religious Belief*, pp. 12—14. [28] *ibid.*, p. 18. ---And in many people the psychological link is not appreciably weakened by the fact that the story associated with the behavior policy is not believed. Next to the Bible and the Prayer Book the most influential work in English Christian religious life has been a book whose stories are frankly recognized as fictitious—Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*." (29) In summary, Braithwaite states, "A religious assertion, for me, is the assertion of an intention to carry out a certain behavior policy, subsumable under a sufficiently general principle to be a moral one, together with the implicit or explicit statement, but not the assertion, of certain stories." (30) Some questions may now be raised for discussion.

1. As in the case of Randall's theory, Braithwaite considers religious statements to function in a way that is different from the way they have, in fact, been used by the great majority of religious persons. In Braithwaite's form of Christianity, God has the status of a character in the associated fictional stories. 2. The ethical theory upon which Braithwaite bases his account of religious language holds that moral assertions are expressions of the asserter's intention to act in the way specified in his assertion. For example, "Lying is wrong" means "I intend never to lie." If this were so, it would follow that it would be logically impossible to intend to act wrongly. "Lying is wrong, but I intend to tell a lie" would be a sheer contradiction, equivalent to "I intend never to lie (= lying is wrong) but I intend to lie." This consequence conflicts with the way in which we

actually speak in ethical contexts; sometimes people do knowingly intend to act wrongly. 3. The Christian stories to which Braithwaite refers in the course of his lecture are of very diverse logical types. They include straightforward historical statements about the life of Jesus, mythological expressions of belief in creation and a final judgment, and belief in the existence of God. Of these, only the first category appears to fit Braithwaite's own definition of a story as "... a proposition or set of propositions which are straightforwardly empirical propositions capable of empirical test." (31) Statements such as "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" or "God loves mankind" do not constitute stories in Braithwaite's sense. Thus, his category of religious stories takes account only of one relatively peripheral type of religious statement; it is unable to accommodate those central, more directly and distinctively religious statements that refer to God. To a great extent it is men's beliefs about God which impel them to an agapeistic way of life. Yet, these most important beliefs remain un-analyzed; for they cannot be placed in the only category that Braithwaite supplies, that of unproblematically factual beliefs. ---[29] Ibid., p. 27. [30] Ibid., p. 32. [31] Ibid., p. 23. ---4. Braithwaite holds that beliefs about God are relevant to a man's practical behavior because they provide it with psychological reinforcement. But another possible view of the matter is that the ethical significance of these beliefs consists in the way in which they render a certain way of life both attractive and rational. This view would seem to be consistent with the character of Jesus' ethical teaching. He did not demand that people live in a way that runs counter to their deepest desires and that would thus require some extraordinary counterbalancing inducement. Rather, he professed to reveal to them the true nature of the world in which they live, and in the light of this, to indicate the way in which their deepest desires might be fulfilled. In an important sense, then, Jesus did not propose any new motive for action.

He did not set up a new end to be sought nor did he provide a new impulse toward an already familiar end. Instead, he offered a new vision or mode of apperception of the world, such that to live rationally in the world as thus seen is to live in the kind of way he described. He sought to replace the various attitudes and policies for living which express the sense of insecurity that is natural enough if the world really is an arena of competing interests in which each must safeguard himself and his own against the rival egoisms of his neighbors. If human life is essentially a form of animal life, and human civilization a refined jungle in which self concern operates more subtly, but not less surely, than animal tooth and claw, then the quest for invulnerability in its many guises is entirely rational. To seek security in the form of power over

others, whether physical, psychological, economic, or political, or in the form of recognition and acclaim, would then be indicated by the terms of the human situation. Jesus, however, rejected these attitudes and objectives as being based upon an estimate of the world that is false because it is atheistic; it assumes that there is no God, or at least none such as Jesus knew. Jesus was far from being an idealist if by this we mean one who sets up ideals unrelated to the facts and recommends that men be guided by them rather than by the realities of their lives. On the contrary, Jesus was a realist; he pointed to the life in which the neighbor is valued equally with the self as something indicated by the actual nature of the universe. He urged men to live in terms of reality. His morality differed from normal human practice because his view of reality differed from our normal view of the world. Whereas the ethic of egoism is ultimately atheistic, Jesus' ethic was radically and consistently theistic. It set forth the way of life that is appropriate when God, as Jesus depicted him, is wholeheartedly believed to be real. The pragmatic and in a sense prudential basis of Jesus' moral teaching is very clearly expressed in his parable of the two houses built on sand and on rock. (32) This parable claims that the universe is so constituted that to live in the way which Jesus has described is to build one's life upon enduring foundations, whereas to live in the opposite way is to go "against the grain" of things and to court ultimate disaster. ---[32] Matthew 7:24-27. ---The same thought occurs in the saying about the two ways, one of which leads to life and the other to destruction. (33) Jesus assumed that his hearers wanted to live in terms of reality and he was concerned with telling them the true nature of reality. From this point of view, the agapeistic way of life follows naturally, via the given structure of the human mind, from belief in the reality of God as Agape. However, belief in the reality, love, and power of God issues in the agapeistic way of life (like good fruit from a good tree) (34) only if that belief is taken literally and not merely symbolically. In order to render a distinctive style of life both attractive and rational, religious beliefs must be regarded as assertions of fact, not merely as imaginative fictions. --- [33] Matthew 7:13-14. [34] Matthew 7:16f. ----