

**DIVINE ACCOMMODATION:  
AN ALTERNATIVE THEORY OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE**

**Dr. Roy A. Clouser**

For a very long time it has been recognized by both Jewish and Christian thinkers that there is an important problem to be solved concerning the possibility of true predication about God. The problem centers on the apparent incompatibility of two biblical doctrines: (1) God created everything about the universe; (2) human language conveys truth about God. The problem is to explain how terms drawn from experience can be true of God when everything we experience is created, but God is not created.

Over the centuries, the most popular theories proposed to solve this puzzle have all been variations on the same basic theme. This theme, known as the analogical theory of language, has not only come to prevail as the most widely accepted solution, but as has acquired such a hegemony that in recent years thinkers of very different theological persuasions have agreed that either some version of the -analogy theory is true or the problem cannot be solved at all.<sup>1</sup> This judgment is only confirmed the more when a thinker of the stature of Karl Barth finds the analogy theory objectionable, but admits that he has nothing to put in its place and that the puzzle remains a mystery.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows, I will agree with Barth in rejecting the theory of an analogy of being between God and creatures as incompatible with the biblical teaching of God's creatorship and transcendence. But over and above that, I will propose a new solution for the problem of religious language. Moreover, the view I will be maintaining holds that religious language is a species of ordinary language. On my view, religious language does not require a special theory of symbols or analogy which alters its *meaning* in order to explain how its reference to God is possible.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ross, J.F.: "Analogy as a Rule of Meaning for Religious Language", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 1, no.3, Sept. 1971, p.476. Also John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Systematic Theology* (University of Chicago Press, 1951), vol.1, pt.2, p.235.

<sup>2</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, II, 1, p.230 ff.

This is not intended to suggest that there are no problems concerning the meaning of religious language, or still less that everything in Scripture should be taken literalistically. Like all other kinds of linguistic discourse, religious language employs many styles and figures of speech, and comes in various linguistic forms. It is also true that terms employed in religious discourse take on a special religious connotation relative to their faith context, just as terms take on a special sense when used in other distinct universes of discourse such as those of physics, economics, art, or law.

But I contend that the way in which terms acquire a distinctive connotation when employed in religious discourse is not the key to solving the problem of how such terms can successfully refer to God. And I hold that the way in which they convey truth about God is the same as the way true predications in other universes of linguistic discourse convey truth about aspects of creation. That is, I hold that what is predicated of God in Scripture should be understood as true for the reason that God really has the characteristics and really stands in the relations to creation which-Scripture ascribes to him. Moreover, the terms describing these characteristics and relations are to be understood *in their ordinary meaning, provided the distinctive sense of their faith context is included.*

In order to formulate the problem more precisely, and to make clear the basis upon which I reject the analogy theory, I will first summarize what I understand to be the biblical doctrine of creation and its consequences regarding the distinction between the Creator and all creatures. For it is this doctrine which is the motive behind both my disenchantment with the analogy theory and the alternative I will propose.

## I. UNIVERSAL CREATION

There cannot be much doubt that the biblical writers assert God's creatorship of the world of everyday experience. The visible heavens and earth, the sun, moon, stars, the life forms on earth are all explicitly said to have been brought into existence by God. Moreover, the biblical writers teach that this creation was not, at the first, simply a forming of something already there. It was instead a bringing into existence out of nothing, rather than mere interior decorating. Gen. 1:1 teaches, and a host of other biblical passages echo, that in this sense God is the one who has created "all things".

But just how far does the expression “all things” extend? It obviously seems to include middle-sized and large objects of the universe clearly enough. But what of properties, propositions, laws, and the so-called host of abstract animals in the great corral of Plato’s Other World? Assuming they exist, would a believer in the biblical Creator have to say God created them, too? Or could they exist independently from the God of Abraham as easily as they did from the god of Plato? More especially, are there any biblical grounds for answering such a question?

It is pretty clear that no biblical writer *specifically* answers this question, any more that he specifically mentions the big bang or supreme novae among the stellar creations, viruses or spiny anteaters among the created life forms, or molecules and quarks among the tiny creatures. The reason is simple. No biblical writers ever knew about such entities. So if we are going to find their attitude on this issue we will have to look at how they use such expressions as “all things” and how they talk about God’s creatorship in general. We will have to extrapolate from what they say in order to apply their attitude to those abstract animals - putative of real - whose separate existence neither Abraham nor Moses nor St. Paul seems to have suspected. Doing this can hardly take the form of a detailed hermeneutical analysis of each pertinent text, however; that would take a book all by itself. So what follows is a brief annotated index of several passages I think pertinent to the issue. Anyone who thinks my understanding of these passages to be seriously faulty will, no doubt, disagree with my conclusions. But we can hardly be wrong in starting with the biblical evidence, even if we do not end up agreeing on its meaning in every case.

1. *Gen.8:22.*

I believe this passage applies a general doctrine to a few specific examples, without *confining* the doctrine to those examples. Accordingly, this passage teaches that the law-like order of things is God’s creation. The laws of nature depend on God since it is by God’s guarantee that the regularities we observe and rely on will continue as long as the earth exists. There is nothing here to suggest that these regularities are self-existent, and that God is merely informing us of their inherent stability and reliability. On the contrary, it is God who is said to be stable and reliable and the laws are viewed as dependent on him; our reliance on natural laws is justified by God’s promise, not anything in the laws themselves. In Ps. 119:89-91 and

Jer.33:25, natural laws are also spoken of as the means by which he rules creation, and that are also termed his creations and his servants.

2. *Gen. 22:16 and Heb. 6:13.*

These texts minimally teach that there is nothing, greater than God. They do not go so far as to say nothing else is uncreated or that nothing else is on a par with God. But they do rule out anything to which he could be subjected in any sense, or else it would not be true that there is no greater reality by which he could secure his promise.

3. *Isa. 44:24ff.*

God's sovereignty over all sorts of entities is asserted here, 'as is his uniqueness; he is the sole deity. Not all that is entailed by this is spelled out, but it is significant that included among the "all things" which God is said to create are not just ordinary middle-sized and large visible objects, but also "darkness," events in the course of history, peace, evil, and human decisions.

4. *Eph. 1:3-2:2.*

Again God is sovereign over "all things" where this expression includes the course of history and the election of those who believe. Eph. 3:9 and 10 extends "all things" to cover "principalities and powers," as does Rom. 8:38 and 39, which explicitly calls life, death, angels, principalities, and powers, "things present," and "things to come," *creations*. It is important to note that "height" and "depth" are also covered here as creations.

I say "important" because it is obvious by now that "all things" and "creatures" are used in Scripture in a very wide sense indeed. Powers, principalities, spatial extensions, human decisions, darkness, and the course of history are quite different: sorts of entities.

5. *Phil. 3:21.*

This verse extends "all things" to the future renovations of believers' resurrected bodies, and Col. 1:16-20 emphasizes that immaterial and invisible realities are also to be understood under the rubric of "all things." These latter again include "dominions, principalities, and powers."

6. *I Cor. 4:7.*

On any natural reading I Cor. 4:7 seems to say quite clearly that any characteristic or talent which humans possess is given by God. I realize my critics could reply that it may mean only that God sees to it that people receive just the characteristics they do without his being the creator of those properties. But in the context of the biblical teachings so far, that is not the general drift or attitude we have found. In each case so far, God's sovereign control is linked to his creatorship; there are no exceptions. Unless some sort of hermeneutical special pleading is inserted here, the passage would appear to teach that the properties and dispositions of every human are God's creations. There is still some room to wriggle a bit, I admit. But to deny this general import to the passage seems strongly implausible at this point.

#### *7. Prov. 8:22-31*

Compare what has been said so far with the treatment of wisdom in Prov. 8:22-31. There, in a personification, wisdom is represented as saying of herself:

Yahweh formed me as the beginning of his way, the first of his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was.

Here wisdom is spoken of as an abstract entity: a something existing before the earth or anything else; a something which is everlasting! This is perhaps as close as any Bible passage ever comes to saying that something has the status Plato ascribed to abstract properties, yet even here wisdom is declared to be God's creation! Even if everlasting, then, it is everlastingly dependent on God.

Finally, it is significant that in drawing the fundamental religious contrast between believers and unbelievers, St. Paul says the only options humans have are: (i) the service of God or (ii) the service of something God created which is wrongfully accorded God's status (Rom. 1:25). It is hard to see such a remark as anything less than an explicit confirmation of what we have found so far everywhere else: everything whatsoever is either God or a creation of God's. There are no other alternatives.

St. Paul speaks this same way in other places as well. In Rom. 9:5 he says God is "over all" as though it means "all else". And he shows that this is the way he uses "all" and "all things" by some even more explicit remarks in I Cor. 15:24-28. There he says that at the second coming of Christ, God will turn his kingdom over to Christ to rule it. At that time all other powers and

authorities in the world will be abolished, including the power of death. At that point “all things” will be in subjection to Christ except for God himself (v. 27). Clearly, then, this is intended as an all-inclusive comment. The quantifier covers everything but God, who is explicitly stated to be the only exception.

Now it might be replied that even if “all things” means everything but God, in the latter passage Paul only says that God *rules* all not that all else creatively *depends* on him. But this reply will not do. For Col. 1:15-17 speaks of the same topic, uses the same expressions, and explicitly adds that the “all things” were created by God and are sustained by Christ. Moreover, the added stipulation that “all things” includes whatever is “visible or invisible” logically requires that there are no exceptions whatever (other than God): everything is either visible or not! (Cp. also Eph. 1:21-23, and II Cor. 4:18).<sup>3</sup>

My contention about these - and many other passages not cited - is that they give a clear impression of *trying* to say that there is nothing uncreated but God, so that nothing about the universe is uncreated. They are written in ordinary, nontechnical language, and do not use the terminology of philosophy or science. But lacking such technical terminology, it is hard to see how they could have made this point plainer.

This very fact seems to me to be an important argument in favor of my interpretation. So let me put it another way, this time as a question to those who may disagree with me. If the Bible writers had wanted to teach that God created everything other than himself and that nothing about the universe is uncreated, what could they have said to convey this point (barring technical language) that they did not say? How could they have made it clearer? I can't think of any way for them to have improved on what they said if it were indeed their purpose to convey just that point.

---

<sup>3</sup> There are even allusions in the N.T. to God's creative sovereignty over time. In Titus 1:12, II Tim. 1:19, and Rev. 10:5-7, the common theme is God's secret plan for the course of history. The Rev. text says that when the present world is destroyed (prior to the creation of a new heavens and earth) “time shall be no more”. Some recent translations have rendered this “let there be no more delay” (*hoti kronos ouketi estai*). But I can find no precedent in the Greek language for using the verb “to be” in this context to mean “delay”, and the common theme strongly suggests God's independence from, and creative control over, time. Comp. also I Cor. 2:7.

On the basis of the foregoing considerations, I conclude it was their purpose to convey that point. The biblical teaching is that the Creator-creature distinction is exhaustive; all reality is either God or something that depends on God. So if there exist propositions, numbers, universals, relations, or any other abstract animals from Plato's great barnyard in the sky, they must be regarded as dependent on Yahweh the Creator.

If this is correct, it becomes totally unacceptable to regard anything other than God as uncreated. To do so is to regard it as being every bit as divine as Yahweh. The issue here is not only whether there exists something over which God would not have control. That is part of what is at stake, yes. But the additional issue at stake is nothing less than monotheism. For given the biblical position, the admission that anything besides Yahweh exists independently of him accords divine (untreated)-status to it, and is equivalent to a crypto-polytheism.

## II. ANALOGY THEORY

Now it is precisely this absolute difference between the Creator and all creatures which gives rise to the problem of religious language. How can it be that characteristics and relations ascribed to God in Scripture are possessed by creatures? Since these properties and relations are themselves either created or they are not, we are confronted with a dilemma: either we must admit that something about the universe is uncreated, or we must admit that something about God is created.

The analogy theory attempts to avoid this dilemma about terms referring to both God and creation, by altering their meaning in each case. In Thomas Aquinas' version, for example, the analogical nature of religious language entails that God does not really have exactly the same properties as creatures at all. This is accomplished by contending that every property consists of both a quality (*res significata*) and the mode of its possession (*modus significandi*).<sup>4</sup> Thus a term truly predicated of creatures is not univocal in meaning when used of God, because although the quality God possesses is the same as the quality creatures possess, God possesses all his properties in an infinite mode. So while there is something in

---

<sup>4</sup> See his *Commentary on the First Book of the Sentences* d.22, q.1, a.2 corpus. Also *Summa Theologica*. Ed. T. Gilbey. McGraw Hill, NY, 1964, pp. 47-85.

the meaning of terms common to God and creatures which is the same, there is also something very different. In this way both wholly univocal and wholly equivocal meanings for these terms are avoided, and the analogy is established. Thus the theory ends up claiming that what God really possesses is the highest degree of (some of) the qualities which creatures possess - a degree not found in creation at all.

In this way our language is supposed to come as close to the truth about God as it is possible for us to come. The language is not false because it does not lead us to believe that God has qualities which he actually lacks. At the same time, however, God possesses these qualities in a mode we cannot even conceive, and which is utterly unlike anything created. Our language, then, succeeds only in stating something like what is true about God, since strictly speaking God and creatures share no property (quality plus mode of possession) in common.

Of course, this move won't work at all if one adopts a realistic theory of universals. On that view it wouldn't help to say that God possesses an infinite degree of a property which creatures possess in a finite degree, because there would have to be a numerically identical universal quality which both degrees share in common. The dilemma would then recur since the shared universal would have to be either created though possessed by God, or uncreated though possessed by creatures

It appears therefore that the analogy theorist need only deny a realistic view of universals to make the theory work. The theory would then maintain that for any property possessed by God as well as creatures there is an infinite (uncreated) instance of it in God, while in the universe there is a numerically distinct finite instance of it which God has created.

Despite its surface plausibility, however, this attempt still fails to avoid the dilemma. For while it concentrates on God's creatorship and transcendence with respect to the properties of creation; it neglects his creatorship and transcendence with respect to its laws. By "laws" I mean all the kinds of orderliness which holds among the things and properties of creation, including both what we ordinarily call "laws of nature" and what we usually call "norms". On the universal creationist interpretation, the various sorts of orderliness in the universe are as much the creations of God as any other features of it. In fact, Scripture specifically includes them among the "all things" whose existence God initiated and sustains.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Laws are referred to in Scripture in ways which clearly include more than norms, and are explicitly said to be God's creations. See, e.g., Gen. 8:22, Ps. 110:91, Ps. 148, Job 38:33.

The reason this is a serious difficulty for the analogy theory is that all the properties (or the quality-components of properties) which are possessed by creatures, including those ascribed to God by Scripture, are essentially related to laws or norms of creation. We have no conception whatever of what “wise” or “knowing” *mean* apart from logical and other normative laws. Similarly, we have no conception of the meaning of “love” apart from moral norms, nor any conception of “fairness” apart from norms of justice. And the traditional anthropomorphic terms such as “father”, “judge”, “shepherd”, “king”, etc., require even more extensive complexes of both laws of nature and norms for their meaning. That is, something must conform to many kinds of such laws and norms simultaneously in order to possess the properties essential to being a father, king, or what not<sup>6</sup>

But if these terms are to retain *anything* of their usual meaning, the laws and norms which make possible the properties they designate would have to hold when they are applied to God as well as to creatures. The laws which form the framework of orderliness which regulates creation, and which therefore set the limits of possibility and necessity which govern the relations of every property to every other, must equally govern every degree of them. That is the law order would have to hold for a quality irrespective of the mode in which it is possessed. For no mode of possession, not even an infinite one, can exempt a property from the orderliness which makes it possible. So if the entire law-order of the universe was brought into existence by God out of nothing, every degree of all the qualities subjected to that order must also be created. Thus, it will be unacceptable to theorize that there can be an uncreated instance (a perfection possessed in an infinite mode) of any property which also occurs in creation. To put the point in Thomistic language, even if God’s possession of a property is in an infinite *modus significandi* which is unique to himself and uncreated, there is no *res significata* he could possess in that mode which could be uncreated if it is subjected to the law-order of creation. But if the property is exempted from the law-order of creation, it becomes inconceivable and the term designating it becomes literally meaningless. Apart from every sort of orderliness, a term fails to connote anything like its ordinary (creaturely)

---

<sup>6</sup> This is not intended to suggest that the nomological order of creation exists prior *in time* to whatever is governed by it. On the ontology assumed here there is a two-way dependency or correlation between the divinely created law framework and all that is subject to it. E.g., properties of things, events, etc., are the ways they function under the laws.

meaning. In that case the analogy is destroyed, and all our language about God is flatly equivocal.

It is also worth noting in this connection that the analogy theory draws much of its initial plausibility from the fact that we do observe varying degrees of properties in our experience. Things around us seem to possess greater or lesser degrees of beauty, power, intelligence, etc. So there seems nothing initially implausible about the suggestion that there may be a highest, infinite degree of such properties which is possessed by God. In fact, however, this assumption seems to me highly dubious at best. Not only do I not know of any argument to show that properties can actually have a highest degree, but there appear to be very good reasons why the notion of “highest qualitative degree” is in the same epistemological boat as “the class of all classes”.<sup>7</sup> And even if that turns out not to be so for all properties, it is clear that at least some of the properties the analogy theory needs to admit are possessed by both God and creatures *do not admit of degrees at all* so that the distinction between quality possessed and mode of possession can’t be applied.

Take for example the logical property “conforming-to-the-law-of-noncontradiction”. If we regard the logical laws as part of the order of creation (and not restrict them merely to governing our thought), it seems pretty obvious that nothing can possess the property of conforming to them in a greater degree than anything else. Everything subject to the logical axiom of noncontradiction must conform to it perfectly, and anything which has an inconsistent but correct description is logically impossible. Therefore, if God exists subject to logical law (as analogy theory maintains), God has the property of selfconsistency and has it in a way which is no better, complete, or more intense than any creature.

The only reply I can see open to the analogy theorist is to claim that in the case of logical properties the difference in God’s mode of possession is not one of degree, as it is for such nonlogical properties as goodness, justice, mercy, love, beauty, etc. It is rather to be found in the fact that the laws of logic are parts of God’s own Being. Thus, while these laws make other things *possible*, God’s Being is *necessary*; while logical laws govern all created things *ab extra*, God is selfgoverning even in having the property of being consistent with himself.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ross, J. “God the Creator of Kinds and Possibilities: Requiescant universalia ante res”, in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*. Cornell U. Press, 1986, pp. 315-354.

This sort of reply, however, leaves the analogy theory worse off than before with respect to the doctrine of universal creation. This is because the reply takes one of the kinds of orderliness found in creation and regards it as part of the Divine Being. In this way the reply not only fails to maintain that the laws of logic, as norms of creation, are creations of God. It even goes so far as to postulate that the logical order which holds for creation is actually part of God, so that at least one feature of the creation is (pantheistically) identical with the Divine Being! And this, of course, flatly contradicts the biblical doctrine of universal creation.

This difficulty is not, as I see it, a consequence of only Thomas' version of analogy, but plagues every possible version. Stated generally, the difficulty is that no matter how an analogy is construed there would have to be a law-order common to both the Divine and creaturely instances of any property (*a lex continui*) for there to be any basis for the univocal sense in which the analogy itself is supposed to hold. But in that case both sides of the analogy would have to have at least one property (quality plus mode of possession) in common univocally, namely, the property being-in-conformity-to-the overarching-law(s)-in-one-of-the-modes-made-possible-by-the-law(s). And that property would have to be either uncreated though possessed by creatures, or created though possessed by God.

### III. A NEW PROPOSAL

Since the biblical teaching seems so dead set against regarding anything about creation to be uncreated, why not try the other horn of the dilemma? Is it unbiblical to say of the properties and relations ascribed to God by Scripture that they are created? I wish to suggest that there is not only nothing against this option in biblical teaching, but much in favor of it.

Consider, for example, the biblical doctrine of creation. This doctrine teaches that once there was only God and then God brought the universe into existence out of nothing. This entails that prior to creating the universe God did not have the property of being Creator. He did not stand toward anything in the relation "being-the-creator-of", because there was only himself. But simultaneously with creating the universe, God also created the relation "being-the-creator-of" and the property of standing in that relation which is the property of being "Creator". That property itself, then, must be a created property given the biblical account.

Why, then, cannot God's other properties and relations be equally created? If God can take on one created property, stand in one created relation, why not many? Why not construe all God's personal characteristics this way? In that case terms such as "loving", "forgiving", "merciful", "angry", "just", "wise", "good", "powerful", etc., will all refer to created properties God has taken on for our sake. And since those properties are the same as those which exist in creation, we can know them as they are, not merely "something like" them. They can be just the characteristics we mean by the terms of our language as we ordinarily employ them!

This is not to say that God possesses these characteristics with the same incompleteness, inconsistency, or other faults that people do. His love and wisdom are complete, faultless, and never-ending. But they are still what we mean by "love" and "wisdom" in ordinary language. We need not say that his love is unimaginably different in order to explain how the term "love" can apply to him at all. Rather, it can mean just what we ordinarily mean by love qualified by the universe of discourse of faith and within the limits set forth in his Word.

The heart of this proposal, therefore, is that God changed himself in order to accommodate himself to humans. He freely chose to abide by certain laws of the creation in order to have certain properties and stand in specific relations to people. He did this, according to Scripture, in order to extend a covenant of friendship, forgiveness, and everlasting fellowship to us. So I maintain that our understanding of him in covenant relation to us, needs only to be based on this covenant accommodation itself. It does not require an elaborate theory of language employing a metaphysical *analogia entis* to account for how God can have this relation to us, or how we can know that he does.

Though this proposal is admittedly a theory, since it is not explicitly taught in Scripture, it is at least strongly suggested by the passage earlier cited and partially quoted from Proverbs 8:22-31. There wisdom is said to have been created by God before the heavens and earth, and to have been the first of his creations. Taken at face value, this would mean that wisdom was God's wisdom since there was nothing else which could have possessed it. (In fact, the word used for "formed" in the text can also mean "possessed".) Nevertheless, wisdom is repeatedly said to have been *created*. In fact much of the language is very similar to that which occurs in

John 1 where it is the “Word” of God which is said to have been with God from the beginning.

At this point it is fair enough to ask whether I think this theory of Divine Accommodation can account for *all* our talk about God. I must say that I think not. The exceptions consist of two things we can truly predicate of God without attributing to him a feature or relation he created and took on. I refer now to our speaking of his Divinity, or self-existence, and his ability to create. God’s Divine self-existence, while not strictly a biblical predicate, is a clear entailment of the doctrine of creation and has for that reason become a widely used term (aseity) in theology. And obviously self-existence is not a created property. But then I would contend that neither the self-existence of the Divine Being nor God’s ability to create are properties at all.

This is, of course, a complex and controversial issue which cannot be fully treated here. But in the ontology I’m presupposing, properties fall into a number of basic kinds, and always correspond to the laws of their respective kind. Thus, as I suggested earlier, properties and laws exist in correlation; there are no properties which exist aside from every sort of order, nor does there exist a sort of order which fails to govern anything whatever.<sup>8</sup> In this view of properties, they do not correspond to predicables in every case. Not everything which can truly be said of something denotes a property of it. This is true of creatures as well as of God. For example, we can speak of the individuality of something. But individuality is not one of a thing’s properties alongside its other properties.

In addition to maintaining that individuality is not a property, I would also contend that we have no *concept* of it. It is a fact encountered in our direct experience and approximated in a limiting idea. But a limiting idea is the best we can manage.

Now I hold that what is true of individuality in creatures is also true of talk about God’s uncreated Being and creativity. They are not properties, nor have we concepts of them. As in the case of created individuality we have only a limiting idea of the Being of God and his creativity. God as he was prior to creating, or as he now is aside from the created properties and relations he took on in order to accommodate himself to us, should not be thought of as a

---

<sup>8</sup> H. Dooyeweerd. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., Philadelphia, 1955.

thing with properties at all. For as soon as we realize that God created all the laws which hold in creation it is clear that, aside from his freely abiding by certain laws for our sake, God is not subject to any of the kinds of created order which make properties possible.<sup>9</sup>

It is sometimes objected to this that even if existence is not itself a property, necessary existence is. Thus God's existence would indeed be a property if he exists necessarily. To that my reply is simple. God does not exist necessarily in any sense of necessity which holds for creation. The sense which has been so popular among philosophers is, of course, logical necessity. But if God created all the laws which hold in the universe including the logical, then they do not require or guarantee his existence. Quite the reverse: it is God who guarantees and sustains logical laws. God has unconditional self-existence, yes. But that is not only not the same as necessary existence, it is incompatible with it.

The same points apply to God's creativity. It too cannot be a property, and can only be approximated in a limiting concept. Does this mean, then, that there is something improper about saying God "could" have created things differently? Yes, I think it does. Since God is the creator of possibility in all its senses including the logical, his creating is not possible in any of those senses. Possibility is properly applied only to the actual creation God has brought into existence in subjection to the law-order which regulates what is possible in creation and what is not. All talk of what "can" or "could" be otherwise applies only to created things or events, not to God himself. Strictly speaking, we should say that this or that created thing or event could be different or might have been different in certain respects or circumstances (God willing), but not that God could have created differently. Counterfactual talk can therefore apply only to *creatures*, and only to creatures which are actual. Only what is actual can be governed by laws. And to be actual, everything other than God must already be created and sustained by God. For this reason no one who *fully* grasps the radically biblical sense of creation should ever be tempted by the theory that God creates by actualizing from among antecedently existing possible worlds.

---

<sup>9</sup> Comp. Calvin: "Not that God should be [regarded as] subjected to the law, unless insofar as he is a law unto himself" (*De Aeternal Praedestinatione* C.R. 36, 361). "...And therefore he is above the laws because he is a law to himself and everything" (*Comm. in Mosis Libros V*, C.R. 52, 49, 131). "...We do not imagine God to be arbitrary (*exlex*). He is a law to himself. The will of God is ... the law of all laws" (*Inst.* III, xxiii, 2). "...it is perverse to measure [the] Divine by the standard of human justice" (*Inst.* III, xxiv, 17).

This point about God's creativity should not be misunderstood, however, to include the acts and events which he himself performs in the course of taking on temporal relations, entering history, and having covenant dealings with humans. All these acts are subject to the laws of creation and so can properly be the subjects of possibility talk and counterfactual talk. But even in the case of such saving acts, we must not forget that they conform to those laws within the limits specified in God's word. As Calvin once warned, we must never think or speak *of* God further than we have Scripture as our guide. For the laws do not govern God's acts unrestrictedly as they do creatures. For instance, God has father-like relations to those who love him though he is not a male, and he is good to those who trust him without that entailing that no one will ever suffer unjustly.

So far as God's Divine Being and creativity are concerned, then, there is nothing in the world that is even like them. So my proposal denies that any property can be univocally predicated *of* God and creatures as he was prior to creating. At the same time, however, the accommodation theory entails that God now shares many properties and relations in common with creatures. Indeed, all God's personal characteristics, and all our knowledge of him that is truly conceptual, consist of these created properties and relations. Since these are created, they are subject to the same created law-order which govern them in creatures. Thus they can be known as univocally as they are known in creatures, and our language can carry its ordinary meaning for the terms used to designate them.

Although this theory of religious language is a new proposal so far as I am aware, it was foreshadowed in the work of the 16th century reformers, particularly by Luther and Calvin. It is significant that, so far as I can find, neither of them adopted the analogical theory of religious language. This could not have been mere oversight or ignorance on their part. No one could study theology in their day without being exposed to a large dose of Thomas Aquinas, and both reformers mention him often. Rather than go in the direction of the analogy theory, however, they drew a strong distinction between God's untreated Being and the properties and relations he bears toward humans. For example, Luther maintained:

Now God in his own Nature and Majesty is to be left alone; in this regard we have nothing to do with him nor does he wish us to deal with him. We have to do with him as clothed and displayed by his Word, by which he presents himself to us. That

is his glory and beauty in which the Psalmist proclaims him to be clothed. (*Martin Luther*, Ed. J. Dillenberger. Doubleday Anchor, NY, 1961. p.196.)

Calvin also comments that in many passages of Scripture "...God clothes himself with human affections and descends beneath his proper majesty." (*Inst.* III, xxiv, 17). Elsewhere he expands this idea:

...in the enumerations of his perfections [God] is described [in Scripture] not as he is in himself, but in relation to us, in order that our acknowledgement of him may be more vivid actual impression than empty visionary speculation ... *every* perfection set down [in Scripture] may be found in creation; and hence such as we feel him to be when experience is our guide, such he declares himself to be in his Word. (*Institutes*, I, xiii, 1. Italics mine.)

These attitudes agree with my suggestion insofar as they seem to recognize that what Scripture reveals about God is not accomplished by prying into his uncreated Being. After asserting the self-existence of the Divine Being and his creation of all else, Scripture is mainly concerned with clarifying the ways God relates to us and the ways we should relate to him.

However, there is a possible danger in putting this point in just the way the reformers did. For when stated this way, it could sound as though they were saying that by taking on various created relations and properties God reveals himself to possess, he is really something quite different behind that mantle of assumed characteristics.

But that is not what I am suggesting all, and it is clearly not what Luther or Calvin held. In the view of almost every Jewish or Christian theologian, there is certainly more to God than he has (in fact) revealed, and more than we can (in principle) know. My position that the truths about God are all (with the exception noted) *created* facts does not make them any the less true of God. Remember, God's standing in the relation of being Creator and sustainer of the world is itself a created property of his. But the fact that this relation is itself created does not make it any less true of God. Although he created that relation, he now *really* stands in it. It is not true that this relation is a ruse behind which he is really not the Creator! And my position is that this is so for the other relations and personal characteristics God has revealed of himself. The fact that he has created them does not mean that behind those relations and

properties which he has taken on he really has other properties or is another sort of personality altogether. For “behind” what God has revealed, our concepts simply do not apply at all!

Perhaps it should be added at this point that nothing said so far is intended to prove that the biblical view of God is the true religion. Nor does my position offer a guarantee that God has not in fact misled us about his characteristics, even if he did cause Scripture to be written. But then I do not believe that any theory or argument is capable of ruling out that possibility as, for example, Descartes tried to do when he attempted to prove that “God *cannot* deceive us.” The fact that Scripture is God’s revelation and reveals the truth about him, rests squarely and solely on the believer’s experience, not on arguments or inferences. In the face of that experience, running a theoretical credit check on God is not only unnecessary, but sacrilegious!

To sum up, my suggestion about religious language is that it be understood as purporting to give univocal truth about God. It should not be seen as giving us something *like* what is true of God, while the real truth is beyond our comprehension, as the analogy theorists maintain. Nor should it be understood as merely our resolve to talk about God as if he had the characteristics which are revealed, as Kantians and pragmatists have maintained.<sup>10</sup> Rather it should be seen as quite ordinary language purporting to ascribe to God properties which he really has and relations in which he really stands. And although God possesses those properties more completely than creatures generally do, stands in those relations more faithfully than sinful humans do, nevertheless it is the creaturely mode of those properties and relations which are true of him. Thus what is revealed to us are (some of) God’s properties and relations as they are, not just something vaguely like a mode of them which is unknowable to us, or - still worse - merely what we might hope for.

#### IV. REPLIES TO OBJECTIONS

But is the teaching that God created everything other than himself plausible? Or does it lead to absurd consequences which should force us to reconsider whether that can really be the

---

<sup>10</sup> I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*. Liberal Arts Press, 1956, pp. 105-106. W. James, *Pragmatism*. Meridian Books, NY, 1959, pp. 185-186, 193-193.

correct interpretation of the biblical writers? Several thinkers have suggested that all sorts of absurdities are generated by this position, and at least one defender of this position has admitted as much!

Most of the objections charging this theory with absurdity center on the contention that along with the other features of creation, God also created *all* the laws operative in the universe. The criticisms are intended to show that if this contention is taken to include logical and mathematical laws as well as say, physical and biological laws, then absurdities do result. On the other hand, if logical and mathematical laws are not included, then it is simply not the case that God alone is uncreated. Logical and mathematical laws will then be accorded divine status as they were by Aristotle or Pythagoras respectively. Since the criticisms I have encountered are mostly examples of alleged logical, rather than mathematical, absurdity the discussion to follow will concentrate on logical issues.

### **A. Logical Objections**

The nub of all the examples of logical absurdity supposed to be generated by the universal creationist position is that it requires God himself not to be subject to the logical laws. As we noticed earlier, Calvin drew that inference in a number of places, as had Luther before him. Later on, Descartes also held that since everything but God was created by God, all logical and mathematical laws and truths were also created. Descartes said:

The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on him entirely no less than the rest of his creatures. As for the eternal truths, I say once more that they are true or possible only because God knows them as true or possible. They are not known as true by God in any way which would imply that they are true independently of him.<sup>11</sup>

Or as he put it in his *Reply to Objections to Meditation VI*:

... it is clear that nothing at all can exist which does not depend on Him. This is true not only of everything that subsists, but of all order, of every law, and, of every

---

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Descartes to Mersenne, Ap. 15, 1630, in *Descartes Philosophical Letters*, tr. & ed. A. Kenny, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970. p. 11.

reason of truth and goodness ...<sup>12</sup>

But while I believe these remarks of Descartes' to be expressing the position which Scripture teaches, there is reason to object to the way he expresses this position at other points. For example, he says this position entails that God was free to "make it not be true that three angles of a triangle were equal to two right angles, or in general that contradictories could be true together." And again, he says in another place that "God could from all eternity bring about that it should be untrue that twice four is eight..." Descartes then recognizes that this means all sorts of absurdities are possible, and advises "we should not put these thoughts before our minds".<sup>13</sup>

Remarks such as these have led such critics as Alvin Plantinga to describe Descartes' position as "universal possibilism," and to understand that "...Descartes does not intend to say that for God, the logically impossible is possible; he means to say instead that nothing is logically impossible."<sup>14</sup>

Now it is not my intention to determine whether this is or is not a correct interpretation of Descartes. It seems to me Descartes does make remarks which warrant this interpretation while at the same time making others which would rule it out. But I am more concerned here with establishing that this cannot be the right interpretation of the claim that God has created everything other than himself. That claim, I contend, does not entail that nothing is logically impossible or logically necessary. Neither does it require that "God could bring it about" that contradictories be true together.

The error in such misunderstanding is subtle but important. It involves a shift of levels in the discussion which results in the assumption, at a meta-level, of precisely what is being denied at the initial level of the discussion. Let me first illustrate this point with another sort of case altogether, and then apply it to the issue of God and creation.

---

<sup>12</sup>*The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, tr. E. Haldane & G. Ross, Cambridge University Press, 1967, Vol. II, p. 250.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 252.

<sup>14</sup> *Does God Have a Nature?* Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 1980, p. 116.

My sample case is a teaching found in scores of undergraduate logic textbooks.<sup>15</sup> It concerns the claim that where the premises of an argument are logically inconsistent with each other, the argument will validly yield any conclusion whatever. This is regarded by some authors as “paradoxical.” It has even been termed the “paradox of strict implication”: when it is logically impossible for all the premises to be true, then everything validly follows.<sup>16</sup>

But there is more going on here than an isolated paradox. And it is not innocuous!<sup>17</sup> For in every case of determining the validity of an argument, we are always engaged in seeing what else would be true if its premises were true. It is not necessary that we believe the premises to be true in order to determine that an argument is valid; we need only see what would follow from them in case they were true.

If, however, the premises of an argument containing assertions of the form  $p$  and  $\sim p$  were both true, the law of noncontradiction would be false and there would be no such thing as logical entailment at all! In other words, nothing logically *follows* from the truth of  $p \cdot \sim p$ , because the truth of  $p \cdot \sim p$  would vitiate all “logical following” whatever.

Thus the paradox that Copi and other writers feel uneasy about is neither mere allegation nor trivial. It arises because although advocates of this point are trying to see what would be true if  $p \cdot \sim p$  were true at the initial level of dealing with an inference, as soon as the contradiction becomes explicit they shift their thought and speech to a meta-level where they retain belief in the logical laws. They then proceed to apply the laws to the argument by employing logical rules which presuppose those laws. At this meta-level, then, the fact is that they are no longer seeing what would be true if the premises were true. For if the treatment of the argument remained at that level, the rules of logic would cease to apply since the law of noncontradiction would be denied.

What really happens here is therefore an unconscious shift to a meta-level where the premises are assumed to be false, while the truth and applicability of logical axioms and rules are insisted on. It is this shift from initial level to meta-level, and the inconsistency between the

---

<sup>15</sup> For example, I. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 5th ed. Macmillan, NY, 1978, pp. 332-335.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 335.

<sup>17</sup> 17 Lemmon, *Beginning Logic*. Thomas Nelson Sons, Camden, NJ, 1965, p.ix.

two, which produces the feeling of paradox surrounding the (illusory) demonstration that if premises are impossible everything validly follows:

$$\begin{array}{c} P \\ \sim P \\ \hline P \wedge \text{anything} \text{ (rule of addition)} \\ \text{anything} \text{ (disjunctive syllogism)} \end{array}$$

Please do not misunderstand my point here. I am not for a moment attempting to defend the view that we should seriously maintain  $p$ ,  $\sim p$  and give up the logical laws. What I am trying to point out is the tacit shift in the levels of thought and discussion which are introduced by the supposed demonstration that  $p$ ,  $\sim p$  entails everything. What I do mean to maintain is that this shift of levels needs to be acknowledged, and that when it is acknowledged it highlights two very important factors. First, we cannot consider the truth or falsity of a statement, or of the state of affairs it asserts, in isolation from the laws which we assume to govern it. And second, we cannot pretend not to be begging the question against the hypothetical truth of a claim at one level, while at the same time passing judgment on it from another level where what it denies is already assumed to be true.

Thus Descartes should not think that the dependency of things on God entails that God can make it true that  $p$ ,  $\sim p$  *while the laws of logic remain what they are!* This is what he appears to say at points, and what Plantinga takes him to assert. This, of course, results in absurdity. To hold that all things are (logically) possible, including those things the laws of logical possibility exclude is absurd.

But there is no absurdity in holding that although there really is necessity, impossibility, and possibility for creation, the laws which determine those conditions also depend on God. In that case the correct way of stating the consequences of universal creation is not to call it “universal possibilism”; it is not that anything is possible for God. Rather it is that God created all the senses of possibility.

To interpret the doctrine of universal creation as “universal possibilism” is to think about and discuss the creationist claim by tacitly shifting to a meta-level of thought and discourse. At this meta-level it is assumed that logical necessity and possibility are conditions which govern

God as well as creatures. It is to assume that the laws of logic form an “environment” for all things, God included. And it is to assume, at the same time, that the claim of God’s exemption from those laws must somehow entail that God can make some creatures exempt from the laws while the laws remain universal laws for creation.

But universal creation need not mean any such things. It can very well hold instead that God has created the laws which obtain in the universe, and the things which are governed by them, as *correlates*. In that case, for God to create an exception to a law would mean that what was formerly a law would no longer be a law. Thus universal creationism does not hold that “God can make  $2 \times 4 = 8$  false.” If the laws of mathematics and logic were different from what they are, the “ $\times$ ” and “ $=$ ” as well as “2”, “4”, and “8” would not mean what they now mean. If these laws were different, reality would differ in ways not now imaginable by us.

But this does not require created reality would differ by *violating* the laws which now do obtain. If the law of noncontradiction did not obtain, nothing would be self-contradictory or absurd as we now understand “self-contradictory” and “absurd.” For anything to violate a law, the law must hold. Thus God’s sovereignty over laws means that God was under no compulsion to make just the laws he did; it does not mean that creatures as well we now know them could violate logical laws. For as we now know them, all creatures are subjected to logical (and nonlogical) laws. And these laws govern not only what created entities can be, but how we can conceive of them.

This is also why it is incorrect to interpret the position being maintained here as saying that God can violate the logical laws. As was already explained, since “can” means “is logically possible,” such a position would amount to holding that it is logically possible for God to do what is logically impossible! But that is not at all what is being maintained. For an entity to *violate* a law, the law must hold for that entity. And precisely what we are saying is that the laws do not hold for God. To interpret this position as saying God can violate the laws is therefore to beg the question against it. It is to make a meta-level assumption of its falsity, analogous to the meta-level assumption which generates the paradox of material implication.

## **B. Religious Objections**

Even if the logical objections lodged against the accommodation theory can be answered, the theory of religious language based upon it must pass yet another test. It must pass the test of comporting with the teachings of Scripture both in their letter and their spirit. Obviously, there is no room here to do this extensively. So I will restrict my remarks to three major biblical doctrines:

- (1) the doctrine of the trinity;
- (2) the doctrine of the incarnation;
- (3) the doctrine of the image of God in humans.

(1) *Trinity*

The first thing to be borne in mind is that on the accommodation theory not only tri-unity but every quantitative property ascribed to God must be a created property he assumes to himself. The laws and properties of quantity are characteristics of created things in the universe, and so are themselves also created. This point applies, then, to the Jewish and Muslim doctrine that God is *one*, as much as it does to the Christian doctrine that God is one-in-three. In each case quantity is something created and assumed by God, and not intrinsic to God as he was prior to creating. The quantitative properties should therefore be understood as true of the ways God relates to creation.<sup>18</sup>

On this view Greek metaphysical concepts such as “substance” and “person” are not needed to explicate trinitarian doctrine. Nevertheless, while doing without them, this construal guards against all theological modalism and subordinationism in the trinity. For on this position no one of the trinitarian distinctions is more truly God than any other, nor is the unity basic to the diversity or vice versa.

(2) *Incarnation*

There are four classes of statements in the New Testament asserted of Jesus of Nazareth. The first are statements about him strictly as a human being. These include reports of his

---

<sup>18</sup> Augustine had a feel for this point when he recognized that while tri-unity talk is true it still somehow falls short of God’s own Being. He says that we speak of “trinity” and of “three persons” in theology “not because the phrases are adequate [to God] - they are the only alternatives to silence.” *De Trinitate*, V.9.

birth, childhood, public ministry, teachings and death. The second class of statements contains assertions pertaining to his office as Messiah. Among these are remarks of Jesus himself as well as others which are intended to explain his actions and teachings, and to demonstrate that he fulfilled the prophetic description of the role of Messiah. The third class of statements are those which speak of the special relation of God to Jesus in virtue of his office as Messiah. In this respect God is said to “indwell” Jesus (Jn. 14:10) as had been said of the prophets before him; that is, God conferred on him special power and authority (Lk. 4:32, 36). By way of contrast with the prophets which preceded him, however, Jesus is said to be indwelt without limitation (Col. 2:9; Jn.3:34); and so to have *all* God’s power and authority conferred on him (Matt. 28:18; Jn. 3:34; I Cor. 15:24; Rev. 19:16).

Now whatever difficulties anyone might have with any of these classes of statements, it seems pretty clear that consistency with the biblical doctrine of creation is not among them. But the fourth class of statements does raise the issue of consistency with that doctrine. It is the set whose members have traditionally - and, I think, correctly - been understood to assert the divinity of Jesus. It seems to me that anyone who reads these statements in the light of the biblical doctrine of the creator-creature distinction, will have to sympathize with the Jews who accused the early Christians of idolatry. For how, given the radical biblical sense of God’s transcendence, can God be identified with anything in the universe, even the Messiah?<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, a closer look at the statements which assert Jesus’ divinity uncovers a remarkable consistency if they are construed along the lines of the accommodation theory of religious language.

Consider some of the most direct of this set of statements: Jn. 1:1-14 refers to Jesus as the “Word of God”; Col. 1:15, I Cor. 11:7, II Cor. 4:4 and Heb. 1:3 all call Jesus “the image of God”; and Phil. 2:6 says he was “in the form of God” so that it was not illegitimate for him to be regarded in some sense as “equal with God”.<sup>20</sup> Now the expressions used in these passages appear almost as though, designed to conform to the theory I have put forward! For in them the man Jesus is not said to be identical with the Divine Being prior to creation, but to be the embodiment of God “as revealed”, as “clothed in his Word”.

---

<sup>19</sup> Muslims also make this charge. In Islam the sin of identifying any part of creation with Allah is called “shirk”.

<sup>20</sup> There are also indirect assertions of Jesus’ divinity and equality with the God of Israel, I Cor. 2:8 and Jas. 2:1 call him the “Lord of Glory”. This is an obvious allusion to Ps. 24 where God is said to be the “Lord of hosts” and the “king of Glory”.

Jesus is said to be the “Word”, the “form” and the “visible image of the invisible God”. That is, he is the very embodiment of the personal character God had taken on and had been revealing to Israel for centuries. In fact this is literally what Heb. 1:3 declares: he is the reproduction of [God’s] character.”

One of the bases for suggesting this interpretation is the attempt to take seriously what such terms as “form”, “Word”, and “image” would mean to a pious Jew steeped in the Torah, Psalms, and prophets rather than what they might mean to an educated pagan steeped in Plato, Aristotle, or Plotinus. Reflecting on this, I find no need for talk about different “natures” in a “hypostatic union” to explain the relation of Jesus’ humanity to the sense in which he is also divine. For on my interpretation, it is the very human personality of Jesus which is an exact image of the personality of Yahweh. And there is no inconsistency involved with the biblical doctrine of creation, since the properties comprising Jesus’ personality are all created. They are properties God had created and assumed to himself, and had revealed through the prophets. Thus there is a real qualitative identity between the two sets of properties and the two personalities. The covenant-love, faithfulness, compassion, goodness; etc., which were true of the ways God related to mankind (Israel in particular) prior to the incarnation, were the same as those possessed by Jesus during his earthly ministry and which he still possesses since his resurrection. Thus Jesus could appear to a pious believer to be literally the incarnation of the (created and revealed) personality of God.

Important as this last point is, however, it is not the whole story concerning the sense in which Jesus may properly be said to be divine. As was already pointed out, this point must be taken in conjunction with the third class of statements having to do with God’s indwelling in Jesus and conferring upon him all power and authority. For, remarkably enough, there is precedent even in Judaism for the identification of a man with God-as-revealed in the sense of having God’s power and authority. That precedent is the case of Moses. More than once the book of Exodus records that God told Moses that he, Moses, was to be regarded as God: he was to be God to Aaron, and God to the pharaoh of Egypt (Ex. 4:16, 7:1).<sup>21</sup> In the contexts these remarks are grounded in the extent to which Moses

---

<sup>21</sup> Moses’ father in law also speaks of Moses as God to the people of Israel (Ex. 18:19).

was empowered to speak for God,<sup>22</sup> and to which God's authority rested on him. On this same basis it is also made abundantly clear that any and all criticism or disrespect directed to Moses is directed to God himself.

Finally, there is another factor in addition to these. For besides having all God's power and authority conferred on him, and besides being the living embodiment of the revealed personality of Yahweh, the New Testament says that God now bears his relations to creation through Jesus. Such remarks as "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" certainly suggest strongly that God's covenant relations are now accomplished by having Jesus stand in those relations to the universe which only God had prior to the incarnation. In fact, even God's creating relation of sustaining the universe in existence is now exercised through Christ (Col. 1:17).

It should now be clear why the doctrine of Jesus' divinity does not contradict the doctrine of God's transcendence when it is interpreted from the standpoint of the accommodation theory. If Moses could, in a sense, be identified with God because of the extent to which he carried God's authority, why not the Messiah who carries *all* God's authority? In light of the claim that this Messiah is at the same time, in his human personality, the living embodiment of the personality of "God in relation to us", the completion of the revelation of God's character, *and also the creature through whom God actually bears his relations to the world*, there could be no more adequate way to express these facts than to complete the sense of identification with God which Moses was said to have partially. In fact, this seems to be exactly the point which forms the background to the explicit contrast drawn between Moses and Jesus in Jn. 1:17. In that passage Moses is, for all his greatness, said to be merely the instrument through which the Law was given, while Jesus "creates grace and truth".

Finally, I find it remarkable confirmation of this interpretation that it is the very explanation given by Jesus himself when he was accused of blasphemy for asserting his divinity. According to Jn. 10:34-36 he replied to his accusers:

---

<sup>22</sup> This, of course, is the literal meaning of "prophet": not "one who foretells the future", but "spokesman" or "deputy".

Is it not written in your Law that “I said, ‘You are gods.’” If he called them gods to whom the word of God came, and if Scripture cannot be broken, why do you say of the one the Father has made holy and sent into the world, “you blaspheme” because I said I am the Son of God?<sup>23</sup>

### *(3) Image of God*

By now it may be quite obvious how the accommodation theory of religious language will handle the doctrine of the image of God in humans. Humans will be understood to be in the image of the created personality of God, not of the Divine being prior to creating. This interpretation finds, therefore, that the anthropomorphic depiction of God is not only the revelation of God’s character, and thus of the treatment we can expect from him, but is also the revelation of the biblical idea of what it is to be fully human (Heb. 4:15; Eph. 4:13) which we should take as our model (Rom. 8:28; I Cor. 15:49; I Peter 2:21). It also makes sense of Jesus’ statement that we should be “perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

This view of the meaning of the image of God in humans is a deliberate break with the long history of theologies which have identified the image with a particular faculty that we are supposed to have in common with God (e.g., reason), or with some particular duty of life which we supposedly share with God (e.g., to be loving or creative). Instead the *imago Dei* now turns out to mean the whole of what it is to be rightly human.

In summary, I think it has been shown that the accommodationist view of religious language is a genuine alternative to the traditional analogy theory. It presupposes, and remains consistent with, the biblical doctrine of God’s transcendence, while the analogy theory does neither. Moreover, it is a view which is able to maintain religious language as literally meaningful and religiously significant, thus avoiding the unrelieved agnosticism which the analogy theorist fears. And finally, it appears that the accommodation theory, when applied to several important biblical doctrines, turns out to be illuminating by the way it clarifies them and frees their interpretations from the distorting influence of pagan Greek philosophical theories.

---

<sup>23</sup> Ps. 82:6.