

# SIMPLICITY, ANALOGY AND PLAIN RELIGIOUS LIVES

John King-Farlow

Aquinas and Maimonides, as well as several Muslim thinkers of the thirteenth century, emphasized much older traditions in arguing that perfect *simplicity* must characterize their perfect God. Some modern believers continue to insist upon belief in divine simplicity. Some even go on citing it as a primary reason for denying that plain religious believers in this life, unless made less plain by special light from heaven, can talk literally about their God. There are sceptics annoyed to find their long favoured target, "God's necessary existence", defended with such advanced analytical tools as forms of modal logic. It is tempting to take the often connected doctrine of simplicity to be an easier mark.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows I hope to show (1) that this idea of divine "simplicity" does make sense and is useful for talk about God; (2) that it does lend support to temperate, if not to overpowering claims about the need for analogical predication in matters of faith; (3) that, when distinguished from each other and from some Hellenistic metaphysical baggage, the notions of simplicity and analogy are both philosophically manageable and helpful within plain, if theologically inquisitive, religious lives.

## (1) *Two Opposed Christian Views of Literal Claims About God*

In Chapter Two of his valuable and extremely readable book *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism*<sup>2</sup>, Gary Gutting sets in contrast two opposed views of intelligibility and religious language. These belong to his own colleagues Alvin Plantinga and David Burrell. Gutting begins with the following words from Plantinga:

It is a piece of sheer confusion to say that there is such a person as God, but none of our concepts apply to him...If our concepts do not apply to God, then our concepts of being loving, almighty, wise, creator and redeemer do not apply to him, in which case he is not loving, almighty, wise, a creator or a redeemer. He won't have any of the properties Christians ascribe to him. In fact he won't have any of the properties of which we have concepts...The fact is this being won't have any properties at all,



since our concept of having at least one property does not apply to him. But how could there be any such thing? How could there be a being that didn't exist, wasn't self-identical, wasn't either a material or immaterial thing, didn't have any properties? Does any of this make even marginal sense? It is clearly quite impossible that there be anything to which none of our concepts apply.<sup>3</sup>

Gutting at least partly endorses Plantinga by saying "Consider, for example, the suggestion, popular among contemporary theologians, that none of our concepts are applicable to God. *In this bold form*, the suggestion is certainly absurd."<sup>4</sup> But in a less bold form, Gutting goes on to add, the suggestion is brilliantly developed in David Burrell's works *Exercises in Religious Understanding*<sup>5</sup> and *Aquinas: God and Action*.<sup>6</sup> He cites from Burrell's earlier work:

Aquinas probes the possibilities of different ways of thinking and speaking to test for intimations which the outright denial might have opened up. He makes an implicit appeal to a quality of experience, a form of life which could prepare someone to adopt a way of speaking quite different from that adapted to physical objects.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Aquinas, as understood by Burrell, comes up with an analogue of the doctrine, rejected by Plantinga, that none of our human concepts can apply to God. Gutting clarifies this view:

The true significance of the *via remotionis* is to deny the possibility of making well formed statements about God. Far from yielding literally true negative statements about God, the moment of denial shows that we cannot properly say anything about God.<sup>8</sup>

If I have understood Burrell's ways of talking, we must accordingly ascend to metalinguistic remarks of very tortured, grammatically ill-formed kinds about our ordinary uses of "God" and of co-referential terms in our present language. *Intimations* of God, may then guide us as a faithful community towards a wiser way of talking.<sup>9</sup>

## (II) Possible Sources of Disagreement Over "Literal" and "Analogical"

From their words and silences it looks reasonable to infer that Burrell and Plantinga are close to agreement on the first of the following points— points which often crop up in disputes about the possibility of literal or just of distantly analogical talk about God. Gutting mentions several of these, but tends to fuse some and overlook features of others.

- (i) An infinitely perfect God would be in many ways too different from finite hu-

mans for us *ever* to understand him. As for some other ways, His gifts of grace, revelation, human reason and excellent, inspired teachers can enable us to make considerable progress (by human standards) in coming to understand. As for some other ways, God may choose to favour a number of us with further insights into His nature through visions, special intimations, prophetic dreams, and the like. In heaven a human person is given a far deeper comprehension and appreciation of God through the beatific vision.

(ii) What some philosophers will want to distinguish as quite different kinds of “is” in contexts of use may include cases of predication, identity, identification, attributing *parts* to *wholes*—[“That is *this* ship’s.”]—assigning individuals to sets, etc. But these will all be cases of “is” being used for predication in the broadest sense for purposes of discussing revealed and natural theology.

(iii) When we predicate literally, in this *broad* sense of “predicate”, something “*P*” of a subject “*S*”, we must allow that not just the sense or connotation, but also the reference of denotation of “*S*” and “*P*” will have to be distinct. (Predication of “*S*” of “*S*” can be an exception.) The act of placing “is” or “is *P*” after “*S*” makes this clear by virtue of the most essential features of human thought and language.

(iv) There is an essential connection between “*intellectually distinguishable things*” and “separable elements” in contexts where (in the broad sense of “predicate”) we literally predicate “*P*” of “*S*”. This again pertains to the ways in which humans must think and speak.

(v) Therefore, anything properly fit for receiving literal predications, true or false, must be composite and not simple.<sup>10</sup>

(vi) Therefore, deliberately making any literal predications of “*God*”, or in some contexts of “*The First Cause of all things*”<sup>11</sup>, etc., constitutes a denial of His simplicity. One would thereby reject the unity of His existence and essence.

(vii) Again, by so denying the divine simplicity we are bound to imply that His existence is *caused* (as are all composites’ existence in general), and also that His existence is not atemporal and immutable. This is getting close to blasphemy unless there is excusable ignorance. So we must conclude that it is conceptually absurd and religiously impious (without excusable ignorance) to aim at literally describing God or applying any human concepts directly to the divine being.

Burrell and Plantinga will both support proposition (i) or something like it. But Plantinga, as his quoted passage indicates, would consider it misleading, if not followed by a statement that many of our concepts *do* apply literally to God. Burrell would call proposition (i) misleading, if not followed by the statement that *none* of our concepts can literally apply, and only some can be used analogically. Gutting’s exposition makes it fair to infer that Burrell would also consider (i) superficial without the addition of something like (ii), (iii), (v), (vi), (vii). Explicit or implicit versions of the highly fallacious (iv) appear, according to my medievalist colleague R. N. Bosley, in various thinkers from Parmenides through the Middle

Ages to Hume.<sup>12</sup>

When the position that very few of our concepts apply literally to God is derived from (i) alone, then a simple doctrine of analogy is enough. It is one which religious children can find intelligible. Moreover, many religious sophisticates can accept it as something independent of questionable impositions of Hellenic metaphysics on the Bible.

Also, the doctrines that God is simple and that His existence and essence are one can be extricated from such philosophically and scripturally dubious, Hellenistic doctrines about causation, atemporal changelessness and predication. When this happens, the results should prove again to be intelligible to clear-headed, religious children. Also many theologically reflective adults can dwell on them as religiously exciting in themselves and as possible further justification of what could become an agreeably supported doctrine of analogy.

In what follows I shall offer (A) such a modest account of the divine simplicity; (B) such a moderate account talk about of analogy—with allied points about its natural role in promoting plain believers' religious humility and joyful hopes.<sup>13</sup> Possibly these analyses can guide faith to a fusion of what is most realistic both in Plantinga and in Burrell; (C) an exchange between Aquinas and a cultured plain believer on analogy, predication and 'surface grammar'.

### (III A) *The Divine Simplicity*

Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* heartily reproves himself for his earlier teaching that the world is composed of absolute simples. "Simple" and "complex", like "exact" and "inexact", he now insists, are only intelligible when used in relation to one or another appropriate activity. Can we, then, make religious sense of calling God a simple being? Can we, that is, if we don't mean something like "easy to—" or "simple-minded—", when we say "simple"?

A very smoothly Wittgensteinian way of meeting the question is to say one cannot understand believers' use of "God is simple" unless one shares in their form of life. An excellent reply to such relativism comes at the end of Gutting's chapter. Some primitive people's religious beliefs may be inextricable from their form of life: "By contrast, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc., articulate systems of truths and values designed to challenge and transfrom their societies."<sup>13</sup>

In this vein I would say that talk of the divine simplicity, wisely employed, challenges us to think how an ideal might be instantiated in a person of vastly greater perfections than ourselves. In such a being, among other perfections, one would find a complete *absence* of self-conflict and self-deception, of 'weak spots', of inconsistencies, of favouritism, of one set of glorious aims being pursued arbitrarily at the expense of different, yet equally noble sets, of inability to be just and loving to all persons, and much else that we already know to be opposed to fullness of in-

tegrity and integration. Such a God is simple, as opposed to being selfishly ‘complex’ or ‘complicated’. Such a God is simple, as opposed to those ‘fragmented’ people’s selves whose various sub-selves<sup>14</sup> have to be flattered, or made jealous, or intimidated, in order to get them to be consistently fair, to keep their promises, to avoid cruelty. We can meditate daily (as plain believers) on God as ideally simple. We can thus think of Him as challenging us to ‘integrate’ ourselves and become more harmoniously moral and benevolent beings, more open to truly new ideas and not just to variations on our old favourites. This can make us consistently humbler, yet increasingly hopeful as well.

You may ask: “But what of the supposed connection between the divine simplicity and God’s other perfections? What of the purported unity in God of all the ‘things’ we humans call virtues? What of the alleged identity between His existence and His essence? Are we to be fobbed off with only some naturalist or anthropopsychic ideals of simplicity?”

Not at all. But let us take one step at a time.

Suppose that N, a woman from Nevada, lives in India for three years. She shares in the work of a living saint, a quite *holy* person such as Mother Teresa. Soon after N’s return, someone who is curious, but knows little about Mother Teresa, or sainthood, or anything to do with religion, asks N “Would you call her a *kind* person? Would you call her *loving, sane, sincere, peaceful?*”

N: “Yes, if I were in a great hurry, I could conscientiously call her all those things without qualification. But really that would be a misleading sort of reply. If someone truly wanted to know the answer as a matter of life and death, I’d put it more like this. If you could live close to such a saintly and holy person, you might say: ‘Well, she certainly throws light on how such human terms of praise are used and how they ought to be used more realistically by human beings. I’d have to say she illustrates a staggering amount of virtues that we would admire at once or come very soon to praise. But in this case her partly ‘superhuman’ nature makes the virtues we distinguish (and seem at the level of ‘surface grammar’ to separate), in most cases when we talk, give the curious, but substantial impression of being ‘*all-of-a-piece*’ with each other. And there’s something that goes with this ‘all-of-a-piece’ quality of hers: she’s *unchanging, immutable*, rather as we think of God. I don’t mean ‘outside time’ in either case. I mean naturally, fixedly unswerving in the way she illuminates all these virtues. For another thing, if you get to know such a person well, you’d find it hard to think of her as anything less than *immortal*. Such a holy woman might ‘shed’ her body, but such a unity of excellence would *have* to go on existing in some new form as a person. You come to feel that there’s something ‘essentially connected’ between her holy kind of fused qualities in a person and her indissoluble existence. Her nature—not entirely unlike God’s nature—is not outside time, but not threatened by time.”

C. B. Martin, whose scepticism is also discussed by Gutting, has written: “The

trouble, however, with the idea that the basic item's properties are one with another and one with its very existence...is just that it is hogwash." ("God, the Null Set, and Divine Simplicity", 140). The trouble I have with Martin's remark is that if I heard someone speak in N's way from close knowledge of Mother Teresa, or Gandhi, or a Buddhist Abbott, I wouldn't find it hogwash at all. Why should any open-minded person find it hogwash if a Biblical believer not very mysteriously extends such a form of description to 'God-talk' in seeking to convey what it was like when she or he had an encounter or a vision of God? Suppose the believer extends it with expressed belief that what he experienced *had* to be the only creator, *had* to be the one entirely nondependent being.

Now let us suppose the believer is a theologian and adds:

There are things one experiences of God that one could not experience of a Saint. As Pseudo-Dionysius put it 'The one Cause of everything is not one of the many, but prior to all unity [outside Himself] and all plurality and determines all unity and plurality.' (*Divine Names* 13.2). But this person N who so richly experienced the holiness and presence of God in Mother Teresa is well on her way to a superhuman grasp of what Aquinas meant when he wrote: 'although predicates of this kind which the intellect on the basis of such conceptions attributes to God signify what the substance of God is, they do not signify it completely as it is, but as it is understood by us. (*On the Power of God*, 7.5)'.<sup>15</sup>

Those like C. B. Martin would protest that "perfectly wise person" cannot *mean* "perfectly merciful person"; that "the concept of someone perfectly wise, perfectly merciful, perfectly loving, perfectly nondependent,..." cannot *mean* "the concept of one who must exist". Presumably such assertions of what *means* what are for sceptics of Martin's line more of the same old hogwash: anyone who speaks English can see that they are necessarily false. But, of course, "means" is highly ambiguous. Among other possibilities "means" naturally covers (1) sense and (2) reference, (3) how we *do* use or understand a word or phrase, and (4) how we *ought* to use or understand a word or phrase if we were more enlightened. Ordinary use need not always show how we *ought* to use or understand a term in a relevant context of religion—let alone of a special and repeated experience of the divine.

Talk of the divine simplicity is not quite so obscure as some would like to think.

### (III B) *Analogy and Plain Belief*

If God is simple in the ways considered, then some of the terms and sentences which we use to talk about Him *can* in some contexts, but *need not* always be misleading. On the other hand, we have seen that the chance of believers' being misled sometimes by what they say about God already follows quite obviously enough

from the less controversial point that God, unlike us, is supremely perfect. Therefore, we do not have to be so sanguine as Plantinga about the literal applicability of great droves of our concepts to the divine nature. But neither need we be as radically anti-literal and tortuous as Burrell.

Christian philosophers seeking light on uses of language for plain religious living should not be afraid to gamble a little on Jesus's own uses in the Gospels. At Matthew 19.16.17 one reads: "Teacher, what good must I do, to have eternal life?" Jesus replied: "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good." Jesus appears to use his reply to make two literal points about God and man. The first is that a term of such *eneration* (or a term used here with such veneration) should be directed only to God—not to 'good works', teachers, masters, high priests and other imperfect acts or people. The second is that careless believers should reflect much more carefully on how "good" is used and on how it *should* be used realistically in plain religious life. He thus seems to show limited approval both to literalists and to analogists. The same appears to be true of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It is used in part to make very clearly the literal point that God will accept our sincere repentance, even after much wrongdoing. It also challenges us to reflect further on what a *perfectly* wise father would be like, and how unlike some of the fathers we know: what does "wise father" really mean in the four mentioned senses of "mean"? (Analogical advocates of the *via negativa* and *remotion* get an invitation to begin their subtractings. Theologically minded semanticists get an invitation to look back at earlier, more relaxed, once revolutionary notions like *logical constructions* and *surface grammar*).

What are plain believers to say if they consider the struggle between 'hyper-literalists' like Plantinga and hyper-analogists like Burrell? Let us think now of some otherwise plain believers<sup>16</sup> who took several good courses of philosophy and theology in college. Starting with the most obvious point, I suggest, they could well speak rather like this:

'Analogy' sounds imposing when we want to say that one thing is similar to or resembles another; that the two share at least one common property. But there is no universally accepted way of deciding in all cases how great or how significant a spread of likeness must be, or how many and how significant the common properties must be, for a genuine analogy to exist. In most cases it would be a poor joke to say, for example, 'Walt Disney was an American analogue of Praxiteles, since both were well known and both copied human figures'.

Of course, we often have to use similes, metaphors, models, analogies, parables, etc., to talk about a perfect God in as illuminating a way as we can. But philosophers and linguists have shown how much we use similes, metaphors and the rest in very ordinary language to talk about very familiar things.<sup>17</sup> Jesus Him-

self in attacking the Pharisees could shift gears easily from ‘literally’ calling them *hypocrites* to ‘analogically’ calling them *whited sepulchres*. The way that someone like Burrell will argue suggests that there is an unfailing decision procedure for picking out and setting apart all literal remarks or literal uses of remarks.

“The best defense among plain believers for having a greatly reduced form of Burrell’s or Aquinas’ teachings on analogy is this: it should make increased humility tie up closely with increased joy in our religious expectations. Humility, if I may draw on the late Ronald Knox’s words in a sermon, is largely a matter of *realism* about ourselves, other people and God—and about what is more and what is less valuable and praiseworthy in certain crucial dimensions. For this purpose we need to set aside for reflection a good number of possible, but properly provoking descriptions of God and men. We ought to meditate on some of the different implications or ‘contextual implicatures’ which radiate from, for example, describing, or praising, or thanking a deity and a human being with the same words or phrases. We can usefully, in a Christian community, try to agree on a particular set of terms with strong tendencies to mislead us. We can call them ‘*specialy analogical*’. We can let discussion or meditation on them produce greater humility and happier expectations: the more different God is from us in certain ways, and so the better He is, then the better we are loved and the better eternal life will be for us in His presence. Of course, there will be other words we agree to call literal in describing God: they strike us as being (relatively) so much less controversial. Take, for example, Plantinga’s examples: *loving* and *immaterial*. But even what we will style “literal items” are worth raking over the coals occasionally for our purpose of reflecting on God’s superiority and love. The grammatical forms of literal predication, which may encourage those without faith to say we do not treat God as simple, need never mislead us after childhood. Rather similarly, we can say literally (after childhood) that numbers exist far greater than one billion, without misleading each other in any Platonist directions.

“The most useful aspect of Plantinga’s literalism is that it seems to fit the following point. In a religious family we learn the word ‘God’ partly as a proper name and partly as a definite description. There must be some core of largely clear and unproblematic statements about God for the learner, (not always exactly the same for all Christian learners), or the phenomenon of children’s becoming believers or informed sceptics in religious families would not be part of our history. In that case sophisticated theism could hardly begin without an amazing series of *ad hoc* interventions by God in the human brain.”

#### (IV) *The Plain Believer, Analogy and Saint Thomas*

Aquinas and Burrell might well object. St. Thomas, for example, would personally say:

“This plain religious believer has ‘castrated the stallions of analogy’. Even in theological commerce one must not settle for too little. This plain religious believer, in dealing with analogy, has settled for the right to explain in human language a number of important ways in which humans or other created beings stand in the relation of *resemblance* to their Creator. (The *perfect* and thus utterly non-dependent creator cannot, I must remind this believer, stand in any real relation to created and ever dependent creatures). But where this plain believer stops is only where I begin. As I and some of my later Thomist or Neo-Thomist followers have shown, talk of *analogy* and *resemblance* must be related to a pair of crucial terms: *proportion* and *proportionality*.”

*The plain believer replies:*

“I think you miss two points of great importance. *First*, if a doctrine of analogy did not primarily serve the purposes I laid down, it would be largely irrelevant to the religious lives and needs of almost all believers in the secular world. Greater ‘sophistication’ may help to make a wise approach wiser, but it is likely to be *this* wise approach to God and analogy which is really essential for ordinary people. *Second*, it is conventionally “wrong” or infelicitous to say ‘Queen Sirikit resembles King-Farlow’s Thai wife’, ‘Queen Elizabeth shares Mrs. Allstone’s views on scholarly conventions’, ‘God resembles man in certain ways.’ The term for the less lofty referent of the two, thanks to polite convention or reverent taste, is felt to have the proper place in the subject position before such verbs. But this does not show that, from a logical point of view, X’s resembling Y does not entail Y’s “really” resembling X. You may object that because Y is simple and devoid of distinct properties, while X is complex with many distinct properties, X cannot be said to resemble Y—for that would be to suggest that X has a distinct property among others which Y also has among others. But, I should point out, the divine simplicity seems to be such that forming “*logical constructions*” by abstraction (or extraction) from one’s understanding of God’s nature, as Jesus does in parables and in direct speech about divine requirements of men, legitimates one’s speaking of creatures as having certain properties which resemble some of God’s “logically constructed” (LC) properties and *vice versa*. Just so, if Jones somewhat resembles the average plumber, then the average plumber somewhat resembles Jones. (After childhood we know enough about surface grammar<sup>18</sup> not to reify the average plumber or send him a letter). Hence we can, with felicitous mental reservations, say that in some ways creatures resemble the Creator *and* the Creator, therefore, re-

sembles creatures in some ways. And, thanks to revelation and grace, a Christian knows a few descriptions to be literally true.”

*Aquinas responds:*

“Very well. Your point may bring us somewhat closer together. ‘The average plumber’ does not stand for any distinct person, but is a term, (based on abstraction from truths about many plumbers), which can be the subject of literally true propositions. An obvious example would be: ‘The average plumber charges fifty dollars an hour.’ In a converse way we can helpfully abstract from our limited understanding of the simple and singular divine nature, then come up with a plurality of descriptive terms. They are ‘logically constructed’ (LC) predicates, standing in important kinds of relations to many predicates which we can literally apply to finite beings. We can use LC-predicates with prudence and come up with literally true sentences if we know how not to be misled, as you say, by surface grammar. For example, God is LC-loving in ways partly comparable with those of the loving father in certain of Christ’s parables or those of a (historical) loving father like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Given your point about explicitly admitted LC-properties, this statement can (perhaps) be literally true, whereas ‘God is my loving father’ can only be analogically true in any human use. (I don’t agree with you that grace and revelation give us a literal understanding of even a very few truths that are not LC-truths about God. And I only allow that the felicity conditions are perfectly satisfied for literal ascriptions of logically constructed properties to God where both speaker and hearer have enough linguistic and theological education, as well as grace with revealed truths, so as not to be misled by the forms of ‘surface grammar’ into denying the divine simplicity. Christians must wait, like all others who are saved, for the beatific vision before they can literally understand the truth conditions of our sentence ‘God is loving!’).”

*The plain believer asks:*

“Very well, then, what about the value of talk about proportion and proportionality in connection with analogical language or uses of language?”

*St. Thomas leaps in:*

“*Analogy of proportion (analogia secundum convenientiam proportionis)* must be distinguished from *analogy of proportionality (analogia secundum convenientiam proportionatis)*. I believe that some of the later Scholastics’ involvement with what is now called *analogy of attribution* is what I call *analogy of proportion*. Some seem to have later rebaptized

my *analogy of proportionality* as *analogy of proportion*. I use 'analogy of proportion' to cover cases of this sort: a predicate like 'holy' is properly used as a term applying primarily and perfectly to the infinitely holy Godhead, but secondarily and imperfectly to a finite, but holy man like John the Baptist. On the other hand, although between 8 and 4 there is a resemblance of proportion, the relation holding between *6 to 3* and *4 to 2* is one of resemblance of proportionality. 'What ocular vision is to the eye, intellectual vision is to the mind.' 'Rather as Joseph was deeply but finitely loved by his earthly father, Jacob, so Jesus was deeply and infinitely loved by his Heavenly Father.' See my *De Veritate (passim)* or Father Frederick Copleston's admirable *History of Philosophy* for all this and more on my philosophy of religious language."

*Our plain believer might reply:*

"Very well then, suppose I say with due reflection: 'God's LC-knowledge is to my knowledge as an infinite time is to a second.' In this case of mentioning what you call a resemblance or analogy of proportionality, there are interesting reasons for calling the sentence literally true when used among Christians. For talk of 'God's LC-knowledge' conveys a limited, but serious amount of intelligible truths to a well-instructed, but plain believer, who is too blessed to be misled by surface grammar. For God's knowledge has no limits and my knowledge is extremely restricted. If something is said in a colorful, comparative way, this does not force us to call the saying "analogical". And once the plain believer satisfies something like your 'felicity conditions' he understands the basic ideas of *limited* and *unlimited*, of *divine simplicity*, *abstracting* and *logical constructions* (like *the average plumber*). Compare my numerical sets of examples again: "There really do exist numbers that are far greater than  $n$ " may be used literally, yet need not be used to ontologize a separate realm of numbers. Hence talk of God's LC-knowledge is often unlikely to be misleading or too mysterious. Then there are factors which may well make us want to drop the "LC" and say that some such talk of infinite and finite time and of God's and my knowledge must be treated as analogical and a case of analogy of proportionality. (You and I have given enough examples of proportion already.) The importance of humility, along with a preference for speaking simply about shared beliefs with other Christians, may usually justify offering and viewing our sentences as analogical speech. But I suspect that when the plain believer wants to use his former theological and philosophical education for talk with professional theologians or with similarly learned laymen, he has the right to invoke logical constructions of divine properties, as Jesus often did. Then he may treat

not all, but much more of his claims as *literal* claims, though as literal claims whose ‘surface grammar’ is not allowed to count against belief in God’s simplicity.”

*Aquinas:*

“I can feel some such dialectical tension between viewing some uses of metalinguistically refined statements about God’s LC-properties *first* as literally true, if sometimes grammatically misleading, and *then* as true, but analogical predications. For if the LC-approach is taken with explicit acknowledgement of limitations posed both by our surface grammar *and*, more importantly by God’s infinity, non-dependence and simplicity, then we can hope to follow Jesus’s example prudently in alternating between parables and literal claims about what God wants of us mortals.”

### CONCLUSION

Gary Gutting, as I mentioned before, closes his chapter on analogy and religious language with a splendid point against Wittgenstein: outside primitive societies like the Zande’s, a religion is not a form of life. “By contrast, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc., articulate systems of truths and values designed *to challenge and transform their societies.*” (77, my italics.) My plain believer’s account of what a reformed, pragmatic approach to talk of analogy would entail is very much in keeping with the thrust of Gutting’s conclusion. If truly open and inspired, the required discussions and meditations on God’s qualities and purposes for man would challenge us first to transform ourselves so as to become wiser and more realistic. Then believers would be far better equipped to transform the society around them. The continuing Pharisaical equation of admirability with wealth piled up at other citizens’ and other nations’ expense could finally be dissolved.

*University of Alberta*

### NOTES

1. See, for example, C. B. Martin’s “God, the Null Set and Divine Simplicity” in John King-Farlow (ed.), *The Challenge of Religion Today*, (New York, N. Y.: Science History Publications, 1976) pp. 138-43. But cf. John King-Farlow and W. N. Christensen, *Faith and the Life of Reason*, (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1972) pp. 78-122.

2. Gary Gutting, *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism*, (Notre Dame, In.: Notre Dame University Press, 1982). There are so many fine points in this book, and especially in Chapter II, that I hope my using the chapter as the springboard for my own arguments will be useful in several ways.

3. Gutting, *Religious Belief*, pp. 50-51; A. Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1980) pp. 22-23.
4. Gutting, p. 50; the italics are mine.
5. David Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, (Notre Dame, In.: Notre Dame University Press, 1974).
6. David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, (Notre Dame, In.: Notre Dame University Press, 1979).
7. David Burrell, *Exercises*, p. 88. Gary Gutting, *Religious Belief*, p. 53.
8. Burrell, Gutting and Plantinga might all have benefited from W. P. Alston's suggestion that the *relevant* kinds of predicates are what he calls the intrinsic ones, the ones that tell us something "about what the subject is like." These 'intrinsic' or 'positive' predicates are contrasted with others that "don't tell us anything about what the subject is like, about the nature or operations of the subject." See W. P. Alston, "Can We Speak Literally of God?" in *Is God God?*, eds. A. D. Steuer and J. W. McLendon Jr., (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980) pp. 144-77.
9. Cf. Gutting, *Religious Belief*, p. 52.
10. Cf. Gutting, *Religious Belief*, p. 56.
11. Cf. Gutting on Burrell's view of substituting what are in context nearly synonymous, co-referential expressions for "God." The co-referential expression, Burrell holds, cannot in that context admit of literal Predication. See Gary Gutting, *Religious Belief*, p. 58. Cf. John King-Farlow, "Is the Doctrine of the Trinity Literally Absurd?" *Sophia*, 1983.
12. R. N. Bosley, "Distinctness and Separation" (to be published after expansion). Copies are available from the Philosophy Department, University of Alberta, Edmonton. *N. B.* Philosophers are quite capable of explicitly rejecting the supposed connection between distinguishability and separability, while letting it implicitly affect their arguments.
13. Gutting, *Religious Belief*, p. 77.
14. Cf. Herbert Fingarette, *The Self in Transformation*, (New York: Basic Books, 1963); Herbert Fingarette, *On Responsibility*, (New York: Basic Books, 1968); John King-Farlow, "Self-Deceivers and Sartrean Seducers" (*Analysis*, 23, 4, 1963) pp. 131-36; John King-Farlow, "Akrasia, Self-Mastery and the Master Self," (*Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 62, 1, 1981) pp. 47-60; John King-Farlow and Richard Bosley "Self-Formation and the Mean: Programmatic Remarks on Self-Deception," forthcoming in Michael W. Martin (ed.), *Self-Deception: Philosophers and Psychologists*, (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1984.).
15. This Thomist point is made very helpfully, not obscurely, in Peter Geach's *Mental Acts* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957). See page 40 where he makes creative use of Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q.3 art. 12 ad tertium.
16. For these *plain believers*, unlike the wide range of thinkers addressed by W. P. Alston in "Can We Speak Literally of God?" in *Is God God?* eds. A. D. Steuer and J. W. McLendon Jr., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), pp. 144-77—the question of God's existence has been settled by Revelation and Grace. They also take Revelation and Grace to establish clearly for each true believer the intelligibility of a few ('intrinsic') core-predicates. But what are intelligible core-predicates and clearly correct core-beliefs, they allow, can vary slightly from believer to believer as God's dispensation of relevant Grace to individuals may vary. And they would add that their unqualified uses of the grammatical forms typically involved when they predicate of God *some* usually distinct sounding properties (that they admire) need not be misleading in cases where Grace-led understanding and Special Revelation of God's Nature are used by one plain and enlightened believer in speaking to others similarly enlightened.

17. Cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language," *Journal of Philosophy* (LXXVII, 8, 1980) pp. 453-86; William P. Alston, *Philosophy of Language*, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964) pp. 98-99, 103; elsewhere in the chapter Alston seems much more optimistic about the literal-(figurative, metaphorical) distinction. In *Religious Belief and Philosophical Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963) Alston sounds more sceptical of analogical talk's yielding much understanding of a Deity. See especially pp. 223-24.

18. Cf. William P. Alston on "translation" and "seductive grammatical likenesses," in "Ontological Commitments," *Philosophical Studies*, (IX, 1-2, 1958, pp. 8-17), J. King-Farlow "From 'GOD' to 'IS' to 'OUGHT'," *Philosophical Quarterly*, (VII, 1, 1957, pp. 136-48).