

# GOD'S TALK OR GOD-TALK?

*by James Stafford*

## 1. Introduction

LANGUAGE IS TO CHRISTIANITY as light is to the eye. Without language, Christianity would cease to exist. At the center of Christianity is God's saving work in Christ; yet without language to communicate that message, there would ordinarily be no way for someone to be made a partaker of Christ's salvation. While God may certainly apply the redemption purchased by Christ to an individual apart from language, such as in the case of elect infants, the apostles make clear that a verbal message is the ordinary means through which salvation comes to a person. The apostle John, wishing for others to have eternal life, does not paint a picture, perform an interpretative dance, compose a piece of music, or set an example of godly piety; instead, he writes a book. Paul states that salvation requires the verbal confession that Jesus is Lord and belief with the heart that God raised him from the dead. This is belief in a linguistically communicated truth, as Paul asks how men could possibly believe if they have never heard someone preach this good news. The synoptic gospels end with a command to verbally communicate a message: to teach the nations all that Christ commanded (Matthew), to tell Peter and the disciples that Christ is going before them to preach the gospel to all creation (Mark), and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in Christ's name to all nations (Luke). Of what benefit is Christ's sacrifice without words to communicate it? What good is the most beautiful of paintings in a museum without light?

Given this close link between God's speech and salvation, it is not surprising that the reliability of God's speech has fallen under attack from the beginning. At their root, the God-talk debates of the twentieth century are simply variations on an ancient theme: "Has God really said...?" It may be objected that the question under consideration is not whether God has spoken but whether man can speak truthfully concerning God. However, the very act of questioning man's ability to speak truthfully concerning God presupposes its corollary: that God is unable to speak truthfully to man concerning himself. That these two questions are of a piece—man's speech concerning God and God's speech concerning himself to man—is evidenced by the nature of the Scriptures as written through the instrumentality of men. If man cannot speak truthfully concerning God, then God necessarily cannot speak truthfully concerning himself to men – at least not through the man-written Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. If this is so, then knowledge of God must be obtained through

some other means, perhaps a feeling of utter dependence, existential angst, or a mystic encounter. Whatever the case, to call into question man's ability to speak truthfully concerning God is to call into question God's own self-revelation to and through man.

This essay will address the God-talk debates of the previous century, first by providing a positive argument for the legitimacy of predicating true things about God and second by critiquing the various subjectivist approaches to the issue.

## 2. Analogical Language as a Vehicle of Truth

Historically, the orthodox view on God-talk has been that it is indeed possible to predicate true things about God according to a creaturely mode of discourse. Thomas Aquinas articulates the nature of predicating truth about God in the thirteenth question of his *Summa*, in which he assumes a conceptualist signification theory of language. While later philosophical discussion has demonstrated that there is more to language than its semiotic function, I will restrict the discussion to its semiotic nature since the veridicality of language is tied to its semiotic rather than its illocutionary functions. In Aquinas's view, since "words are signs of ideas, and ideas [are] the similitude of things ... words relate to the meaning of things signified through the medium of the intellectual conception."<sup>1</sup> A speaker's words designate an object only as that object is filtered through his mental conception of it. Suppose a man was asked what color his house was. *My house is blue* directly signifies the speaker's conception of his house and indirectly signifies something about the house itself. In so far as the speaker's conception of the house accurately resembles the house, his statement is true. Supposing, though, that someone painted his house without his knowledge in his absence, his statement becomes false; it becomes false not because it misconstrues his own mental conception but because his mental conception does not comport with reality. For Aquinas, the inability of language to univocally predicate truth about God does not reside in language itself; the inability resides in the creature's inability to see God in his essence owing to the ontological distance between God and man. In so far as man's intellect can generate an accurate similitude of God, language is perfectly adequate to describe that conception. Man's conception is at fault, not language. Such a view of language anticipates the later philosophical arguments of knowing a *Ding an sich*. Linguistic philosophy collapses very quickly into an epistemological and ontological discussion. How can we know that our conception of things reflects the way they really are?

Man's inability to properly conceive of God is rooted in his ontological status as a creature separated by an infinite chasm from the Creator. As a corollary to his ontological argument, Anselm reasons that not only is God that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, but he is also greater-than-can-be-thought.<sup>2</sup> Whatever conception of God a creature may have, it is inherently less than what God is in himself. Anselm's conclusion rightly demonstrates that God is quidditatively different from his creatures.

---

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York: Christian Classics, 1981), 61. (Part I, Q. 13, Article 1).

2. Anselm, *The Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 96. (*Proslogion* §15).

God is not at a higher point on the same spectrum of being than the creation; he is on a different “spectrum” altogether. To say that God is incomprehensible does not merely mean that there is too much to him for man to wrap his arms around. It is not as though there is just too much in God to know, but what we do know, we know after a perfect manner; the very mode of knowing is insufficient for the task.<sup>3</sup> Exhausting our knowledge of God is not like trying to empty the ocean with a cup; it is like trying to empty the ocean with a harmony. The tool (a harmony) is in the wrong ontological category to be fit even to begin the task, let alone complete it. Yet even this comparison fails, as the gap between God and the creation is larger than the gap between any two created things.<sup>4</sup>

Given such a vast separation between God and man, God's transcendence raises the question of whether God can be known at all. The discussion here becomes ethical.<sup>5</sup> God has predicated true things concerning himself in the Scriptures. God has revealed that he cannot lie and that his self-depiction in the Scriptures is truthful and reliable. Moreover, the instrumentality of this revelation was through man. Thus, man has and can predicate true things about God. This is not a thesis to be argued but a precept to be believed. It is precisely at this point that the subjectivist approaches to God-talk make their critical error by rooting knowledge of God in something other than his own self-revelation. The conclusion that the God-talk debates are trying to reach (that true things may be predicated of God) should be a premise that is accepted as axiomatic, not a hypothesis that is to be demonstrated. *That* true things are predicated of God by men in the Scriptures must be believed before it can be understood *how* it is that true things can be predicated of God by men.<sup>6</sup>

Two seemingly conflicting truths remain from this analysis. First, the Scriptures make clear that God transcends the creation, which teaching provides the foundation for the orthodox view that it is impossible for the creature to have a univocal knowledge of the Creator.<sup>7</sup> Second, the Scriptures make clear that God's revelation of himself is truthful.<sup>8</sup> Thus it must be resolved that the Scriptures' depiction of God is both non-univocal and true. Aquinas's discussion on linguistic predication of God is of great help in clarifying the apparent tension. Aquinas recognizes that human speech pertaining to God is analogical, which is to say that it bears a resemblance to the way that humans speak about other things, but this resemblance is not perfect. Analogical

3. In *The Last Battle*, Lewis captures the idea of analogical knowledge well. A rather dull character, a Bear, experiences the goodness of Aslan through a means accommodated to his capacities. “The Bear was just going to mutter that he still didn't understand, when he caught sight of the fruit trees behind them. He waddled to those trees as fast as he could and there, no doubt, found something he understood very well.”

4. Aquinas, *Summa*, 63. (Part I, Q. 13.5).

5. The discussion does not become a discussion about ethics; the very having of the discussion becomes an (un)ethical act.

6. As to the *how* of this question, Warfield's essay “Inspiration,” wherein he argues that God superintends and concurrently works through the human instruments of revelation, is most helpful. See particularly his stained-glass analogy and discussion on pp. 103–105 of *Revelation and Inspiration*.

7. John 1:14, 18.

8. Titus 1:2.

speech stands over against univocal and equivocal speech.

Univocal speech refers to speech that is used in the same sense from one situation to another. For example, *The grass is green* and *The car is green*. Both use the word *green* in the same sense and predicate the same thing of two different objects. Both the grass and the car reflect light within a particular band of frequencies on the electromagnetic spectrum and do so with a certain intensity relative to the other colors of the spectrum. Equivocal language, by contrast, uses the same word in two completely different senses. E.g., *The politician is green* does not use *green* in the same way as above. In the latter sentence, *green* does not have anything to do with reflecting light. Indeed, its use is triply equivocal since *green* could refer to the politician's inexperience, to his environmental policy, or even to an appearance of sickness. The word *strong* provides an example of analogical speech. A warrior and a bridge may both be strong. The senses of *strong* are not the exact same in the two instances, nor are they completely unrelated as in the example with *green*. There is a point of continuity and discontinuity. Both a warrior and a bridge resist falling down when met with physical forces, but the nature of and interaction with these physical forces is different in each case; thus, different but related senses of *strong* emerge. A warrior who resists ten men may be considered strong, but a bridge that collapses under the weight of ten men would be considered weak. In both instances, there is opposition from a physical force, but the exact nature of the force is different; in one case, the force comes from swinging weapons, and in the other, from the weight of men marching.

Is Aquinas's solution viable? Are analogical statements capable of veridicality? Here, the more recent concept of "mode of discourse" may be of help. "Mode of discourse" refers to the genre of speech employed in a particular context, along with the rules governing the interpretation of that genre.

Take, for example, the statement *My beloved is a rose*. Under a certain mode of discourse, this statement is false; a biology textbook that equates a human organism with a botanical one is suspect. Yet if Robert Burns does the same in a poem, which is to say, in another mode of discourse, those same words may be true. One can hear the specious objection of the logical positivist saying that the poet has not said something which properly falls under the category of truth and falsity; rather, the argument goes, he has made a non-veridical statement that gives expression to his emotions. Yet this objection begs the question by reducing all veridical speech to the realm of the empirical, which assertion fails to meet its own criterion, itself being empirically unverifiable. Further, the conventional use of language shows that there really is a veridical element to the statement. If the woman truly is a rose, ten men acquainted with her might confirm the statement; or, they might unanimously concur that jimsonweed is a better predicate. They may do so because the statement, while being emotive, nevertheless retains a veridical component. Thus, a statement may be true in one mode of discourse while false in another.

Analogical speech pertaining to God is regarded as truthful because the mode of discourse in which it occurs allows for discontinuities of a certain kind. The points of discontinuity in an analogical statement do not in themselves constitute a falsehood since the mode of discourse requires that its interlocutors interpret statements

according to a specific set of rules; namely, that any creaturely perfection that is attributed to God is attributed to him by way of eminence and that whatever creaturely imperfection is inherent in the analogy is denied. The statement *God is a fortress* is true when stated in a hymnic mode of discourse. The same statement is false in a mode of discourse in which a heretic is trying to argue that God is ontologically equivalent to a castle, i.e., in a mode of discourse whose hermeneutical principles do not permit the use of certain analogical discontinuities permitted in other modes of speech. Thus, a statement does not need to be univocal to be true.

Further, analogical statements are not susceptible to equivocation when the proper mode of discourse is recognized. This is because the mode of discourse governs which parts of an analogy constitute affirmations and which parts do not. The statement *My house is a fortress* is equivocal if it lacks a clear context and mode of discourse. Which parts of the metaphor are to be affirmed, and which are to be denied? Is the house a medieval castle? Is it a modern home with a sound security system? Is it a construction in Minecraft? By contrast, the opening line of Luther's hymn is not equivocal. God is the strong protector of his people against the ancient foe. The mode of discourse has the ability to remove ambiguities, and so analogical language is not necessarily equivocal and hence ultimately meaningless. Instead, analogical speech stands in a category distinct from univocal and equivocal speech and may very well carry a positive veridical valence.

To further refute those who insist on univocality as a criterion for veridicality, we may consider whether or not any statement is truly univocal. Aquinas states that *dog* is equivocal because it may refer to the barking dog or the dogfish.<sup>9</sup> Supposing this equivocal word was reduced to the supposedly univocal statement *There is a (barking) dog in the house*, an ambiguity remains. Is the dog a Boston terrier or a German shepherd? Supposing it is a particular breed, is it this particular instantiation of that breed, *Spot*, or that particular instantiation, *Fido*? Supposing it is Fido, is it Fido as he existed at 3:00 pm on Tuesday the fifth of March, or at another time, or over the course of his whole life? Further detail may be demanded until the very last molecule of Fido is accounted for. What initially appeared as a univocal statement now seems to be equivocal, for *dog* has not denoted the *Ding an sich* but instead left open an infinite number of possibilities.

Similarly, we could return to the example of *green* above. Initially, it was stated that *green* was predicated of grass and of a car univocally. On closer examination, however, it appears that *green* contains within it a range of possibilities on the chromaticity scale. It is rather unlikely that the car's color matches that of the grass identically. Thus, *green* does not express a singular color but a group of shades that fall within the genus *green*. Upon similar evaluation, the literally true statement *The book is on the table* appears to be univocal; by *book* is meant a book, by *table* is meant a table, and by *on* is meant the conventional sense of the preposition. Yet which book is on the table? Aquinas or MacQuarrie? The statement is best regarded as analogous. It affirms certain things, like that the object on the table exhibits the properties of a species belonging to the genus *book*, such as paper, ink, and a binding. It also denies

---

9. Aquinas, *Summa*, 63. (Part I, Q. 13.5).

certain things, like that the object in view does not belong to the genus *dog*. *Book* is a shorthand way of saying, “The object is like these other objects over here, but not like those objects over there.” This is the very essence of analogical speech. The affirmation does not correspond univocally to the reality of the *Ding an sich* and is, therefore, non-univocal. Nevertheless, the original statement should be regarded as literally true. Its truth is owing to the fact that the mode of discourse provides the sufficient hermeneutical principles for evaluating the statement. A statement may be literally true without being syntactically univocal.

The above paragraph demonstrates that a statement’s literal truthfulness does not consist in the words and syntax alone, but that literal meaning is also derived from the context and mode of discourse in their power to limit certain hermeneutic possibilities. Indeed, this is the genius of language. Rather than having a separate name for a limitless number of objects existing at an uncountable number of points in time, speech enables the speaker to lump objects into conceptual categories. Words, by their nature, agglutinate multiple meanings and are therefore inherently equivocal. The equivocality is removed by arranging the words in a certain syntax, context, and mode of discourse so that their varied meanings co-limit and co-restrict one another until ambiguity is removed. In this way, a finite number of words may designate an infinite number of possibilities.

The question remains whether such a thing as univocal speech can even exist. Anselm suggests that God alone knows things perfectly; that rather than deriving mental conceptions from externals, externals are derived from the “mental conceptions” of God (to speak analogously after the manner of a creature).<sup>10</sup> God alone has truly univocal knowledge of his creatures and himself.<sup>11</sup> With respect to himself, Anselm construes the eternal generation of the Son as follows: The Supreme Being eternally contemplates the highest good, namely itself. As it does so, its “image” or mental conception of itself resembles the object it contemplates. Since it is more perfect to accurately image the thing contemplated than not, the Supreme Being’s image of itself is perfect. Indeed, its conception of itself is so perfect that it is identical in every way, being of one substance with the Supreme Being.<sup>12</sup> The Supreme Being which contemplates itself, Anselm calls the Father. The image of the Supreme Being he calls the Son. Whatever the validity of his thought process, it is driven by the biblical conclusion that the Word is the image of God and the exact imprint of his nature.<sup>13</sup> The Father’s own speech, his Word, is the only word that univocally predicates anything of the Father. To speak univocally of God’s essence is to be God, for univocal speech about God is tantamount to eternally begetting the Word.

It appears that *univocal* is itself an equivocal word as it can mean different things in different contexts. In an absolute metaphysical sense, only God is capable of univocal speech. In a creaturely sense, we may be said to speak univocally when the context of a statement removes all but one possible interpretation for the given mode of discourse. Similarly, it appears that *truth* is equivocal as well, since it may denote

10. Anselm, *Major Works*, 24–25. (*Monologion* §§10–11).

11. Anselm, 46–47. (*Monologion* §31).

12. Anselm, 23–25 (*Monologion* §§10–12).

13. Colossians 1:15 with Hebrews 1:3.

that two things correspond to each other in any number of ways. A statement may be propositionally true, a straight hole may be true, a friend may be true, and money that is not counterfeit may be true. To unequivocate these meanings, *veracity* may be defined as the truth of a thing evaluated within its own mode of knowing or discourse according to the rules of that mode. *Veritability* may be defined as the degree to which the mode of knowing is adequate for knowing an object.<sup>14</sup> This distinction clarifies in what sense true things may be predicated of God. Veracious statements may be made within a mode of discourse (rooted in a mode of knowing restricted by one's ontology) that is not perfectly veritable. To integrate Anselm's thought, God alone speaks Veraciously concerning himself with Veritability, these together constituting Univocality. The above discussion has sufficiently demonstrated that analogical speech in no way removes the possibility of truthful speech, so long as *truthful* is properly understood in the creaturely sense as the manner in which man predicates veracious things of God according to a veritable (but not Veritable) mode of knowing.

The last question to address is the degree to which our veritable knowledge (and hence our linguistic predication) will approach Veritable knowledge (and hence Univocal speech). In Christ's incarnation, the transcendent God bridges the quidditative chasm separating God and man ontologically. Our present ability to speak about God is limited because we see him as in a blurry mirror. As much as we can make out from that reflection, that much is true. But it remains a reflection nonetheless. When Christ returns, we will see the Father face to face in the face of his Son. In Christ, we see the Father. In Christ, we will see God as he is. The Father is not different from how he has revealed himself through his Son. In Christ, Christians come as close as possible to a univocal knowledge of God.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, there remains the hope that human speech will one day be less analogous than its present restriction. I now turn to the polemical portion of this essay.

### 3. Subjectivist Approaches to God-talk: a Critique

In contrast to the view presented above, several variations on a single theme have been suggested by philosophers and theologians searching for a way to affirm (or dismiss) the possibility of God-talk. The common strand running through them all is a rejection

---

14. As an example of this distinction, consider John 1:17–18. The knowledge of God which came through Moses and the law was not false, but the mode of knowing was insubstantive compared to the veritable knowledge of God revealed in Christ.

15. Aquinas denies that a created intellect can comprehend the divine essence in Supplement Q. 92. I understand his position to be univocal-but-not-comprehensive knowledge of God's essence. (Man can know God in the same way he knows himself, but not to the degree he knows himself.) Emphasis on *as close as*, contra Aquinas who states that the saints will see God in his essence when they attain the beatific vision. This would imply, it seems, the concomitant ability to have a mental conception of God which is the exact, univocal similitude of his essence. If Anselm is correct in his (analogical) analysis of the Son as "mental image" of the Father, Aquinas's view would lead to an unqualified theosis for the saints. I reject Aquinas on this point in favor of Anselm's view of the beatific vision (*Proslogion* §§25–26), though primarily for Aquinas's lack of Trinitarian Christocentricity.

of God's talk in his Word. While they may seem disparate, all of the approaches below are united in that the subject becomes the epistemic authority.

The early Wittgenstein proposed the picture-theory of language in which he suggests that language can only have meaning if it depicts a physical reality.<sup>16</sup> Bertrand Russell similarly posits a naturalistic view of language. Beginning with a thoroughly materialistic ontology, he suggests that language consists of entirely physical components and, as such, can only designate physical realities. Thus, any language about the supernatural does not really have a referent and cannot be true.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Ayers suggests that for a claim to be true or false, it must be a logical tautology or empirically verifiable. All other speech is emotive, not belonging to the category of truth and falsity. Thus, any meaningful speech about the supernatural is ruled out *a priori*. The problem with all these suggestions, of course, is that the claim that "all linguistic expressions must be empirically verifiable to be true" fails its own test, the statement itself not being empirically verifiable.

Another view of language, suggested by the later Wittgenstein, is the use-theory of language. In this view, the meaning of a word is its use.<sup>18</sup> This is different from saying that the meaning of a word is determined by *how* it is used. In the latter case, the meaning is derived from its relationship to other words, words that may denote metaphysical objects. In the former case, the meaning is derived from the empirically observable behaviors of individuals who use the words. Once again, a metaphysical referent is ruled out *a priori*.

Wittgenstein's use theory has certain commonalities with Bultmann's demythologization hermeneutic. Bultmann demythologized the supernatural parts of Scripture by positing that they were not to be interpreted literally according to their surface meaning. A biblical narrative no longer means what was previously thought when interpreted through its own mode of discourse. Its meaning is now its use in a primitive culture. And what was its use? Primal man expressed his existential insights through myth. Thus, the meaning is ripped from its original mode of discourse which would dictate the rules for interpretation, and the hermeneutical principles of an alien mode of discourse based on a supposed usage are substituted. The great irony is that the principle of observing the use of a word or narrative is directly violated, as the use (technically empirically unobservable for an ancient text) was quite clearly that the texts were authoritative religious documents whose claims were literally true. MacQuarrie rightly notes that Bultmann is unable to escape reducing Scripture to a document that only speaks about man and never the transcendent God.<sup>19</sup> If all narratives are to be demythologized, what is to stop Bultmann from demythologizing the concept of God himself as a myth describing some merely human relationship? The line is arbitrarily drawn.

Sadly, MacQuarrie does not cast off Bultmann's demythologization practice

16. Gordon Clark, *Language and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 29.

17. John MacQuarrie, *God-Talk: An Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology*. The Seabury Library of Contemporary Theology (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 59.

18. Clark, *Language and Theology*, 67.

19. MacQuarrie, *God-Talk*, 40.



altogether. Recognizing that Bultmann's method will never reach the transcendent, he decides to artificially make the transcendent immanent by making it part of a panentheistic cosmos. For MacQuarrie, "God" is most immanent not when he is encountered in his Word but rather when man has a subjective sense of angst, self-conscious of the fact that his continued existence is precarious. Being is not wholly other than the subject, nor is it identical to the subject. This ambiguous relationship between the self and not-self leads MacQuarrie to propose a dialectic approach to God-talk in which man's objective being in the world and subjective awareness of the same participate in an interplay that leads to the knowledge of God. Although he distinguishes his method from both the purely objectivist and subjectivist views, he ultimately falls into the latter category.

For MacQuarrie, the Scriptures are merely primitive man's attempt to mythologically express that angst through story. Any truth that the Scriptures might communicate concerning "God" must be demythologized and translated into modern modes of discourse. When this has been done, modern man might gain insights into his own existential precariousness from previous generations. Thus, MacQuarrie's method does not stray very far from Bultmann's; he merely recognizes the weakness of Bultmann's method and weakens it further by offering a deficient cosmology.

In seeking to preserve the immanence of God, MacQuarrie destroys any possibility of his transcendence. The root of MacQuarrie's error is that he does not seek God's immanence in the one place where God is most immanent—in the incarnation of the Son—but instead seeks to make immanence an essential attribute of God's nature. He constructs a pantheism in which Being is not the Supreme Being of the medieval scholastics, ontologically distinct and transcending the creation, but in which Being comes to expression in and through the beings of creation, albeit without being merely identifiable with those beings.

To understand MacQuarrie's view, it is necessary to appreciate his symbolic view of language.<sup>20</sup> MacQuarrie distinguishes his own view from a signification theory of language, such as that proposed by the early Wittgenstein above, by saying that language is a symbol that participates in the reality it depicts; language is not an arbitrary picture divorced from the thing it signifies. The following serves as an example: a young man in love with a young woman might tell her, "I love you." According to a logical positivistic picture view of language, the speaker has, at best, made a true statement about how he feels and nothing more. MacQuarrie understands, though, that the statement has more than a veridical function. The very act of making the statement is an actualization of the reality it depicts. The statement is itself an act of love and, as such, functions as a participatory symbol rather than a mere signifier of the young man's love. The thing symbolized elicits the symbol, and the symbol brings a knowledge of the thing symbolized. The two mutually illuminate each other in a reciprocal relationship. There is an analogy here between MacQuarrie's symbolic view of language and his panentheistic ontology. Just as Being ("God") gives expression to individual beings, individual beings come to know Being by realizing that they are, in fact, beings and not non-beings.

---

20. MacQuarrie, *God-Talk*, 192–211.

In a similar manner to *I love you*, MacQuarrie interprets the Scriptures as symbolic myths, the participation in which is to participate in Being. The myths are not artificial constructs but arise naturally out of primitive man's experience of Being in the world. Modern man is so hopelessly non-mythic that he cannot recover the truth by believing the myths in the same manner as his ancient counterpart. By decoding and recasting these myths in language palatable for modern man, the usefulness of God-talk may be recovered.

Ultimately, MacQuarrie's method fails to lead him to greater certainty about God. He confesses in the conclusion of his book:

Belief that there is a real river flowing outside of my window is confirmed by everyone who looks out and sees it; but there is no such universal agreement about the reality of God, and no simple way of testing the belief, like looking out of the window.... It is part of the meaning of the word 'faith' that there cannot be certitude in these matters. Faith is not sight, and so to live in faith is to live with the possibility that the faith may be an illusion, in the sense that it refers to nothing beyond one's own states of mind.<sup>21</sup>

In the end, MacQuarrie's approach to God-talk succumbs to the same deficiency as the other subjectivist approaches. It fails to meet its own criteria. If God-talk derives meaning from the interplay between Being and beings, then God (Being) is hopelessly mutable, manifesting himself (itself?) differently from being to being in their individual experiences. Since being differs from being, no consistent objective, ultimate truth can ever be reached; God-talk is merely a comparison of subjective experiences about encounters with Being. MacQuarrie succumbs to his own criticism of Bultmann: "[God-talk] collapse[s] completely into talk about ourselves."<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

All God-talk is rooted in God's talk about himself through his Word in his Word. The Thomist approach to God-talk (analogical language) provides man with an intelligible way of reconciling the apparent conflict between the transcendence and immanence of God. The analogy of this method does not detract from the veracity of the statements made. The alternative approaches to God-talk inevitably end in subjectivism, failing to bring the knowledge of God due to their rejection of the Word of God, who alone has made the Father known.

---

21. MacQuarrie, *God-Talk*, 246.

22. MacQuarrie, *God-Talk*, 54.