UNIVERSIDAD DE NAVARRA

FACULTAD ECLESIÁSTICA DE FILOSOFÍA

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THE COGNITIVE CHARACTER OF FAITH

Extracto de la Tesis Doctoral presentada en la
Facultad Eclesiástica de Filosofía de la Universidad de Navarra

PAMPLONA

2006

Ad norman Statutorum Facultatis Philosophiae Universitatis Navarrensis perlegimus et adprobavimus

Pampilonae, die 25 mensis octobris anni 2005

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Coram tribunali, die 27 mensis iunii anni 2005, hanc dissertationem ad Lauream Candidatus palam defendit

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PRESENTATION

Man is by nature religious. Being religious, man has always been interested in questions about the existence of God, the phenomenon of faith, the fact of religious beliefs and all those matters connected with human religiosity in general.

Faith is one topic that has always been, and continues to be, an integral part of the subject matters discussed and studied by both theologians and philosophers. This is especially true in the philosophical traditions of the East and the West[1]. Having been influenced by Christianity, which played a very powerful role in its development, philosophy in the Western tradition has given an ample treatment to the question of faith is an issue which is undeniably present and prominent in the Old Testament, and the New Testament wich, of course, form the Sacred Scriptures of Christianity[2]. It is no wonder then that philosophical reflections on faith, of the Christian faith in particular, has since ancient times captured the interest of many a philosopher. That interest continues until the present day.

The Vienna Circle was a group of scientists, philosophers and mathematicians which launched one of the biggest challenges Christianity had to hurdle in the middle of the last century. Operating from an empiricist perspective where all knowledge is grounded in experience, this group claimed that all meaningful propositions must be either analytic/tautological or verifiable empirically. They launched the so-called verifiability principle, according to which the meaning of a proposition lies in the mode of its empirical verification. Since the theological and religious assertions of believers are not empirically verifiable according to their standards, they claimed that religious discourse is nonsensical and empty of cognitive

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1. Cfr. SESSIONS, W.L., *The Concept of Faith,* Cornell University Press, New York 1994, p. vii.
2. Cfr. WOLTERSTORFF, N.P., «Faith», in CRAIG, E., (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Vol. III, Routledge, London 1998, p. 539.

meaning. Closely allied to this principle is the falsifiability principle of Anthony Flew, who contended that since believers allow nothing to count against their assertions, then these assertions do not say anything at all, they neither affirm nor deny anything.

One of those who responded to the challenges by the logical positivists was an American philosopher by the name of James F. Ross, a Catholic philosopher and a member of the philosophy and law departments of the University of Pennsylvania. Ross summarizes the anti-cognitive attacks against the faith into, among other terms, the inaccessibility challenge and the skeptical challenge. He responds to these challenges by showing that upon closer examination, these challenges do not hold water. He answers the inaccessibility challenge by claiming that religious discourse is a craft-bound discourse and that one must participate in the craft where the discourse is utilized in order to fully grasp it. He responds to the skeptical challenge by asserting that testimony is a source of knowledge and that nothing epistemically deficient or weird happened in the originating experiences of the Apostles and prophets in their encounter with God in revelatory events.

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THE COGNITIVE CHARACTER OF FAITH

This article discusses the *cognitive character of faith*. James F. Ross supports the thesis that there is nothing that can prevent faith from being knowledge. The question of the cognitivity of faith arose in the middle of the last century, which saw various challenges, if not outright denial, to the cognitive character of faith. These challenges has as their immediate origin the logical positivism or neo-positivism of the Vienna Circle.

This shall be divided into five main parts. The first part will discuss the question of the relation between faith and cognitivity (I.); the second part will present some non-cognitive analysis of faith (II.); the third part will discuss some cognitive analysis of faith (III); the fourth section will deal with religious discourse as a craft-bound discourse, in answer to the anti-cognitive challenge called the *inaccessibility challenge* (IV); and the last section will present the claim that testimony is a source of knowledge, in answer to another anti-cognitive challenge called the *skeptical challenge* (V).

I. FAITH AND THE COGNITIVITY QUESTION

1. The Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle

Although aware of its difficulties, traditional philosophy of religion never seriously doubted the possibility of speaking meaningfully of God[1]. According to Ross, the first modern version of non-cognitivism was launched by David Hume when, at the end of his inquiry, he claimed that

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1. Cfr. Conesa, F. and Nubiola, J., *Filosofia del lenguaje,* Herder, Barcelona 1999, p. 267. Cfr. also Peterson, et. al., *Reason and Religious Belief,* Oxford University Press, New York 1991, p. 141.

any book that contains metaphysics should be consigned to the flames[2]. It was however the development of logical positivism or neo-positivism of the Vienna Circle in the middle of the last century, which seriously questioned the meaning and significance of religious propositions, «putting a new curve into an otherwise old pitch»[3].

The Vienna Circle was a group composed of scientists, philosophers and mathematicians which met weekly to develop a highly scientific and empiricist approach to philosophy. The spirit of this group can be summarized in the phrase *The Scientific Vision of the World*. With this expression, they wanted to show that philosophy must be scientific and must imitate science in its clarity and logical rigor[4]. Prominent members of the group included Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, Kurt Godel and Friedrich Waismann, among others[5]. Taking scientific language to be the model of meaningful discourse, this group was convinced that all meaningful propositions (aside from analytic or tautological statements) must refer to situations which are empirically verifiable; otherwise, outside the possibility of empirical verification, propositions are meaningless or nonsensical. They constructed what came to be known as the *verifiability principle*. This principle claims that «the meaning of a proposition lies in the mode of its empirical verification». The statement for example that «the rice pudding is tasteless» would be verified empirically if one actually tastes the rice pudding. Corollary to this principle is the claim that cognitive language must express an empirical state of affairs[6]. Restating the principle in a slightly different way, one can say that «a statement is a genuine factual assertion if, and only if, there could be empirically observable states of affairs that would show it to be either true or false»[7].

One of the intended objectives of the Vienna Circle was the elimination of metaphysics. Rudolf Carnap, a member of the circle, affirmed: «our thesis is that logical analysis has revealed that the pretended propositions of metaphysics are in reality pseudo-propositions»[8]. Applying this

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2. Ross, J.F., «Religious Language» in Davies, B. (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion, A Guide to the Subject,* Cassell, London 1998, p. 117.

3. *Ibid*.

4. Cfr. Artigas, M., *El Desafío de la racionalidad,* Eunsa, Pamplona 1994, p. 25.

5. Cfr. Stiver, D.R., *The Philosophy of Religious Language, Sign, Symbol and Story,* Blackwell, Massachusetts 1997, p. 42.

6. Cfr. *Ibid.,* p. 43.

7. Peterson, et. al., *Reason and Religious Belief,* p. 141. The Vienna Circle actually limited meaningful discourse to logical formulas or tautological statements and to those reducible in a logical way to empirically verifiable propositions. Cfr. Nubiola, J., «Neopositivismo y filosofia analítica: balance de un siglo» *Acta Philosophica,* 8 (1999), p. 200.

8. Carnap, R., *La Superación de la metafísica mediante el análisis lógico del lenguaje,* p. 67 quoted in Artigas, M., *El Desafío de la racionalidad,* p. 34.

idea to different concrete cases, such as to concepts like «principle», «God», «the Absolute», «the Infinite», he concluded that «the pretended propositions of metaphysics which contain these words do not have meaning, they do not declare anything, they are mere pseudo-propositions»[9]. Carnap therefore proposed the expulsion of metaphysical and religious propositions from the realm of cognitive and meaningful discourse for being empirically non-verifiable[10]. For Carnap, the term «God» lacks semantic meaning and all religious language are but expressions of vital emotions.

A. J. Ayer who developed and extended the spirit of the Vienna Circle to the English-speaking world, expressed the verifiability principle in this way:

> «the criterion which we use to test the genuineness of apparent statements of fact is the criterion of verifiability. We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express – that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false»[11].

Ayer likewise dismissed metaphysical and religious language as cognitive non-sense. Since metaphysical and religious propositions are not tautological statements, they have to be empirically verifiable ; since they are not (Who could for instance empirically verify the religious statement that «God is eternal?»), they lack cognitive meaning. He emphasized an emotive approach to ethics and the use of ethical language which for him is non-cognitive.

With their verifiability principle, logical positivism tied the cognitive meaningfulness of language to empirical verification. Since metaphysical, ethical and religious statements are clearly not empirically verifiable, the logical positivists dismissed them as cognitively meaningless, lacking in cognitive value. These propositions lack even the minimal merit of being meaningful. They are complete cognitive non-sense. As can be noticed, the danger the logical positivists posed to religion is worse compared to the atheistic position. The atheist might say that for lack of evidence, religious and theological claims are false. But for the logical positivists, these claims have not even reached the realm of the meaningful. They are plainly nonsensical. A. N. Prior once remarked: «the real intellectual diffi-

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9. *Ibid*.
10. Cfr. Conesa, F. and Nubiola, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 268.
11. Ayer, A.J., *Language, Truth and Logic,* Victor Gollancz, London 1962, p. 35.

culty of the believer or would be believer is not the problem of proof but the problem of meaning»[12].

It was not long before it was discovered that the fundamental ideas of logical positivism were themselves problematic. «Like a meteor that shines brightly for a while, then quickly fades, the Vienna Circle *per se* faded quickly for a variety of reasons»[13]. The verifiability principle claims that a statement is a genuine factual assertion if, and only if, there could be empirically observable states of affairs that would show it to be either true or false. However, no empirically observable states of affairs could possibly verify the truth or falsity of this proposition. This principle then encounters the problem of self-referential incoherence[14]. As Stiver observes «how can one use empirical proof to prove that every cognitively meaningful proposition can only be empirically proven?»[15]. In fact, this principle itself appears to be metaphysical and capable of being accepted only on faith.

Furthermore, the verifiability principle could not make completely good sense of science. Logical positivists considered scientific language to be a model of cognitive meaningfulness. However, the history and practice of science is replete with cases where scientific claims are thought to be clearly meaningful even if at the time scientists could not specify the exact verification of these claims. The debate between the wave and corpuscular theory of light is a case in point[16]. Scientists are perfectly convinced of the cognitive meaningfulness of their claims even in the absence of conclusive verification.

Due to the above problems, logical positivism became less convincing, and was consequently abandoned as a theory. It is often said that no one would be proud to call himself a logical positivist today, even if the spirit of logical positivism continues to influence, wittingly or unwittingly, many scientific theories. Ross says that the verifiability principle of meaning is a woefully inadequate perspective from which to attack religious belief[17]. Consequently, it became an abandoned carcass in the morgue of metaphysics[18].

12. PRIOR, A.N. , «Can Religion Be Discussed?» in FLEW, A. and MAC INTYRE, A. (eds.) *New Essays in Philosophical Theology,* SCM Press, London 1955, p. 3.
13. STIVER, D.R., *The Philosophy of Religious Language,* p. 45.
14. Cfr. PETERSON, et. al., *Reason and Religious Belief,* p. 144.
15. STIVER, D.R., *The Philosophy of Religious Language,* p. 45.
16. Cfr. PETERSON, et. al., *Reason and Religious Belief,* p. 144.
17. Cfr. ROSS, J.F., *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion,* Macmillan, Toronto 1969, p. 76, (hereafter cited as *IPR*).
18. Cfr. *Ibid.,* p. 97.

2. THE FALSIFIABILITY PRINCIPLE

As a result of the continued efforts by philosophers to refine and articulate the basic point of the logical positivists' view of logical meaning, Anthony Flew presented his challenge to religious assertions in the form of the *falsifiability principle*[19], originally proposed by Popper as a «criterion of demarcation among the propositions of empirical science, metaphysics and mathematics»[20]. Popper distinguished science from metaphysics. He considered that «metaphysics consists in statements which can be meaningful (against the positivists), but cannot be submitted to experimental proofs; metaphysics would be the field of the non-scientific, which can be meaningful, but which cannot be an object of objective criticism in the same way that science is»[21]. Operating from an empiricist perspective like the logical positivists, where all knowledge is grounded in experience, Flew applied Popper's falsifiability principle to religious and theological statements.

Flew presented his challenge based on a story entitled «Gods» by John Wisdom[22]. He asserted that religious and theological assertions are deprived of factual meaning for being non-falsifiable statements. The believer for instance asserts that God is a Father who loves his children. In times of difficulties, one would naturally expect help from God. But God is silent. So the believer makes some qualifications saying that God's love is unlike human love or is inscrutable, making misfortune and suffering compatible with the original claim. Flew contended that religious believers allow nothing to count against their claims, continually modifying and qualifying them so as to prevent them from getting falsified. He asks: «What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or the existence of God?»[23]. If there is no state of affairs that would count against or is incompatible with the original theolog-

19. FLEW, A., «Theology and Falsification» in FLEW, A. and MAC INTYRE, A. (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology,* SCM Press, London 1955, pp. 96-99.
20. CONESA, F. and NUBIOLA, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 269.
21. ARTIGAS, M., *El Desafío de la racionalidad,* pp. 50-51.
22. Two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle, where flowers and weeds were growing. One says that a gardener is tending the plot, the other disagrees. They pitched tent to watch but no gardener appears. «But perhaps he is an invisible gardener». They then set up electrified barbed-wire fence. They patrolled with bloodhounds. But no shrieks, no movement of the wire, the bloodhounds never gave a cry. Yet the believer is not convinced. «But there is a gardener who is invisible, intangible, who has no scent and makes no sound. At last the Skeptic despairs. «But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from no gardener at all?» (Cfr. FLEW, A., «Theology and Falsification», p. 96).
23. *Ibid.,* p. 99.

ical assertion, then it is not a genuine assertion at all. It doesn't say any-
thing, neither affirming nor denying that something is actually the case.
Religious believers end up killing their own claims, subjecting them to the
death by «a thousand qualifications».

Religious propositions like «God has a plan», «God created the
world», «God loves us like a father loves his sons», are not falsifiable and,
therefore, do not have empirical content[24]. No truth-value can be assigned
to them. He thus says,

> «People sometimes claim to know the propositions of their faith.
> This is, in the present context, a most unfortunate usage. For to "know", in
> the ordinary and more exacting sense, it is not enough merely to feel ab-
> solutely certain and to act accordingly. It is necessary also for your belief to
> be in fact right, and for you to have sufficient reason to warrant your confi-
> dence. […] The man who "knows", but who "knows" wrong, or the woman
> who "knows" but is unable to produce any grounds for her conviction, does
> not in this ordinarily exacting sense, know at all. That is why the word
> "know" when applied in such cases has to be wrapped in emasculating in-
> verted commas»[25].

Flew underscores an important point regarding the question of cog-
nitive meaningfulness namely, if an assertion is compatible with any state
of affairs whatsoever, it is empty since it literally makes no difference
whether one believes it or not[26]. However, if we grant Flew that the only
allowable proof is empirical, then it is surely hard to defend traditional us-
age of religious language. But this is totally to miss the point of traditional
Christian discourse. Stiver is therefore right in claiming that «Flew's ap-
proach restricts this whole issue in a novel way by counting only empirical
evidence for the designer (God) as valid, suggesting something that can
hardly be found anywhere in the history of Christian thought, that God is
empirically discernible»[27]. Flew applies a criterion of meaning which is
foreign to the way cognitive meaning operates in religious assertions, in
total disregard to the original idea of Popper that the falsifiability criterion
applies to science and not to metaphysics and therefore cannot be applied
to religious and theological claims.

Assessing the verifiability and falsifiability criteria of cognitive
meaning, Ross says that they «died of overweight in the 1950's when it
was established that both the criteria were not themselves verifiable or fal-
sifiable and that any version of the criteria strong enough to cast doubt

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24. Cfr. *Ibid.,* p. 97.
25. FLEW, A., *God and Philosophy,* Hutchison & Co., London 1974, p. 14.
26. Cfr. STIVER, D.R., *The Philosophy of Religious Language,* p. 48.
27. *Ibid.,* p. 49.

upon religious discourse would also cast doubt upon the heartland of science; and that any version weak enough to leave science unchallenged would permit religion, metaphysics, aesthetics and all other forms of "effete" thought back into the theater of the meaningful»[28].

While the verifiability principle of the logical positivists claimed that religious propositions do not even have the minimal merit of being meaningful, Flew's falsifiability principle denied truth value to religious assertions. Due to the far-reaching consequences of Flew's claims, philosophers were not slow in reacting to his position. From Blackstone's work on this topic, it became habitual to classify the reactions of philosophers into two classes: the right-wing response which defends the cognitive character of faith and the left-wing response for which faith is not in any way knowledge[29]. It is from this essay of Flew that the beginning of the discussion of the cognitive value of faith in analytic philosophy can be properly dated[30]. For reasons which will be made clear later, Ross belongs to the right-wing response, since he defends the cognitive character of faith.

II. NON-COGNITIVE ANALYSIS OF FAITH

1. EMOTIVE OR EXPRESSIVE THEORY

Capitulating to Flew's thesis that religious and theological propositions cannot be considered cognitive or are deprived of cognitive value, some philosophers proposed to explain and attribute to religious assertions a merely *expressive* or *emotive* value. This analysis is known as the noncognitivist emotive or expressive theory of religious assertions, based on the empiricist epistemology according to which only facts and the data of the senses can proportion knowledge. Now since religious or theological propositions do not pertain to facts nor are about the data of the senses, this theory then relegates religious and theological propositions to the sphere of emotions and feelings[31]. They therefore cannot be true or false since truth corresponds only to propositions relative to an empirical object.

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28. ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing» in FERRE, F., KOCKELMANS, J.J. and SMITH, J.E. (eds.), *The Challenge of Religion,* Seabury Press, New York 1982, pp. 84-85.

29. Cfr. BLACKSTONE, W.T., *The Problem of Religious Knowledge,* Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs 1963, pp. 75-76.

30. Cfr. CONESA, F., *Creer y Conocer, El valor cognoscitivo de la fe en la filosofía analítica,* Eunsa, Pamplona 1994, p. 25.

31. Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 34. Cfr. also CONESA, F. and NUBIOLA, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 270.

This position can be found in John Hermann Randall who claimed that religion cannot proportion any kind of knowledge – it is a way of acting and feeling and not a way of knowing[32]. Religious symbols which are neither descriptive nor explicative, function solely as motives which bring one to act in a determined way. They help man and recapitulate his experience of the universe and what it offers to life. The function of religious symbols is not knowledge in the strict sense but a kind of «knowing how to act». Thus he claims: «the distinctive character of religious knowledge which distances it from any form of knowing is that it is not a unique experience, nor a mystical intuition, or a knowledge of a more elevated level, but more of an art, a technique, a kind of knowing how to open one's heart to see the Divine, to know God in the midst of the conditions of human life in the natural world»[33]. For allegedly being only motives for acting, religious propositions are therefore classified by Randall as lacking in cognitive meaning.

The philosopher who developed more clearly the emotive/ expressive response to the falsifiability challenge of Flew is R. M. Hare, who likened religious propositions to ethical sentences[34]. According to Hare, in both cases one finds expressions of attitudes and intentions of the speaker but not assertions which can be true or false. Agreeing with the idea of Flew that religious assertions are deprived of cognitive value[35], Hare shifts ground and claims that religious propositions are expressions of a person's attitude with respect to the world; he calls this a *blik*[36]. Without defining what he exactly means by a blik, he points out that it is an attitude or a fundamental decision, or a presupposition which a person takes with respect to facts and/ or with respect to the world. This attitude is fundamental in every person and unlike other attitudes it is permanent[37]. Such an attitude cannot be overturned even by empirical observation. All persons according to Hare have *bliks* which can be sensible or insensible, but never true or false. Applying his theory to the area of religion, Hare claims that religious

32. Cfr. CONESA, F., *Creer y Conocer,* p. 34.

33. RANDALL, J.H., *The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion,* Boston 1958, p. 133.

34. For Hare's theory on moral language see SANTOS CAMACHO, M., *Ética y filosofía analítica. Estudio histórico-critico,* Eunsa, Pamplona 1975, pp. 514-542.

35. «I must begin by confessing that on the ground marked out by Flew, he seems to me to be completely victorious». HARE, R.M., «Theology and Falsification», in FLEW, A. and MAC INTYRE, A. (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology,* SCM Press, London 1955, p. 99.

36. Hare explains what he means by a blik through a story of a lunatic who believed that all professors at Oxford were intent on killing him and would not be dissuaded from such a blik even in the face of numerous inoffensive and friendly encounters with the mildest, most respectable and kind dons. Cfr., *Ibid.,* pp. 99-100.

37. Cfr. CONESA, F., *Creer y Conocer,* p. 35.

believers have *bliks* that God exists and that a certain religious way of life is correct. Nothing can change this attitude, not even facts which point out the contrary of what the person believes. Since *bliks* are nothing but expressions of a person's attitude with respect to the world, *bliks* cannot claim to be factually significant assertions and consequently, they lack cognitive content. They are therefore non-cognitive.

This type of analysis is not without serious difficulties, one of which has been pointed out by Clarke: «undoubtedly, a great part of religious language, perhaps the greatest part, is used to express attitudes, but although it may be true, it is presumed that God is the object of faith and not the attitude itself, and therefore it could be that the assertion "God exists" may be false or may be deprived of meaning, but as it is used ordinarily, it does not express a blik or an attitude of a person with respect to the world»[38]. Furthermore, while Hare claims that one can distinguish a sane blik from an insane one, he does not offer evidence about how this can be done. How can one tell which blik is sane or insane, short of evidence? «If bliks are truly non-cognitive, they seem vulnerable to charges of irrationality, even insanity. If one blik is better than another, but is not amenable to empirical verification and falsification, then the bliks are liable to endless qualifications with no convincing proof»[39].

Another analysis of religious belief which can be classified as an emotive or expressive theory is the one proposed by Steward R. Sutherland[40]. This author proposes a revision of Christian religious beliefs claiming that the language Christians use in talking about God is untenable. He finds the assertion «God is good» incompatible with evil and suffering, and the belief that «God is eternal» as likewise incompatible with the claim that God acts in the world. He therefore proposes an agnostic position and the restriction of the theistic way of thinking. For being part of the European culture, he does not suggest an abandonment of Christianity, but only its revision. Sutherland reduces the Christian religion to some of its expressive aspects.

Sutherland claims that what is essential in Christianity is not the idea of a personal God but the possibility of contemplating human realities *sub specie aeternitatis*. This expression according to Sutherland contains two elements: the first is hope –and also the belief– that it is possible to understand human realities not in a way relative to an individual, community or epoch; and second is the implication that such a vision is not relative to

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38. CLARKE, B.L., *Language and Natural Theology,* The Hague-Paris 1966, p. 22 quoted by CONESA, F., *Creer y Conocer,* p. 36.

39. STIVER, D.R., *The Philosophy of Religious Language,* p. 52.

40. Cfr. SUTHERLAND, S. R., *God, Jesus and Belief: The Legacy of Theism,* Blackwell, Oxford 1984.

humanity's way of looking at things. This presupposes the acknowledgement of the possibility of some transcendent and eternal values which he does not claim exist but are only possible. The idea of looking at things *sub specie aeternitatis* is not descriptive but only regulative.

2. CONATIVE THEORY

Along the lines of the emotive/expressive theory of religious belief is the position of those authors who emphasize the *conative* aspect of faith to the detriment of its cognitive value. According to the authors who support this theory, the propositions of the faith do not have any cognitive value; their importance lies in the fact that they commit the believer to live a certain and concrete way of life[41]. R. B. Braithwaite and R. W. Hepburn, maintain this line of thinking.

Assuming the positivist vision, braithwrite explains that religious propositions, like moral propositions, even if not totally deprived of meaning, are nothing but expressions of believers attitudes. Religious affirmations are moral affirmations[42]. Faith gives to the believer a group of propositions (Christian stories) in order to familiarize him with some moral principles through his fantasy, imagination and hope. To believe in a proposition is to be disposed to «act as if» the proposition were true[43]. Religious beliefs are «an intention to behave in a correct way (a moral belief) together with the consideration of certain associated stories with the intention in the mind of the believer»[44]. In the case of Christianity, Braithewaite explains that these stories are meant to invite the believer to live an agapeistic life, a life characterized by love. Thus he says: «Unless a Christian's assertion that God is love (agape) –which I take to epitomize the assertions of the Christian religion– be taken to declare his intention to follow an agapeistic way of life, he could be asked what is the connection between the assertion and the intention, between Christian belief and Christian practice»[45].

Christianity is distinguished from other moral systems basically by the stories associated with its moral principles. These stories are «proposi-

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41. Cfr. FERRE, F., *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion,* Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1967, pp. 353-361.

42. CONESA, F., *Creer y Conocer,* p. 38.

43. BRAITHWAITE, R.B., «The Nature of Believing» *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* (1932-1933), pp. 129-146 quoted in CONESA, F., *Creer y Conocer,* p. 39.

44. BRAITHWAITE, R.B., «An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief» in MITCHELL, B. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Religion,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 1971, p. 89.

45. *Ibid.,* p. 81.

tions which are straightforwardly empirical propositions capable of empirical test and which are thought of by the religious man in connection with his resolution to follow the way of life advocated by his religion»[46]. It is not necessary for the believer to believe in the truth of the stories but only that they have meaning for him. Their function is merely psychological. In the case of Christianity, one cannot be «a professing Christian unless he both proposes to live according to Christian moral principles and associates his intention with thinking of Christian stories; but he need not believe that the empirical propositions presented by the stories correspond to empirical fact»[47].

Conesa says that Braithwaite reduces the Christian faith to «acting-as-if» its stories were true[48]. Macquarrie comments that «by assimilating religious assertions with moral assertions, he (Braithwaite) has undoubtedly exaggerated his thesis beyond the plausible. The religious man certainly is committed to a certain style of life but believes at the same time that his religion helps him understand what is the type of world he has to follow this style of life»[49]. Furthermore, by functionally analyzing the language of religion, Braithwaite transforms religious statements into the language of morality embellished by stories which Peterson et. al. compare to the positivistic mistake of trying to reduce religious statements to empirical facts[50]. Donald Hudson calls this kind of mistake a violation of the «depth grammar» of religion, claiming that religious discourse has its own unique character and function[51].

Similar to the conative theory of Braithwaite is the one maintained by Ronald W. Hepburn, who accepts the empirical and naturalistic ideas of Braithwaite[52]. Hepburn claims that one can maintain a religious orientation in life even in the absence of reference to a belief in God or a metaphysical system. This author claims that attitudes and beliefs can be considered religious so long as they comply with three conditions. In the first place, the believer must adjust to a certain ethical behavior. This kind of life is accepted simply as a fundamental moral option. While empirical facts are relevant to one's options, the believer may not derive his option from any

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46. *Ibid.,* p. 84.
47. *Ibid.,* p. 86.
48. Cfr. Conesa, F., *Creer y Conocer,* p. 38.
49. Macquarrie, J., *El Pensamiento religioso en el siglo XX. Las fronteras de la filosofia y la teologia 1900-1970,* Herder, Barcelona 1975, p. 426 quoted by Conesa, F. and Nubiola, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 271.
50. Cfr. Peterson, et. al., *Reason and Religious Belief,* p. 146.
51. Cfr. Hudson, D., *Ludwig Wittgenstein,* John Knox Press, Virginia 1968, p. 62.
52. Cfr. Hepburn, R.W., *Christianity and Paradox: Critical Studies in 20th Century Theology,* Pegasus, New York 1968.

fact. Secondly, what distinguishes religious discourse from moral language is the fact that religious discourse provides a strictly coherent parable or myth capable of expressing correctly the chosen kind of life and which invites the believer to practice it. And thirdly, the parable and the model of life associated with it constitute the rule for all the different aspects of the life of the believer. They demand his supreme fidelity and determine the total imaginative vision of life and of man[53].

There is hardly any difference between the coherent and total histories of Hepburn and the stories of Braithwaite. Their differences however rests on the fact that while Braithwaite thinks that his thesis is compatible with historical Christianity, Hepburn acknowledges that his explanation is incompatible with it. Commenting on the thesis of Braithwaite and Hepburn, Blackstone says that «the point is that the Braithwaite-Hepburn thesis is not to be taken as a descriptively accurate account of what believers think is going on in religious discourse, but rather a prescriptive thesis, a thesis that theirs is the most intelligible account of theological language compatible with empiricism. In effect they are saying: If you want to be a consistent empiricist, then you should adopt a conative theory of theological language»[54].

The logical positivism or neo-positivism of the Vienna Circle denied cognitive meaningfulness to religious and theological assertions. For being non-verifiable, they claimed that these assertions are nothing but cognitive nonsense. The falsifiability principle of Flew claimed that the concepts of truth and falsity could not be accorded to the religious and theological assertions of believers since no state of affairs could count against these assertions. If a statement is therefore compatible with any state of affairs, then the statement says nothing and is not a factually significant assertion. The emotive/ expressive and conative theories likewise denied any cognitive value to religious and theological assertions; the former relegated them to the sphere of the emotions and feelings, while the latter claimed that these propositions only make the believer commit himself to live a concrete way of life. All of these theories can be classified into the non-cognitive analysis of faith.

In spite of the reductionistic character of the theories which came about as a response to the falsifiability challenge of Flew, these non-cognitive assessments highlight important, though partial aspects of faith. The emotive theory for which faith is a vital attitude from which man contemplates the world is partially true and cannot be undervalued. The conative analysis which claims that faith is the believer's commitment to a way of life is likewise to a certain extent true and is undeniable. However, even if

53. Cfr. *Ibid*.
54. BLACKSTONE, W.T., *The Problem of Religious Knowledge,* p. 100.

partially true, these analyses are insufficient as an explanation of the phenomenon of faith. One cannot understand how faith can have these dimensions if not because the believer makes some affirmations rooted in reality (therefore cognitive) and is not simply expressing feelings and vital attitudes[55].

Assessing the debates regarding the cognitivity of faith, Ross says that

> «theologians were in large number frightened by the apparent danger to religion from the positivist's conclusion that metaphysical and religious statements are empirically meaningless because they cannot be empirically verified, and began a large scale retreat into other accounts of religious meaning (emotive and other non-cognitive accounts) before it was widely recognized by philosophers that there is no generally acceptable criterion of empirical meaning, much less of cognitive meaning in its widest sense. […] in the light of what we know now, the debate was archaic as a fencing duel during an atomic war. […] Non-cognitivist accounts of religious meaning are like a coroner's report upon a man who hasn't had an accident yet»[56].

III. COGNITIVE ANALYSIS OF FAITH

Those theories which claim that faith is in a certain way knowledge fall under the category of the cognitive analysis of faith. These theories maintain that the concepts of truth and falsity can be applied to the religious and theological claims of believers. To be discussed hereunder are the theories of Basil Mitchell and John Hick.

1. MITCHELL'S RESPONSE TO THE FALSIFIABILITY CHALLENGE

Basil Mitchell responded to the falsifiability challenge by claiming that religious assertions are meaningful and cognitive, according to Flew's requirements. He presents his response in a form of a parable where a Stranger assures a partisan that he is on their side of the resistance movement[57]. The Stranger asks the partisan to just have faith in him. He indeed helps their movement but at other times he is seen in the uniform of the police taking patriots into the custody of the occupying power. The friends of

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55. Cfr. CONESA, F., *Creer y Conocer,* pp. 158 - 159.
56. ROSS, J.F., *IPR,* pp. 151-152.
57. MITCHELL, B., «Theology and Falsification», in FLEW, A. and MAC INTYRE, A. (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology,* SCM Press, London 1955, pp. 103-105.

the patriots would complain on these occasions, but the partisan is still strongly convinced that the Stranger is on their side. In spite of evidence to the contrary, the partisan retains his faith in the Stranger that «he is on their side».

> «The partisan of the parable does not allow anything to count deci-
> sively against the proposition "The Stranger is on our side". This is because
> he has committed himself to trust the Stranger. But he of course recognizes
> that the Stranger's ambiguous behavior *does* count against what he be-
> lieves about him. It is precisely this situation which constitutes the trial of
> his faith»[58].

Mitchell says that unexplained evil and suffering do count against some of the theological assertions of believers, in the same way the ambiguous behavior of the Stranger in the parable of taking people into prison did count against the assertion that «He is on our side». But believers do not allow evil and suffering to count *decisively* against the theological assertion that God is good and cares for his people, for example, just as the partisan did not allow the doubtful behavior of the Stranger to count decisively against the claim that the Stranger was on their side. The point here is not that certain things do not count against the assertions of believers –they do. But believers will not allow them to count decisively against their faith.

Like other factually significant non-theological claims, the theological claims of believers are not conclusively falsifiable. No one can determine a point where the believer will do away with his claims in the face of contrary evidence. Religious assertions are part of the faith of believers who believe that God has reasons for his actions even if sometimes they are incomprehensible. Religious assertions are therefore cognitively and factually significant –some things do count against them, even if the faith of believers precludes them from making these things count decisively against the faith. One may therefore say that religious beliefs are falsifiable in principle though they may not be in practice[59].

2. HICK'S ESCHATOLOGICAL VERIFICATION THEORY

Another response to the logical positivists' non-cognitive challenge to the religious assertions of believers was given by John Hick, who believes that the logic of theism is quite unique and complex. Hick attempted

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58. *Ibid.,* p. 104.
59. Cfr. EVANS, C.S. *Philosophy of Religion,* InterVarsity Press, Illinois 1982, pp. 148-149.

to meet Flew on his own grounds and went further than Mitchell by claiming that theological assertions are cognitively significant since they are verifiable and falsifiable eschatologically, i.e., not in this life but in the life to come. There is then a way to verify the claims of believers. He also tells of a parable of two travelers walking together –one believes that the road leads to the Celestial City while the other is convinced that it leads nowhere[60].

> «During the course of their journey, the issue between them is not an experimental one […] And yet when they do turn the last corner it will be apparent that one of them has been right all the time and the other wrong. Thus although the issue between them has not been experimental, it has nevertheless from the start been a real issue»[61].

According to Hick, the theological assertions of believers are factually and cognitively significant for they are verifiable and falsifiable. It is not however possible to verify and falsify them in temporal life but only in the afterlife. Since a survival prediction is part of the corpus of Christian belief, the experiences after death of the fulfillment of God's purposes for ourselves and communion with Him, would certainly constitute a verification of the truth-claims of Christianity. Meanwhile, since man is still *in via* and not *in patria,* such possible scenarios in the afterlife assure the cognitive meaningfulness of theistic claims. If on the other hand there is no afterlife, then logically there would be no verification.

The problem with this answer of Hick however is with his notion of empirical verification as applied eschatologically. «The problem is that such a state is so far beyond our comprehension and knowledge that the extension of the word "empirical", whose meaning in this life is understood, to the afterlife, which is so little understood, is questionable»[62]. Those who deny the reality of the afterlife would certainly reject this notion of eschatological verification.

Besides, is this the way the logical positivists understood the idea of empirical verification? If verification is eschatological it is not verification in the sense of the neo-positivists (for whom the evident is that which can be experimented in specifiable and publicly available spacio-temporal conditions) and, if it is verification, it is not eschatological in the meaning understood by religious faith and the Christian tradition[63]. The notion of em-

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60. Cfr. HICK, J., «Theology and Verification», *Theology Today,* 17 (1960), pp. 12-31.
61. *Ibid.,* p. 19.
62. STIVER, D.R., *The Philosophy of Religious Language,* p. 57.
63. Cfr. MARTIN, J.A., *The New Dialogue between Philosophy and Theology,* Seabury, London 1966, pp. 97-98, quoted by CONESA, F. and NUBIOLA, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 272.

pirical verification as understood by the logical positivists cannot be extended to the eschatological sphere without losing its contextual, historical meaning. Be that as it may, Stiver says that Hick «scores a kind of technical or "Pyrrhic" victory over Flew. This victory has the liability, however, of not being deemed satisfactory by Flew or by other believers. In other words, it cannot be put to work»[64].

Ross summarizes the challenges to the cognitive character of faith as consisting of three distinct cognitivity attacks: the *inaccessibility challenge,* the *skeptical challenge* and the *linguistic discontinuity hypothesis*[65]. He answers the inaccessibility challenge by claiming that religious discourse is a craft-bound discourse; he responds to the skeptical challenge by asserting that testimony is a source of knowledge; and he answers the linguistic discontinuity hypothesis by means of the theory of analogy. Ross' answers to the first two challenges will be discussed hereafter, while his response to the third challenge will be treated in the next chapter.

IV. THE INACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGE AND CRAFT-BOUND DISCOURSE

1. THE INACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGE

As stated above (3.1.1), the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle denied cognitive meaningfulness to religious discourse. They claimed that religious and theological propositions are empty of cognitive meaning since these propositions are not empirically verifiable. They lack even the minimal merit of being cognitively meaningful –they are therefore nonsensical. The inaccessibility challenge claims that one cannot know or discover what these religious and theological propositions are all about. One has no cognitive access to their content, no way to find out what they mean. Religious discourse is like a foreign or undecipherable language[66], so that one cannot figure out what is said or what is claimed, just as the average reader would have no way of finding out what this phrase means: «Both switches were broken about sixteen feet from the point; so were all the chairs. They were the only broken rails in the lead, though the fishbolts

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64. STIVER, D.R., *The Philosophy of Religious Language,* pp. 57-58.
65. Cfr. ROSS, J.F., *Portraying Analogy,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981, p. 218 (footnote 1). Cfr. also his other works: «Religious Knowledge» in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Society,* 46 (1972), p. 30 and «Ways of Religious Knowing», in FERRE, F., KOCKELMANS, J.J. and SMITH, J.E. (eds.), *The Challenge of Religion,* Seabury Press, New York 1982, pp. 84-87.
66. Cfr. ROSS, J.F., *Portraying Analogy,* p. 218 (footnote 1).

were snapped throughout and all the joints turn asunder». (a passage from the novel, *Death of a Train*)[67]. The idea behind this non-cognitive attack is that «religious discourse is to the intelligent non-believer the way jazz discourse is to the intelligent outsider: not that what is said is without a content appropriate for belief, etc., but that there is no way into the discourse by which the observer can satisfactorily discover what is to be believed, doubted, denied, etc.»[68].

The importance of the question of the meaningfulness or religious discourse rests on the fact that unless it is resolved that the language of believers is meaningful, the inquiry into whether religious knowledge exists would be an exercise in futility since «the inquiry into religious knowledge is itself a subsidiary of a larger inquiry into the meaningfulness of religious discourse»[69]. Ross says that it might be granted that «a late twentieth-century audience may not have antecedent interest in disputes about whether sentences like "God loves all men" and "God will forgive the repentant man", are or are not without cognitive meaning. But from a theoretical point of view this question […] is of cardinal importance. For if the expressions in religious discourse are without cognitive meaning, then there is nothing (religiously relevant) to believe or to disbelieve, there is nothing to be known»[70]. In other words, the inquiry into the meaningfulness of religious and theological propositions is logically prior to the question of whether faith is cognitive or constitutes knowledge. The question about the meaningfulness of these propositions must be tackled first, before the question of whether knowledge, which could be qualified religious, is handled.

2. RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

Since the question being addressed in this section is the cognitive meaningfulness of religious discourse, it is but proper to deal first with the question of what is meant by *religious discourse*. More often than not, types of discourse are classified according to their contents[71]. Thus, there is political discourse, philosophical discourse, scientific discourse and religious discourse, etc. This type of classification however is in a way mis-

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67. ROSS, J.F., «Religious Knowledge», p. 30.
68. ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 87.
69. *Ibid.,* p. 29. «The negation of the significative capacity of this type of language would clearly hinder whatever ulterior question about its cognitive value». (CONESA, F., *Creer y Conocer,* p. 24).
70. ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 84.
71. Cfr. CONESA, F. and NUBIOLA, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 264, ff.

leading because it tends to separate the different types of discourse, as if they were autonomous realities, unrelated among themselves. If this were the case, communication between a politician and a philosopher, a scientist and a religious believer, would be rendered impossible. But obviously, even if the language a politician uses is peculiar, for example, whoever listens to him understands what he says. It is therefore preferable to talk not of political discourse or philosophical discourse, but of the «political use» or the «philosophical use» of language or discourse. The same can be said of religious language. The language of believers is not some esoteric or impenetrable reality, but the same language which other people use when speaking or talking. It is therefore preferable to talk about the «religious use of language» than «religious language» or «religious language games». The religious use of language is the partial use of everyday language, though it may be amplified and may have reference to another context of life. Religious language is therefore the use which the religious believer makes of everyday language.

Ross says that «there really is no language that, as such, is religious»[72]. The so-called religious language is nothing but ordinary language used in a religious context. He describes religious language as «that portion of natural language people use in religious talk, whether stating their beliefs or unbelief, explaining a belief, telling religious stories, interpreting their life events religiously (“God answered my prayer”), disputing about a meaning of a sacred text, writing hymns or even popular religious songs (Gospel music), praying, performing liturgy or religious rituals, asking divine forgiveness for sins or transgressions and so on»[73]. He emphasizes that religious language is not just «God talk» or «talking about God», pro or con, even if this turns out to be a central element of the discourse and is one of its central problems[74]. That talking about God is a central element in religious discourse is seen by the fact that one can, as a first approximation, define religious discourse as «that whose content the word God is used or that which is related, directly or indirectly, to this word»[75].

That religious language is not some esoteric or other-worldly reality is also made clear by the fact that any language can be utilized to talk about God and divine realities. «Religious talk can go on in any natural language. The basic syntax (grammar) and semantics (meaning relationships) of French, German, Attic Greek, Latin or Arabic are unchanged when the languages are used in religious discourse»[76]. As R. Bell points

72. Ross, J.F., «Religious Language», p. 106.
73. *Ibid.*
74. Cfr. *Ibid.*
75. Conesa, F. and Nubiola, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 264.
76. *Ibid.*

out, «when the term "religious" is used with "language" it should draw our attention to the fact that certain concepts are being used for religious purposes, and not that some kind of semantic or substantive shift has been made to a new type of discourse»[77]. Be that as it may, Ross explains that religious talk has a specialized vocabulary of its own with «expressions like "almighty", "creator", "sin", "salvation", "grace", "predestination", and the like being characteristic of Jewish ritual discourse, and still others characteristic of Islam, and so on. Within Christian sects, as in Jewish and Islamic sects, there are further vocabulary peculiarities. Among some Christian groups, for instance, the notion that Jesus is "my personal savior" is a central idea, not emphasized as much by other groups»[78].

Ross further qualifies religious discourse by claiming that it «does not have to be monotheistic (expressing belief in one supreme being) as it is for Jews, Christians and Muslims. It can be polytheistic (many divine beings), as was the discourse about the gods in ancient Greece and later Rome and in German mythology. It can be polytheistic and pantheistic (everything is in some sense divine), as in many African animist religions and many oriental religions such as forms of Hinduism. It can even be atheistic (religious without acknowledging any supreme or otherwise divine being, as in some forms of Buddhism and Unitarianism)»[79]. Finding the term «religious language» infelicitous, he prefers to use the term «religious talk» instead of the term «religious language», whether written or spoken, regarding matters religious. This is so because Ross thinks that the nearest analogues of «religious language» would have to be «bad language», «obscure language», «smutty language», «obscene language», and the like.

The religious man uses language for two principal objectives: talking with God and talking about God. Within religious talk, one can therefore distinguish between the language of prayer and invocation on the one hand, and the language of testimony on the other hand. The former is found in the liturgy, religious songs and in prayers; the latter would usually take the form of confession on the part of believers, revealing in the process the existential commitment of the speaker. Since the language of testimony depends on the formula «I believe», this language is likewise termed as the language of faith[80].

77. BELL, R.H., «Wittgenstein and Descriptive Theology», in *Religious Studies,* 5 (1969), p. 6.
78. ROSS, J.F., «Religious Language», pp. 106-107.
79. *Ibid.,* p. 107.
80. Cfr. CONESA, F. and NUBIOLA, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 265.

3. CRAFT-BOUND DISCOURSE

Ross answers the inaccessibility challenge by claiming that reli-
gious discourse is a craft-bound discourse. What is a craft-bound dis-
course? A craft-bound discourse is that kind of discourse internal to a par-
ticular craft. Examples of crafts are medicine, law, music, philosophy,
farming, carpentry, sports, etc. Normally, the full grasp of a craft-bound
discourse is limited to the members or practitioners of a craft.

Ross says that a craft-bound discourse has five distinguishing char-
acteristic features[81]. First, part of the vocabulary of a craft-bound discourse
has affinities and oppositions of meaning which are obviously different
when the same words are found in an unbound discourse[82].

Second, even if one might already know how to speak the language
of a craft-bound discourse, one has to *learn* how to use the craft discourse.
Learning the discourse requires not only learning the vocabulary, but
learning how to make *justified construals,* such as «We are on course»,
«The floor is level», «There is no platter for that turn-table».

Third, a craft discourse usually has a vocabulary of its own which is
internally interdefined and which is merely equivocal or metaphorical in
relation to the same words outside the craft in question. Strike in baseball
for example does not carry the same meaning as *strike* in the sentence «He
will *strike* you with a bat». Some words in a craft-bound discourse cannot
be found outside the craft at all, like «negligence per se» or «collateral
estoppel» in law.

Fourth, the discourse generally functions to motivate and modulate
human behavior in view of the attainment of the objectives of the craft.
Philosophers talk philosophy in order to do philosophy, as doctors talk
medicine in order to facilitate medical practice. This does not mean how-
ever that each particular utterance is behavior-modulating, but simply that
the function of the discourse is to modulate what the participants in the
craft think, say, do, see, perceive or conclude in the course of doing the
craft.

Finally, in a craft-bound discourse, there are conditions for the ac-
ceptability of expressions, paraphrase, qualifications and even presupposi-
tions which do not apply in an ordinary discourse and which cannot be
learned without participatory experience in a craft. One cannot for exam-

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81. Cfr. ROSS, J.F., *Portraying Analogy,* p. 165, ff.
82. Ross defines an unbound discourse as that discourse that «does not share the
salient features of a craft-bound discourse». (*Ibid.,* p. 165). Although such a definition
is far from being clarificatory, the researcher takes it to mean that an unbound dis-
course refers to discourse in general, not bound to any particular craft, which people
who know the language will readily and without difficulty understand.

ple send a complaint to the court and the defendant, but one *files* the complaint with the court and *serve* the defendant.

A craft-bound discourse is therefore that discourse in which «*skill in action* is necessary for a full grasp of the discourse»[83]. Ordinarily, one masters a craft-bound discourse only if one becomes an insider to the doing that the discourse is about.

4. RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE: A CRAFT-BOUND DISCOURSE

Religious discourse is an instance of a craft-bound discourse. There is a close and intimate connection between the discourse of religion, Christianity or Judaism for example, and the behavior and conduct of those to whom the discourse is directed –the believers, who are the participants in the craft. Parents, ministers, priests and teachers of religion tell stories, teach catechism, explain the creed, liturgy and rituals (make use of religious discourse) in view of influencing the conduct and behavior of the members of religious community. Anyone knowledgeable about Christianity or Judaism will instantly recognize that «bible stories, creedal teaching, stories of saints, and all religious talk (even sermons when properly done) are designed to modulate one's conception of oneself and of one's relationship to other people, to modulate one's judgments about the physical world, about the goals and values of life and one's judgments about God (who is to be encountered through faith, in obedience to moral law and in the pursuit of holiness.)»[84]. Religious discourse is inherently action-oriented, response-oriented and self-construal and judgment-oriented.

Ross says that religion is taught in order to modulate the life of faith of the adherents of a particular religion. There is therefore an intimate and tight connection between words and actions within the craft, in such a way that liturgy, which is the enactment of the religious mysteries with words, stories, song, poetry, physical movement and physical symbols, becomes an indispensable religious reality in the practice and growth in the faith. Communication and teaching that are carried out are directed to Christian living, to the personal development and the integration of the believer's life, basic drives and desires. Truly living the life of faith and the ongoing conversion of the believers is the aim of Christian discourse –it functions to prompt, facilitate and modulate these objectives. Through the discourse, the believers who are participants in the craft are enabled to make well-informed judgments and apply religious predicates to themselves. One can therefore say «I have been *redeemed*»; «I have *sinned*»; «I have been *for-*

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83. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

given»; «Christ died for me and *rose* again»; «I too will *rise* from the dead». Without experience one cannot apply these predicates to oneself since they are all products of self-construals. «Any account of religious discourse, denying that judgments based upon experience have any evidential role in justifying statements about religious realities and about God, is manifestly in error»[85].

Ross claims that

> «there can be no question that religious discourse satisfies the conditions for craft-bound discourse, just as well, say, as does legal discourse or the discourse of physicians, musical performers and abstract scientists. Salvation is as much a craft objective as is health or the peaceful resolution of controversy. You practice religion as you do law, medicine, or philosophy, through judgments, justified through one's *construal* of reality, and directed toward action»[86].

By its nature as a craft-bound discourse, religious discourse is inaccessible to «outsiders» who are not participants of the craft. Outsiders are deprived of the privilege of making judgmental self-construals for the simple reason that they have no experience in living and practicing the craft where the discourse is shared. The anti-cognitivist challenge which claims that religious discourse is inaccessible, like an undecipherable language, is therefore to miss the point[87], because religious discourse is accessible on the condition that one participates in the craft where the discourse is utilized.

> «Religious discourse is a craft-bound discourse not fully accessible to those who have not taken up or at least seriously participated in the form of life for which the discourse serves as a communicating thought form. You can't really grasp the talk of lawyers or doctors or mechanics unless you can make the judgments they are competent to make, dispute in their terms and generally, behave indistinguishably in the craft roles»[88].

Music for example which has its own craft-bound discourse has its own internal rationality whose discourse cannot be fully understood unless one becomes a participant in the craft. As Ross says «there is no stable

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85. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
86. *Ibid.*
87. «The fact that mere observers may be denied access to the discoursing community does not show anything of importance. For *usually* mere observers are without reliable access to the content of craft-bound discourse, e.g., of doctors, lawyers, philosophers, painters and auto mechanics». (ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 87).
88. *Ibid.*

cognitive access to musical meaning, or how to perform a work or how to interpret it, or even to what the musical elements are, such as what a C clef is, or what a "key" is, what a diatonic scale is or chromaticism, or what counts as "together" on an attack […] apart from musical practice»[89]. Whatever is true in any craft-bound discourse is also true in religious discourse, in as far as accessibility is concerned. Ross avers that

> «Full access can be gained only by one's learning to talk as a member of the community –to explain, defend, criticize, qualify, amplify and otherwise assert claims in a mode of speaking that would appear "native" to the dwellers of the belief system or the craft. […] Once we see that the access to religious discourse is an instance of access to craft-bound discourse, in general, no specially religious problem remains. […] there simply is not a serious doubt that one can come to know what religious expressions mean provided one will seriously take part in the discourse of the community that employs it. The fact the expressions may turn out to be disappointingly vague or ambiguously employed or even wholly equivocal in various applications should create no greater difficulty of access than we encounter frequently with discourse about subjects other than God, subjects as diverse as the interest paid by banks and the interests served by the government»[90].

In same vein, alluding to philosophers, Ross says

> «The fact that some philosophers cannot understand religious talk seemed important at first. They thought there must be something wrong with the talk. Now we see the talk is craftbound, that you cannot fully understand it unless you learn it, and its making sense to you is connected with your having or imagining a use for it to modulate living. The philosophers who cannot understand the discourse have forgotten or abandoned or never knew its *use* for getting certain *results*: they have disengaged the discourse from the practice it functions to modulate. No wonder it is vacuous for them. People who *use* religious discourse in their living, learning and

89. ROSS, J.F., «Musical Standards as Function of Musical Accomplishment» in KRAUSZ, M. (ed.), *The Interpretation of Music: Philosophical Essays,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, p. 101. «You cannot get into a position to evaluate until you become an insider. There is no access to the "reliability" of the system from outside, anymore than there is access to the standpoint of musical, philosophical or aesthetic mastery of judgment, except by discipleship first. […] You cannot get into the position of competent cognitive appraisal of the most important channels of belief without talent matured as an apprentice, journeyman, and master (and thus a disciple) of the "way" whether it be how to play the piano, construct arguments, live justly and humanely, or live a fulfilled life». (ROSS, J.F., «Reason and Reliance: Adjusted Prospects for Natural Theology» in LONG, E.T., (ed.), *Prospects for Natural Theology,* Catholic University of America Press, Washington 1992, p. 52).

90. ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», pp. 88-89.

self-construals are cognitivists even if they talk nonsense; non-cognitivists are outsiders to the forms of life, the practices, modulated by religious talking»[91].

The idea that religious discourse is a craft-bound discourse and to understand it one has to participate in the craft where the discourse is utilized, takes its inspiration from Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the *Philosophical Investigations,* Wittgenstein indirectly criticized his previous view of language exposed in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* via criticism of Augustine's view of language[92]. Wittgenstein summarizes Augustine's view of language in this way: «the individual words in language name objects –sentences are combinations of such names–. In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands»[93]. Wittgenstein saw many problems with this view which emphasizes single words and ostention (pointing out), separated from the wider context where language actually operates. The «desire for generalities» (the prejudicial habit of making precipitate general conclusions omitting important aspects of the object of study), is one of the principal problems of philosophy[94]. Wittgenstein claims that in order to discern the meaning of words, it is important to see how they are actually used, rather than coming up with general definitions. «A great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense»[95]. His advice is: «Don't think but look»[96]. Emphasizing the importance of particular cases and the radical contingency of facts, Wittgenstein rejects all essentialism: *«The essence is hidden from us»*[97]. He says: «When philosophers use a word –"knowledge", "being", "object", "I", "proposition", "name"–, and try to *grasp* the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game where is its original home? What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use»[98]. Generalization is the wrenching of words out of their living use and one must avoid

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91. Ross, J.F., *Portraying Analogy,* p. 177.

92. Cfr. Stiver, D.R., *The Philosophy of Religious Language,* p. 59. «For since beginning to occupy myself with philosophy again, sixteen years ago, I have been forced to recognize grave mistakes in what I wrote in that first book». (Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations,* in Anscombe, G.E.M. and Rhees, R. (eds.), Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1963, p. viii).

93. Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations,* # 2. (References are to paragraph numbers and not to page numbers).

94. Cfr. Conesa, F. and Nubiola, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 125.

95. Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations,* # 257.

96. *Ibid.,* # 66.

97. *Ibid.,* # 92.

98. *Ibid.,* # 116.

this by returning words to the stream of life. Philosophical problems arise when «language goes on a holiday»[99]. He was convinced that the task of philosophy must only be to describe and not to prescribe how language actually functions, so as to avoid «the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language»[100]. «Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language [. . .] It leaves everything as it is»[101].

If one examines ordinary language very closely, one can see that words do not have only one appropriate use, but a variety of uses. Wittgenstein says «think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. - The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. […] Of course, what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them spoken or meet them in script and print. For their *application* is not presented to us clearly. Especially when we are doing philosophy!»[102]. He then suggests that instead of thinking only of a single linguistic model, one must take into account that there are a variety of language games[103], where words have their proper sense and meaning[104]. Words have meaning only in the appropriate context of each game. There are as many language-games as there are linguistic activities. «Review the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples […] Giving orders and obeying them; describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements; constructing an object from a description; reporting an event; speculating about an event; forming and teaching a hypothesis […] making a joke and telling it; solving a problem in practical arithmetic; translating from one language into another; asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying»[105]. One cannot therefore reject vast areas of language as non-sensical as did the Vienna circle and Wittgenstein himself in the *Tractatus*. One must consider the actual use of language and not a generalized ideal use of the same.

Language presupposes a non-linguistic context Wittgenstein calls «forms of life». «The *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form

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99. *Ibid.*, # 38.
100. *Ibid.*, # 109.
101. *Ibid.*, # 124.
102. *Ibid.*, # 11.
103. Malcolm says that the idea of «games» applied to «language» occurred to Wittgenstein while he was passing by a place where football was being played. (Cfr. MALCOLM, N., «Recuerdo de Ludwig Wittgenstein», in AA. VV., *Las filosofias de Ludwig Wittgenstein,* Oikos-Tau, Barcelona 1996, p. 69 quoted by CONESA, F. and NUBIOLA, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 127).
104. Aside from the metaphor of a tool-box, Wittgenstein uses also the metaphor of a city formed by the new and the old areas (PI # 18) to explain his idea of a language games.
105. WITTGENSTEIN, L., *Philosophical Investigations,* # 23.

of life»[106]. In order therefore to understand the meaning of a word, one should take into account not only the linguistic context where the word is used, but also the wider pragmatic context of the real life. The meaning of words is supported by an entire background of actions and practices. «This suggests to some extent that one must participate in or at least have some empathy for a particular form of life in order to understand the meaning of the language particular to it»[107]. To understand the meaning of a word, one must examine the language game to which it belongs and the form of life where it is used, «since the meaning of a word is its use in the language»[108]. «A word or a sentence has the meaning that it has because somebody has given it, and not because they are endowed by some power independent of us. It we want to know or understand its meaning, one has to verify in what circumstances was it given; that is, one has to identify how is the word or sentence actually used»[109]. As Wittgenstein says «every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life? –In use it is *alive*»[110].

If to understand the meaning of words one should consider the language games where they are used, and the broader context of the forms of life where the words are operative, does it mean now that the different of language games are autonomous and independent from each other that each game has its own criteria of meaning and truth, with the consequence that truth is relative to a particular language game? Is truth and justification limited to the boundaries of each game? A school of thought which came to be known as Wittgensteinian Fideism[111] maintains precisely the idea that religious language is a specific and autonomous kind of language game with its own distinct criteria of meaning and truth. «It is characteristics of these philosophers to insist on the distance which exists between religious discourse and whatever other type of discourse. Applying the notions of "language games" and "form of life" –developed by the second Wittgenstein– they consider that faith is a peculiar language game or form of life with proper criteria of justification, and with its own concept of knowledge and truth which are not intelligible outside the religious con-

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106. *Ibid*.
107. STIVER, D.R., *The Philosophy of Religious Language,* p. 61.
108. WITTGENSTEIN, L., *Philosophical Investigations,* # 43.
109. CONESA, F. and NUBIOLA, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 130.
110. *Ibid*. # 432. Just what does Wittgenstein mean by «forms of life?». Some think it refers to culture. Others say the term is reducible to language games. Conesa and Nubiola says that a more likely interpretation of the term «form of life» is to think of it as referring to «human communicative activities where linguistic behavior is rooted». (CONESA, F. and NUBIOLA, J., *Filosofía del lenguaje,* p. 129). «Just as there are innumerable language games, so there are also innumerable forms of life». (*Ibid*.)
111. Cfr. NIELSEN, K., «Wittgensteinian Fideism» in *Philosophy,* 42 (1967), pp. 191-209.

text»[112]. D. Z. Philips is a prominent advocate of this point of view[113]. But such a view is hardly defensible for the religious discourse of believers is intimately connected, and not isolated from the language they use in their day to day life activities. What is anomalous with the idea of Wittgenstenian Fideism is the claim that the religious language game and the religious form of life are insulated and separated from other linguistic practices and life activities[114]. So much traffic exist among the different kinds of language games that one cannot insulate one game from the other. Wittgenstein himself observes that the different language games are interconnected and interrelated among themselves and do not exist as autonomous and independent enclaves. An overlapping family resemblance among the different uses of language is too obvious to be overlooked and left unnoticed. «I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. And I shall say: "games" form a family»[115]. Truth cannot therefore be relative to each language game since all these different games belong as it were to one and the same family. A family resemblance exists among the different games.

From the above explanation of religious discourse as an instance of a craft-bound discourse, it can now be concluded that the inaccessibility challenge to the cognitive meaningfulness of religious discourse does not hold water, after all. For being a craft-bound discourse, religious discourse is cognitively accessible provided one participates in the practice of the craft that is religious living. One must participate in the language game where religious discourse is used. Religious discourse is therefore not inaccessible as the anti-cognitivists erroneously claimed.

V. THE SKEPTICAL CHALLENGE AND TESTIMONY

Another attack on the cognitive character of faith is what Ross calls the *skeptical challenge* –the anti-cognitive attack which denies truth value to the religious and theological claims of believers. As noted above (3.1.2), Anthony Flew has asserted that religious and theological claims, for not being falsifiable, do not assert anything factual at all; hence they cannot be accorded any truth value. The skeptical challenge says that «even if you

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112. CONESA, F., *Creer y conocer,* p. 49.

113. Cfr. PHILIPS, D.Z., *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry,* London 1970 and *The Concept of Prayer,* Oxford 1981.

114. Cfr. EVANS, C.S., *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 153.

115. WITTGENSTEIN, L., *Philosophical Investigations,* # 67.

come to know *what* the believer claims and even if what he claims is appropriate for belief, disbelief, doubt, etc., *still,* you can never *know* whether or not what has been said is *true* or *false*, hence, there is still no religious knowledge. The *content* of the assertions may be accessible to belief. But the *truth* values are not cognitively accessible»[116]. Ross sees the underlying reason behind this anti-cognitive attack as the exaggerated contrast between faith and science. Science is said to yield knowledge while faith is alleged to produce nothing but unfounded and unjustified belief. Truth-value can then only be accorded to the claims of science and not to the claims of religion[117].

1. FAITH (ACCEPTING SOMETHING ON TESTIMONY) IS A SOURCE
   OF KNOWLEDGE

Ross answers the skeptical challenge by claiming that faith, which is the acceptance of something on testimony, is a source of knowledge. The importance of this assertion is based on the fact that if it established that faith is indeed a means of knowledge, then there is no reason for anyone to say that religious and theological claims, which have been accepted on the testimony of Apostles and prophets (or of Christ or God himself) cannot be accorded truth value. In other words, if testimony is a means to obtaining the truth, then there is no basis for the skeptical challenge to claim that the testimonial knowledge of believers cannot likewise be true[118].

That one can come to know the truth by the evidence of testimony is so pervasive in life that a host of examples is not difficult to imagine, from the most elemental knowledge to the more sophisticated. A large percentage of what one can justifiably claim to know comes through one's habitual trust in the reports of witnesses, research of experts and even of the opinions of those who are in the position to know. How does one know

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116. ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 89. Cf. also ROSS, J.F., *Portraying Analogy,* p. 218 (footnote 1).

117. This attitude is scientism which John Paul II calls a danger prevalent even today. «In the past, the same idea emerged in positivism and neo-positivism, which considered metaphysical statements to be meaningless. Critical epistemology has discredited such a claim, but now we see it revived in the new guise of scientism, which dismisses values as mere products of the emotions and rejects the notion of being in order to clear the way for pure and simple facticity». (JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio,* Daughters of St. Paul, Boston 1998, # 88).

118. Cfr. ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 90. «If "faith" is as much a vehicle of knowledge as is "reason", then the "faith" oriented belief system of a religious community need not be incompetent as a source for knowledge about God». (*Ibid.*)

that one is the child of the two persons one considers as one's parents? That one was born on a specific date stated in the birth certificate? How does one know that a president named Lincoln was assassinated and that World War II was fought in Europe but not in Iceland? And that the government prints money?[119]. One can certainly claim to know all these things and many more (examples can be cited *ad infinitum*), simply by relying on records, historical documents and the testimony of other people. One can know all these things simply by accepting the testimony of reliable sources. One can even know that AIDS is a dangerous disease or even a virus, even without inquiring what a virus is or whether viruses are living things. Ross says that «to think that we do not know that PCB's are dangerous in the water supply because we have not established it or even read the proof is just being foolish not philosophical»[120].

Coming to know things on the evidence of testimony is indeed the normal and usual way of finding things out. Oftentimes it is *logically necessary* for some kind of knowledge, as in the whereabouts of a person at a particular moment. Sometimes it is *psychologically necessary* as in the information that a loved one was not one of the casualties in a vehicular accident in a far away place. At other times it is *physically necessary* and beyond the practically feasible, since to verify every bit of information or data personally requires time and resources which may not be available, and even if available would mean useless duplication[121]. If one for example is a bird watcher and identifies a certain type based on a classification of some published authority, one can come to know that the N-Wabler has appeared north of Philadelphia. But if one insists on establishing for oneself the classification of bird types, one would not have completed the work before the evidence flew south for the winter[122]. Making independent checks for every bit of information needed in one's life and their cost in time, effort and money would be positively unreasonable as a way of life, because one can certainly know things even without personal independent verification, by just relying on the authoritative testimony of others.

The claim that only science can proportion knowledge is defeated by the mere fact that science is itself a system of trust and reliances. Even such elemental matters as the identification of instruments depends upon the consensus of belief. That the ruler one uses to measure is really twelve inches, that the beaker holds one pint, that the catalogue is not a pack of

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119. Cfr. Ross, J.F., *IPR,* p. 79. Cfr. also PLANTINGA, A., *Warrant and Proper Function,* Oxford University Press, New York 1993, p. 77.

120. Cfr. Ross, J.F., *R & R,* p. 51 (footnote 5).

121. Cfr. Ross, J.F., «Religious Knowledge», pp. 32-33.

122. Cfr. Ross, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 92 & Ross, J.F., «Religious Knowledge», p. 34.

lies, are but few examples of coming to know and acquiring knowledge based on the acceptance of the testimony of other persons in the field of science. Without testimony, science would have been an impossible enterprise. As Newton stood on the testimonial shoulders of giants, so every scientist must stand on the testimonial shoulders of other scientists, past and present[123].

That knowledge acquired through testimony is so pervasive in life is even made clear by the fact that

> «the background condition of the possibility of the sort of sophisticated knowledge one is expected to have in later life is the testimonial knowledge conveyed by one's teachers. What else do we send students to college for but to be told what is so or to be told how to find out? Why don't we give students a spoon and a microscope, a pencil and a pad and say "Go find out?". Because you can't find out without the background of testified belief. For most people most of the time the background of belief within which the person finds out for himself was acquired by his being told»[124].

Can the possibility of errors and mistakes support the skeptical position? That errors and mistakes are possible in the acquisition of knowledge through testimony is undeniable; that this possibility discredits the fact that testimony can be a source of knowledge is not convincing. This is true not only with respect to testimony but also in perception (even memory and reasoning). When one acquires knowledge through perception, it is always possible that one could be mistaken or could be in error. But this possibility of mistakes and errors does not take away the fact that one can have perceptual knowledge. That mistakes and errors are possible is true; that they always happen is false. When one accepts something on testimony the possibility that the witness or testifier is mistaken or lying or misstating his beliefs or that the person misunderstands him is present –but that it actually does happen, or always happen, is rather untenable. It is not true that mistakes and errors always occur[125]. In spite of the possibility of mistakes and errors, faith then which is the acceptance of something on testimony, is a source of knowledge.

In *Warrant and Proper Function,* Plantinga calls testimony a second class citizen in the epistemic republic, compared to, for example, perception, even memory and basic reasoning. His contention is that testimo-

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123. Cfr. PLANTINGA, A., *Warrant and Proper Function,* p. 77.

124. ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 92. Intellectual achievement and culture are made possible because of testimony. In fact, testimony is the very foundation of civilization. (Cfr. PLANTINGA, A., *Warrant and Proper Function,* p. 77).

125. Cfr. ROSS, J.F., «Religious Knowledge», p. 33.

ny is parasitic on other sources of belief as far as warrant goes i.e., «if you tell me something and I believe it on your say-so, I have warrant for it only if you do»[126]. Moreover, there is a cognitively superior way than testimony that can provide warrant to a belief. «... an eyewitness report carries more weight than a report from someone to whom the eyewitness told what he saw»[127]. Sennet calls these observations *epistemic dependence* and *epistemic inferiority* respectively[128]. However, there is no reason why testimony cannot be accorded a first class citizenship as well.

With regard to epistemic dependence, it is true that one's warrant for proposition *p* based on testimony is indeed dependent on the testifier's warrant for his belief of proposition *p*. If I tell you that I visited Japan in 1998 and you believe me, the warrant of your testimonial belief that «I visited Japan in 1998» is dependent on the warrant I possess of this particular belief. But this feature is not unique to testimony. The perceptual belief that I am seeing a kangaroo now is dependent on my memory belief of pictures of these animals I saw before or of the testimonial belief of teachers who told me what a kangaroo looks like. So with reasoning. The warrant that I have that this particular form of logical deduction is correct is dependent on my memory belief or testimonial belief that certain inference patterns are valid. In fact, in many cases, the warrant for perceptual, memory and reasoning beliefs are dependent on testimonial beliefs acquired from others[129]. Dependency in as far as warrant is concerned is therefore not endemic to testimony alone.

With regards to the second observation that there are cognitively better ways for one to have warrant for proposition *p* than the warrant one gets based on testimony, again one can say that this feature is not only found in testimony. My perceptual belief, for example, that the x-ray photographs in front of me shows that I have a hairline fracture in my tibia, has less warrant than if the belief were produced by my doctors say-so. In this case, there is a better way to get warrant than my own perception –an expert's testimony. One's memory beliefs have inferior warrant than the original perceptual or testimonial beliefs of which they are just memories. So with basic reasoning. One's feeble attempts at research about the universe has less warrant than the testimony of physicists or geologists who have been studying the structure of the cosmos for many years[130]. Planti-

126. PLANTINGA, A., *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 87.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
128. Cfr. SENNET, J.F., «Who Are You Going To Believe – Me Or Your Own Eyes? The Place Of Testimony In Knowledge Acquisition», in LEHRER, K. and LUM, B.J. (eds.), *Knowledge, Teaching and Wisdom,* Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordretch 1996, p. 177.
129. Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 179-181.
130. Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

nga's reservations then about the status of testimony relative to warrant are not that convincing. There is no reason therefore why testimony cannot also be first class citizen in the epistemic republic, the way perception, memory and reasoning are.

Testimony then is a source of knowledge and is no less reliable than perception, memory and basic reasoning. In *Fides et Ratio,* the Pope emphasizes the fact that testimony is truly a source of knowledge, saying:

> «There are in the life of a human being many more truths which are simply believed than truths which are acquired by way of personal verification. Who, for instance, could assess critically the countless scientific findings upon which modern life is based? Who could personally examine the flow of information which comes day after day from all parts of the world and which is generally accepted as true? Who in the end could forge anew the paths of experience and thought which have yielded the treasures of human wisdom and religion? This means that the human being –the one who seeks the truth– is also the one who lives by belief»[131].

After explicating that testimony is indeed a source of knowledge, Ross says that one must focus on the originating experiences of Apostles and prophets, who received God's revelation and upon which the beliefs of Christians are based. If the encounter of the Apostles and prophets with God was just a hoax, even granting that testimony is a source of knowledge, then the beliefs of Christianity cannot be any less, since these beliefs are based on the originating experiences of these Apostles and prophets. On the other hand, if the originating experiences were veridical and knowledge making, then there is no reason why the beliefs of Christianity, which traces its origin to these experiences and was handed down testimonially from one generation to the next, cannot be considered knowledge and accordingly accorded truth-value, which is precisely what the skeptical challenge denies. In other words, if the original experiences of Apostles and prophets was warranted, then there is no reason why Christianity as a testimonially based belief cannot be warranted also. Ross calls this a central epistemological issue in the examination of whether Christian beliefs could be accorded truth-value[132].

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131. JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio,* #31.

132. Cfr. Ross, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 96. «The chain of human testimony must end at the first human or humans to whom the truth was conveyed by God. They were in a position to know. otherwise, no one they told had knowledge even if God motivated this belief […]. They were in a position to know only if the experiences they had were sufficient to give them knowledge. Hence the importance of asking whether religious experience can be a source of knowledge and, in particular, whether the kinds of experiences given the prophets and apostles could have been a source for the knowledge claimed. It is their experiences on which the testimony of the

2. RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

How does Ross explain the original experiences of the Apostles and prophets? He claims that the Apostles and prophets underwent religious experiences through which they received God's revelation and which now constitutes the Christian faith. «These prophets, Apostles and disciples through encounter with God discerned what God wished to have communicated to other men. The function of the religious experience was to produce a state of revelation which could be transmitted through the preaching of the "Kingdom of God at hand". The function of the religious experience was to achieve the authoritative declaration of the divine message»[133]. He explains the nature of this encounter with God in experience as including all types of perception, linguistic and sensory perception included. Linguistic factors, community beliefs and personal expectations all contribute important roles in the generation of the appropriate experiences, through which the Apostles and prophets received the truths of the revelatory event.

2.1. Perceptual Sets

Ross says that a sensory information becomes meaningful and provides warrant for a particular perception only if the sensory event is assigned significance. The habit which is developed in assigning significance to sensory information is called a perceptual set[134]. «For a perceptual experience to be "full" the person must assign significance to the experience as a whole»[135].

Take an example of a native who finds a watch while walking along the beach one day. After examining the object, he does not know what it is, thinks of it as useless and throws it away. Years later, he is asked if he has ever seen a watch. He answers no and he is both right and wrong. He is wrong because there was something he saw which was a watch and right because there was nothing that he saw to be a watch. Take another example of a woman stalled in the countryside. When asked why she didn't stop the car when she heard the radiator boiling over, she replies that all she heard was a loud noise and a few whistles, and nothing about the radiator.

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church and preaching is founded. If their experiences could and did provide knowledge which they faithfully reported, then those who have reasonably trusted them and trusted to God's acting through them will have knowledge, too». (ROSS, J.F., *IPR,* p. 83).

133. ROSS, J.F., *IPR,* p. 92.
134. Cfr. *Ibid.,* p. 100.
135. *Ibid.,* p. 99.

She was not able to figure out the car problem for her failure to assign significance to the sound of the radiator.

Both the native and the woman in the above examples failed to assign proper significance to their perceptual experiences. It was not because of a failure of their intellects. They were simply not rich enough in experiences to give significance to the sensory stimuli they were faced with. «In order to see *that* x is F, you must be inclined to see (regard) x *as* F; seeing-as is the pre-requisite for all the more sophisticated forms of seeing-that»[136]. One must know what questions to ask and what kind of checks and expectations are appropriate, given a particular sensory stimuli, for the experience to be worthwhile and meaningful[137]. Ross claims that

> «it is the element of significance assignment (ignored in most discussions of empirical knowledge ...) which converts the apparently irrelevant into the warrant for belief; it transforms a qualitatively empty experience into an appreciation of purpose, beauty or potentiality. Assigning a significance affects the way the sensory data is manipulated and results in the construction of relations by which the data warrant belief»[138].

The Apostles and prophets were rich enough in experiences that they were able to perceive God's revelatory event which was closed to others in their communities. They found themselves in the presence of the holy, of God and were enabled to listen to his words. They «found» God because they were rich in experiences and expectations to notice *that* God was at work in the events considered revelatory. It is true that many have seen the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showing forth the work of his hands; but it is equally true that only a few have seen *that* the heavens indeed declare the glory of God and the heavens show forth the work of his hands. Ross asks: «Is there any reason to deny that the very same thing that I see (for example, a mountain traversed by a valley and crowned with purple clouds) may, while it is still data-for-seeing and not yet seen, be assigned significance so that one's mind is directly conveyed to the presence of God or of God's will?»[139]. Without perceptual sets, one cannot assign significance to events so that they become an experience of the divine. It is a question of not being rich in experiences that many fail to feel the presence of God and see his hand in revelatory events.

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136. *Ibid.,* p. 98.
137. Ross says that «the ability to assign significance is often what differentiates the expert from the neophyte. The "natural" genius is distinguished by his intuitive and uneducated powers at it. The power to reorganize the data, to regard things as different from the way they are commonly regarded is characteristic of the creative imagination and accounts for the discoveries of great originators». (*Ibid.,* p. 100).
138. *Ibid.,* p. 100.
139. *Ibid.,* p. 101.

2.2. Disclosure Situations

The presence of perceptual sets paves the way for what Ross calls disclosure situations, which in turn may give birth to the acquisition of new perceptual sets.

One day a native discovers a metal object along a deserted beach. Upon returning to his abode, he examines the object in detail and could find no explanation as to what the object could be for. In one of his hunting trips, he meets a missionary who shows him a bible. Realizing the similarity of the marks in the object he found and those printed on the pages of the bible, everything became clear in a flash: he found something used to make bibles. Another example could be of a student having difficulty understanding the Pythagorean theorem. He is offered a standard proof but could not understand. He is given a simplified illustration, still no comprehension. The teacher makes a sketch on a piece of paper and the student suddenly exclaims «Now I see!» In a flash, he understood. In both examples, a disclosure situation took place. A disclosure situation then is an experience wherein one suddenly «gets the point» where before one was faced with a blank and the meaningless. Before a disclosure situation takes place, one may have to get puzzled first and feel the knitting of his brows. Intelligibility is the result of disclosure.

The New Testament story of the Transfiguration is a good example of a disclosure situation. The disciples' belief in Jesus was altered upon seeing the vision of the Lord clothed in a garment as white as snow with Moses and Elijah by his side. It suddenly dawned on them that Jesus was someone totally out of the class of other men, making them fall down in fear and trembling. A new perceptual set was acquired after the event. Ross says that disclosure situations are the means to understanding the meaning in events; for the Apostles and prophets, they were revelatory events. «Disclosure is a *sudden and dramatic* seeing x to *be* something, something other than what you took x to be or would have taken x to be without the perceptual set that controls the perceptual judgment»[140]. Whole lives are changed as a result of disclosure. Sudden alterings of experience are especially good at disclosure. «Experience of the horrible, the mysterious, the lovely, the lonely, the evil, the ecstatic, the joyful, the beautiful –all may serve to disclose the relatedness of other experiences and bring one suddenly or gradually, to a recognition of the presence of God and even to explicit conviction about things to be believed or done»[141]. Moments of disclosure are propitious times in the progress of humanity. Hu-

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140. ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 98.
141. ROSS, J.F., *IPR,* p. 107.

man knowledge takes an unprecedented leap is such situation. As Ian Ramsey says «The penny drops», and new things are disclosed[142].

How does the foregoing advance the inquiry into religious knowledge? Ross says:

> «It is likely that among ancient peoples the recitation of the tribal myths concerning God filled with symbols and assigning meaning relationships to various natural events (like storms, illness, good fortune, etc.) created in some extraordinary men both the desire to encounter God and a propensity to find in events indications of the presence of God, so that a perceptual set (or family of them) was generated in some individuals which both (1) realized community expectations as to the description of God and (2) disposed the individuals to have the experiences in which the divine was revealed to them in the transfiguration of the normal: thus, the appearance of God in the burning bush»[143].

As in all perceptual experiences, the religious experience of the originators of religion did not take place in a vacuum. The experience of the Apostles and prophets where they encountered God in revelatory events was made possible through a confluence of factors. Ross underscores the contribution of linguistic factors, community beliefs and individual expectations in the encounter with God. Linguistic factors, talking in a certain way, have influence in one's perception of events. The belief experiences of the community to which one belongs becomes the point of reference and a precondition for the perceptual experience. And one's psychological disposition paves the way for the generation of one's readiness to encounter what is desired and expected. When these factors interact, events are as it were transfigured and God is encountered in experience[144].

142. RAMSEY, I., *Religious Language,* Macmillan, New York 1957, quoted by ROSS, J.F., *IPR,* p. 107. «Is there any reason why human beings may not at their very best see the "speech" of God in the heavens? Not everyone can see this, you say. So, not everyone could see (no matter how we persuade and indoctrinate them) that Bach was a great musician. Not everyone can tell that his automobile starter is defective from the funny clicks he gets where there should have been an energetic start. What you see depends upon the kinds of experiences you can have; that depends upon the significance you assign to the elements of your experience and that depends upon your perceptual sets; and *that* in turn depends very often upon whether you are lucky enough to have met the right disclosure situations. This holds of life generally and is one of the reasons we prize formal university education so highly: the environment is one which creates disclosure situations for the understanding and appreciation of those matters we consider most worthy of man's reflection». (ROSS, J.F., *IPR,* p. 109).

143. ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 99.

144. «Community-reinforced attitudes, skills, and expectations result in *perceptual sets* which, in turn, become the vehicles for disclosure situations and for those *transformations of the appearance of reality* which are peculiar, for instance, to the experiences of the apostles in dealing with Jesus». (*Ibid.)*

For being rooted in experience, one therefore cannot deny that the original encounter of the Apostles and prophets with God was epistemically sound and knowledge-making.

While this explanation of the original experiences of the Apostles and prophets in terms of perception may not be denied its own merit, such an account however seems simplistic and incomplete. One's encounter with God cannot simply be a result of theoretical conclusions based on logical reasoning. The originators of religion who received God's revelatory intervention must have undergone the experience of a rare and awesome Presence, whose nature cannot be other than divine. As Edith Stein rightly says:

> «What gives a prophet the security that he is before God? Seeing with the eyes or imaginative force are not sufficient for this. All this can fail, but nevertheless one can be interiorly certain that it is God who speaks. This security is supported by the feeling that God is present; it is felt that one is touched by Him in the most profound (of his being). This is what we call the experience of God in the proper sense. It is the nucleus of all mystical experience: the person to person encounter with God»[145].

Since testimony is a source of knowledge and since the originating experiences of Apostles and prophets, rooted in experience, shows no epistemological infirmity, then there is no reason why the beliefs of Christians at present, (testimonially handed down from the original experiences of those who encountered God in experience), cannot be accorded truth value. «Religious belief does not display some epistemic inferiority as compared with the rest of human knowledge […] we have no reason to doubt that at least some of the believers have acquired knowledge by faith concerning matters faithfully transmitted, from originating experiences which did involve a direct encounter with God»[146]. As Ross explains,

> «If the burning bush really is a theophany, if God really is present and Moses encounters him, then the long chain of testimony is suitably rooted in experience, and knowledge is available to those who listen, to those who believe»[147].

The tenets of the faith of believers come from the Apostles and prophets who encountered God in religious experience and received the divine message. The message was faithfully transmitted to subsequent gen-

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145. STEIN, E., «Caminos del conocimiento de Dios. La teología simbólica del Areopagita y sus supuestos prácticos», in *Obras Selectas,* Monte Carmelo, Avila 2002.
146. ROSS, J.F., «Religious Knowledge», p. 42.
147. ROSS, J.F., «Ways of Religious Knowing», p. 100.

erations which now form the core religious beliefs of Christians. Since one cannot see anything epistemically anomalous in the original experiences of the Apostles and prophets and in the fact that testimony is a source of knowledge, then there is no reason to be skeptical about the truth values of religious claims. To do so would mean to be skeptical about the claims of the sciences too, since science is a field where perceptual experiential knowledge and testimonially based knowledge also pervade.

CONCLUSIONS

1. It has always been generally accepted that humans could speak meaningfully of God. Even though Hume launched the first modern version of non-cognitivism, the issue of the cognitivity of faith was not hotly debated until the middle part of the last century, when the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle, launched what came to be known as the *verifiability principle*. This group of scientists, philosophers and mathematicians accepted as cognitively meaningful only those propositions which are either analytic or tautological and those that are empirically verifiable. According to the verifiability principle, a proposition is cognitive and meaningful only if it expresses an empirical state of affairs. Since metaphysical, ethical and religious propositions are clearly not verifiable empirically, they therefore concluded that these propositions are all cognitive non-sense. It was A. J. Ayer who introduced and extended the principles of the Vienna Circle, with its anti-metaphysical and anti-religious bias, to the English-speaking world. The challenged posed by the logical positivists to religion was worse than atheism: while atheism may claim that for want of evidence religious beliefs are false, the logical positivists asserted that religious claims have not even reached the minimal merit of being meaningful. Closely related to the verifiability principle was the *falsifiability principle* of Anthony Flew, who questioned whether religious statements can be considered genuine assertions at all. He claimed that believers do not allow their religious and theological claims to be falsified by continually modifying and qualifying them. If no state of affairs could count against the original religious assertions, then these assertions do not say anything at all, neither affirming nor denying that something is actually the case. Believers kill their own claims by a «thousand qualifications».

Both these principles are unconvincing. The verifiability principle's claim that «only those statements which are empirically verifiable are meaningful» is self-referentially inconsistent, for this principle is itself not empirically verifiable. Furthermore, the principle goes against the actual practice of science (which they claimed is the only area with meaningful statements), for scientists consider their claims to be totally meaningful

even if, at the time the claims are made, scientists are still without exact verifications of their claims. Conclusive verification is not the gauge for the meaningfulness of scientific claims. The falsifiability principle, on the other hand, misses the whole point of the cognitivity issue by applying a criterion (empirical proof) to Christian discourse which is foreign to its history. Besides, the application of the principle to religious propositions violates the intent of its originator (Popper) who explained that this criterion applies only to science and not to metaphysical and theological claims.

2. Philosophers were not slow in reacting to the challenge to religion made by the logical positivists. The response to them is generally divided into the right-wing and the left-wing responses. The former asserts that the religious claims of believers are cognitive, while the latter claim that they are not. Ross belongs to the right-wing response for he defends the cognitive character of the assertions of believers.

The emotive or expressive theory and the conative theory of religious assertions belong to the left wing response. The emotive/expressive theory claims that since the religious assertions of believers do not pertain to facts nor are they about the data of the senses, their value is only emotive or expressive, but not cognitive. Randall says that religious assertions serve only as motives for people to act in a determined way. Hare claims that religious assertions are only expressions of one's attitude with respect to the world he calls this blik; a blik can be sensible or insensible but cannot be either true or false. Sutherland reduces the Christian religion to some of its expressive aspects. The conative theory says that the propositions of believers commit them to live a certain and concrete way of life, but they do not have any cognitive value. Braithwaite says that religious beliefs are intentions of believers to behave in a certain way; for Christains, it is the agapeistic way of life. Hepburn on the other hand asserts that religious discourse provides a coherent principle, in parables and myths, to which believers are invited to practice. These theories are reductionistic in character and insufficient, even if they certainly express some aspects of the faith of believers.

The responses of Mitchell and Hick to the falsifiability challenge of Flew belong to the right-wing response. Mitchell says against Flew that there are things that do count against the religious assertions of believers, like evil and suffering. But believers do not allow them to count *decisively* against their assertions and concludes that religious assertions are still cognitive according to the demands of Flew. Hick says that the religious assertions of believers are cognitive in the sense that they are verifiable and falsifiable. But they can only be verified and falsified in the afterlife, not in this life. This response is however hardly acceptable for this is not the kind of verification and falsification that the logical positivists had in mind.

3. The inaccessibility challenge to religious discourse alleges that one cannot discover what the propositions in religious discourse are all about. One has no cognitive access to their content and one cannot find out what they mean. Religious discourse is like a foreign undecipherable language, mere gibberish and non-sense. The answer to this challenge is important because if indeed religious discourse is inaccessible, then it would logically follow that knowledge which could be qualified religious is not possible. Ross explains there is no discourse that as such is religious. Religious discourse is ordinary discourse used in a religious context. It is that part of natural language people use when talking about God and their religious experiences. Any language can be used in religious discourse and no changes in the syntax and semantics takes place in the language used in the discourse. The language used remains the same, even if religious discourse requires a special vocabulary of its own.

Religious discourse is a craft-bound discourse and skill in action is necessary for a full grasp of the discourse. Like any craft-bound discourse (such as the discourse of lawyers, doctors, musicians, farmers, sportsmen), one must participate in the craft where the discourse is used in order to fully grasp it. That people have no cognitive access to religious discourse is due to the fact that they are «outsiders» to the craft where the discourse is utilized. They therefore cannot totally understand what it is all about and it seems nonsensical to them. The language of the traders at the New York Stock Exchange might seem undecipherable to an outsider, even if they are using ordinary language in their activities. Religious discourse cannot therefore be accused of being inaccessible or nonsense, as the logical positivists claim –people just fail to fully grasp it since they are not «insiders» to the craft where it is utilized to modulate the behavior of the participants of the craft. This answer of Ross to the inaccessibility challenge takes its inspiration from the Philosophical Investigations of the 2nd Wittgenstein who, rejecting his earlier view of language, asserted that to understand the meaning of a word, one must consider the language game and the form of life to which the word belongs. As a craft-bound discourse, religious discourse is a particular language game, operating in a form of life that is religious living. The researcher could not agree more with Ross on the point.

4. Even if one has cognitive access to religious discourse, still one cannot accord truth-value to it. One can never know whether the discourse is true or false and therefore there is still no religious knowledge. This is the *skeptical challenge* to religious discourse, whose underlying idea is scientism, the claim that only science can proportion knowledge, while faith gives only unfounded and unjustified belief, based as it is only on testimony. Ross answers this challenge by claiming that testimony is indeed a source of knowledge and that coming to know things through the evidence of testimony is often logically, psychologically and physically necessary.

To check every piece of information before believing it is simply an impractical way of life, since one can surely know things by taking the word of others. To claim that only science can produce knowledge is self-defeating for science itself is pervaded by testimonially based knowledge. The possibility of errors is a poor argument against testimony because error is also possible in perception, memory and basic reasoning. Ross says that if the originating experiences of Apostles and prophets, upon which the faith is based, were veridical and knowledge-making, then there is no reason why the Christian faith should be deprived of truth-value, since it came through these experiences, handed down testimonially through the generations.

Ross claims that the originators of religion encountered God in experience through which they received the messages which now constitute the core of the faith. Their encounter with God was made possible because they had the right *perceptual sets* to see the hand of God in the revelatory event. They experienced *disclosure situations* where God and his message were revealed to them. Unless one has the right perceptual sets and encounters disclosure situations, one cannot see and figure out the full meaning of events. This is precisely what the Apostles and prophets experienced in their encounter with God in revelatory events. To explain the original revelatory event only as a perceptual experience could be much more complete if one developed it in terms of being touched by God in the profundity of one's being –the core of all mystical experience. Considering therefore that testimony is a source of knowledge and that there was nothing epistemically weird in the experiences of the originators of religion, then there is nothing that can prevent the faith of Christians today, handed down testimonially from the original experiences, from being accorded truth-value. The skeptical challenge only demonstrates the ignorance, even naiveté, of its proponents.

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