

August 2020

## Paradox: The Language of Transcendence

Paul B. Hussey Jr.

*Liberty University*, pbhussey@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/djrc>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hussey, Paul B. Jr. (2020) "Paradox: The Language of Transcendence," *Diligence: Journal of the Liberty University Online Religion Capstone in Research and Scholarship*: Vol. 6 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/djrc/vol6/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Divinity at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Diligence: Journal of the Liberty University Online Religion Capstone in Research and Scholarship* by an authorized editor of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact [scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu](mailto:scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu).

In Volume 3 of *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth said, “the Bible is not in itself and as such God's past revelation.”<sup>1</sup> Statements like this are possessed of an infectiousness like the old Arian tune that brought spiritual ruin on generations. While not false on account of popularity alone, clever catchphrases often spread faster than a healthy suspicion can keep pace. One way of arguing that Scripture is not the word of God, is to say that the Bible itself cannot be the word of God because language itself is insufficient to communicate truth about a transcendental reality. This argument fails for two reasons. Firstly, it assumes it is the same thing to argue against the sufficiency of human language use to describe transcendence as an abstraction as it is to argue against the ability of a transcendent person to describe himself with language. Secondly, it fails to recognize that it is possible to know true information about something without the highest level of experience with, or total comprehension of it. The Bible throughout, assumes that it is the transcendent God’s personal revelation of himself in true and meaningful human language. Scripture makes God’s transcendent nature known in human language without reducing him to human comprehension and experience in its paradoxical statements about him.

John Frame summarizes the three main attacks on the sufficiency of human language as, being of a philosophical character, a form of logical positivism, or the idea from Barth that God’s transcendence entails his total ineffability.<sup>2</sup> While the first two simply beg the question by assuming a metaphysical and epistemological framework that supports their language theory, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), [http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE0wtTU1S05ItU0xBScbINDXNwiAVdGNNWnKaqZkxaK-yo5ljkKmHu4mTGxPDRdjWGNgRs4k5uYIY9juAdq6CVjpWwu6ass-ETrGDRpoMDH08nULjgb3gEBzRDI5RYM aNhN07imwcWQMbLCYg5vNhmY68BFDVz-14rJksELnEH-1Ur3M9Lz8olSQQGo82AEgVSVFpalqZUBLkOyIguV4ZgZWYF\\_F2ISFgR9JOt7ZMYSbQaA4PxHqUQNDIKM UqYZzE2RgTQVtexBiYErNE2bggK1UFmEQgNwXpZCSnw4-3bVYIMHQzTXE2UMX3bx46FBQPIYfjcUYWPLY81IIGBQsQFtFjJNSE40sLUzSUoDtRvO0JFCD0cwoDdjNpBk0CLeXCISFEszcAGbkdCBDRkGFIBAyjKwQ3XLYYQYAIhFtb4](http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE0wtTU1S05ItU0xBScbINDXNwiAVdGNNWnKaqZkxaK-yo5ljkKmHu4mTGxPDRdjWGNgRs4k5uYIY9juAdq6CVjpWwu6ass-ETrGDRpoMDH08nULjgb3gEBzRDI5RYM aNhN07imwcWQMbLCYg5vNhmY68BFDVz-14rJksELnEH-1Ur3M9Lz8olSQQGo82AEgVSVFpalqZUBLkOyIguV4ZgZWYF_F2ISFgR9JOt7ZMYSbQaA4PxHqUQNDIKM UqYZzE2RgTQVtexBiYErNE2bggK1UFmEQgNwXpZCSnw4-3bVYIMHQzTXE2UMX3bx46FBQPIYfjcUYWPLY81IIGBQsQFtFjJNSE40sLUzSUoDtRvO0JFCD0cwoDdjNpBk0CLeXCISFEszcAGbkdCBDRkGFIBAyjKwQ3XLYYQYAIhFtb4).

<sup>2</sup> John Frame, “God and Biblical Language: Transcendence and Immanence,” last modified June 14, 2012, accessed July 11, 2020, <https://frame-poythress.org/god-and-biblical-language-transcendence-and-immanence/>.

latter seems to come from within a Christian world view. It has a certain appeal due to the fact that it carries the appearance of humility and reverence. People who simply read the Bible and assume they know true things about God based on what it says are made to seem arrogant for thinking God could be so easily apprehended. James K. A. Smith presents the trilemma of theology as being the appearance of conflict between God's infinity, the finitude of language, and the fact that theology necessitates that God be expressed in language.<sup>3</sup> It seems, on this account, that the infinite God cannot be expressed in a finite language without reducing him to finitude and doing violence to the concept language intends to refer to.<sup>4</sup> Answering this problem requires a Biblical account of reality, epistemology, and language.

It is impossible to separate metaphysics from the discussion of language. Any account of language is interwoven in some way with an understanding of reality and epistemology. An anti-realist for instance, will likely end up with an empiricist epistemology and a pragmatic view of language.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to see how someone who denies there is a reality independent of human

---

<sup>3</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation*, Book, Whole (London: New York; Routledge, 2002), [http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMw1V3dS8MwED\\_mhjIf\\_JiKn2NPexA32vTLCiLb2JzgFzrBt5K0qRa0k80N9gf7f5jLkjI2BX3rpbk05chdfpfcHYBF6kZtTicw02CxzSNGeBhFsRsZVGCy2I1DHjrMxvDnhtt4cLqXdrOTgy8dGqNTzNK3d\\_pDvANGruJNx4muNXWRqCN29DQZ5vVV8ykQKLj3i5ilRAWyPk9w6Z76YvNCfLrNt2TBHOhmq7A-ZgkSzVmXsT2bXU4DiVzq3dXHdWTI7Q\\_4NjAAzKp7PU5GPHqWHx4Zi5nWgssQYEGHsvD2szroNXIVqRQJ8L-KwMtbYtASwJwLwkBkalEs-X9Y8wcZ\\_I289IEGF1MASWTAnLRTePym-VsVkq35XmdBWtmZ2MnvLbq7A-7FMIEMMUD6MZS9zZgALH8IxNyPG0BMV7XYlhUoIVfb16C0qPH5yHrxWaRhUM1cSjg20wO-1eq1ubHz9QLxgQQ7WDuTTfsp3oSJ0js3FvskzuPgTxlgYMepQSNhE7dj9uD47-Pu\\_6fzARRlbrjpkDmEPAr7CJYVd3lBqmUoiL1G--Yb3hzeCw](http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMw1V3dS8MwED_mhjIf_JiKn2NPexA32vTLCiLb2JzgFzrBt5K0qRa0k80N9gf7f5jLkjI2BX3rpbk05chdfpfcHYBF6kZtTicw02CxzSNGeBhFsRsZVGCy2I1DHjrMxvDnhtt4cLqXdrOTgy8dGqNTzNK3d_pDvANGruJNx4muNXWRqCN29DQZ5vVV8ykQKLj3i5ilRAWyPk9w6Z76YvNCfLrNt2TBHOhmq7A-ZgkSzVmXsT2bXU4DiVzq3dXHdWTI7Q_4NjAAzKp7PU5GPHqWHx4Zi5nWgssQYEGHsvD2szroNXIVqRQJ8L-KwMtbYtASwJwLwkBkalEs-X9Y8wcZ_I289IEGF1MASWTAnLRTePym-VsVkq35XmdBWtmZ2MnvLbq7A-7FMIEMMUD6MZS9zZgALH8IxNyPG0BMV7XYlhUoIVfb16C0qPH5yHrxWaRhUM1cSjg20wO-1eq1ubHz9QLxgQQ7WDuTTfsp3oSJ0js3FvskzuPgTxlgYMepQSNhE7dj9uD47-Pu_6fzARRlbrjpkDmEPAr7CJYVd3lBqmUoiL1G--Yb3hzeCw)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Moore and Inc NetLibrary, *Realism and Christian Faith: God, Grammar, and Meaning*, Book, 41 (Cambridge, UK; New York; Cambridge University Press, 2003), [http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE8wSDVOA\\_Z40YO2bIGpmnpxqbGJulgI6rN0U1EcBXxph5hhk6uFu4uTGxFCHfFpBRSX86i\\_EImek0xKhSQI8ywnaGQGZagWpgpxqC6kbbEuKSIPVIFs9QPOyailJtnk5qUnZEEYikOHOz2toBDrfhBnYhzMwYWHgNzD08XQKjOf2o0PinR3hGcUQVPAbmRiD974C609QrO47zQfGB1ZWAsX5iVCXGxgCGaVINZebIANrKmg7gxADU2qeMAMHbAWyCIN0UCro7MNchcS8FAXIEQPAIKKQlphZkiHKYQjmGuLsoYtudDx0tCceaD-wz2RqDDp4Htj6Bza3xBhY8vLzUjUYFCxNUtISk4HFm6mlgYIJMrCnYGSZZJkZJhiYWqaZGwgyaBFvLlSpCiWZuACr4IDj13IMLCAIkOWgR2qWw4jpAHpckPQ](http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE8wSDVOA_Z40YO2bIGpmnpxqbGJulgI6rN0U1EcBXxph5hhk6uFu4uTGxFCHfFpBRSX86i_EImek0xKhSQI8ywnaGQGZagWpgpxqC6kbbEuKSIPVIFs9QPOyailJtnk5qUnZEEYikOHOz2toBDrfhBnYhzMwYWHgNzD08XQKjOf2o0PinR3hGcUQVPAbmRiD974C609QrO47zQfGB1ZWAsX5iVCXGxgCGaVINZebIANrKmg7gxADU2qeMAMHbAWyCIN0UCro7MNchcS8FAXIEQPAIKKQlphZkiHKYQjmGuLsoYtudDx0tCceaD-wz2RqDDp4Htj6Bza3xBhY8vLzUjUYFCxNUtISk4HFm6mlgYIJMrCnYGSZZJkZJhiYWqaZGwgyaBFvLlSpCiWZuACr4IDj13IMLCAIkOWgR2qWw4jpAHpckPQ)

minds will end up thinking truth is knowable and expressible in language. The Bible seems to plainly necessitate some form of realism. It asserts that God created the world prior to human existence, implying that he is ontologically independent of human thoughts about him. Andrew Moore argues, however, that not just any realism will do.<sup>6</sup> He points out that it is a mistake to attempt to prove realism in general, and then make the case for God's existence from the presumably neutral realist framework.<sup>7</sup> A Christian must, rather, begin with a commitment to God's preeminent reality and draw out the implications that flow from it.<sup>8</sup> While there is a circularity to arguing this way, it is unavoidable in any worldview.<sup>9</sup> It is, therefore, essential to present reality as the Bible describes it.

The creator-creature distinction is set forth by Cornelius Van Til, as the most basic distinction in Christian metaphysics.<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1 and John 1 imply that two kinds of things exist: that which is made and that which is un-made. God is the eternal and uncreated reality. The only other kind of thing that exists, is that which he has created. This is why arguments for a neutral realism about abstracts fail to be faithfully Christian. The Bible does not present abstract objects as having some real existence independent of God. There is only him and what he has made. A basic commitment to this teaching of scripture has several implications for reality and its knowability.

As the creator of the world, God has the authoritative interpretation of it. On the biblical account, God is not to be identified with the world. It is his creation, of which he is distinctly

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>10</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2008).

aware apart from himself, and about which he has thoughts.<sup>11</sup> He is also not to be thought of as an impersonal prime mover from which the world necessarily emanates. God is a personal being who created the world with intention and purpose. This entails a realism about God and his creation. The manner of realism between the two is different in that one is derivative and the other is not. While God simply exists independently of human thoughts about him, the world exists independently of human minds as, essentially, a creation of God. The world, therefore, can be known as it really is, but only insofar as God has revealed how and why he made it.

Anti-realism about the world necessitates that categorical distinctions in it are arbitrary, and ultimately fictitious constructions. Moore rightly recognizes the futility of trying to argue against this from a neutral common ground, because realism is only tenable given the truth of the Christian worldview.<sup>12</sup> From a biblical framework, the world has no inherent categorical distinctions because it does not exist in and of itself. In the Genesis account, God creates a formless and void world, then shapes it and makes categorical distinctions in it. In giving the world form, God makes it distinct from all conceivable ways it could have been. In filling it, making it not void, he establishes categorical distinctions in it. Consider that he separated light from darkness and made male and female. This implies that light and darkness exist independently of human minds, but not God's. The distinctions between light and dark, or male and female, are representations of God's thoughts about what he has made. On this account, a

---

<sup>11</sup> Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Moore and Inc NetLibrary, *Realism and Christian Faith: God, Grammar, and Meaning*, Book, Whole (Cambridge, UK; New York; Cambridge University Press, 2003), [http://liberty.summon.serialsolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE8wSDVOA\\_Z40YO2bIGpmnpxqbGJulgI6rN0U1EcBXxph5hhk6uFu4uTGxFCHFpBRSX86i\\_EImek0xKhSQI8ywnaGQGZagWpgpxqC6kbbEuKSIPVIFs9QPOyailJtnk5qUnZEEYikOHoZ2toBDrfhBnYhzMwYWHgNzD08XQKjOf2o0PinR3hGcUQVPAbmRiD974C609QrO47zOfGB1ZWAsX5iVCXGxgCGaVINZebIANrKmg7gxADU2qeMAMHbAWyCIN0UCro7MNchcS8FAXIEQPAIKKQlphZkiHKYOjmGuLsoYtudDx0tCceaD-wz2RqDDp4Htj6Bza3xBhY8vLzUjUYFCxNUtISk4HFm6mlgYIJMrCnYGSZZJkZJhiYWqaZGwgyaBFvLlSpCiWZuACr4IDj13IMLCAIkOWgR2qWw4jpAHpcKPQ](http://liberty.summon.serialsolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE8wSDVOA_Z40YO2bIGpmnpxqbGJulgI6rN0U1EcBXxph5hhk6uFu4uTGxFCHFpBRSX86i_EImek0xKhSQI8ywnaGQGZagWpgpxqC6kbbEuKSIPVIFs9QPOyailJtnk5qUnZEEYikOHoZ2toBDrfhBnYhzMwYWHgNzD08XQKjOf2o0PinR3hGcUQVPAbmRiD974C609QrO47zOfGB1ZWAsX5iVCXGxgCGaVINZebIANrKmg7gxADU2qeMAMHbAWyCIN0UCro7MNchcS8FAXIEQPAIKKQlphZkiHKYOjmGuLsoYtudDx0tCceaD-wz2RqDDp4Htj6Bza3xBhY8vLzUjUYFCxNUtISk4HFm6mlgYIJMrCnYGSZZJkZJhiYWqaZGwgyaBFvLlSpCiWZuACr4IDj13IMLCAIkOWgR2qWw4jpAHpcKPQ).

man is not wrong to say there is no distinction between light and dark, male and female, or good and evil, because his views don't correspond with the way the world is in and of itself. He is wrong because his ideas disagree with the creator's ideas about his creation.

The biblical doctrine of the creator-creature distinction has significant implications in the area of epistemology. If abstract objects existed in and of themselves, it would still leave open the question of how a person would know they exist independently of their experience of them. Given that abstract objects are God's ideas about his world, there is a clear answer as to how they could be known. If God were to reveal his interpretation of the world he has made, then the world as it really is apart from experience would be knowable. As to how God's revelation is knowable as revelation from him, it is impossible to avoid some appeal to faith. To avoid simple fideism, however, reformed epistemology can provide a helpful perspective. According to Alvin Plantinga's articulation of it, if God has created some cognitive faculty by which he can directly introduce true beliefs about himself, a faculty whose damage due to sin is restored by the Holy Spirit, then a person's simple experience of having those beliefs would be epistemically warranted.<sup>13</sup> Plantinga's makes the important observation that Christian metaphysics are inseparable from epistemology. There is no neutral epistemology. If God exists as described in Scripture, it follows that there is a certain way of knowing that he exists. If he does not exist, it may be argued that it is impossible to know anything at all.<sup>14</sup> Given that God and his creation exist independently of human minds, a person could know true things about the world if God were to grant him faith in what He has revealed about reality.

---

<sup>13</sup> Tyler Taber and Tyler Dalton McNabb, "Is the Problem of Divine Hiddenness a Problem for the Reformed Epistemologist?," *The Heythrop Journal* 59, no. 5 (2018): 783–793.

<sup>14</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2008).

If reality is exactly as the Bible describes it, God and his creation, and epistemology follows suit, knowledge of reality being based on God's revelation of it, a specific view of language emerges. A biblical account of language differs radically from non-Christian interpretations of it. Gordon Clark observes that this difference stems from the starting point of the various language theories.<sup>15</sup> Many language theories today assume that language is an invention of humans.<sup>16</sup> Vern Poythress makes an important point from Genesis 1:3, that creation is the result of God speaking.<sup>17</sup> The opening chapter of Genesis is perhaps familiar to so many, that the significance of God creating the world with language is easily lost. This fact implies that language precedes creation. Non-Christian accounts of language assume the exact opposite. They posit that language somehow developed within the world. In the account of Scripture, God has an idea of light expressible in language and commands with language that light be, prior to its existence as creation. This implies not that man created language and then God accommodated his revelation to it, but that God has revealed himself in language because he essentially is a speaking person. Language then, is not a finite creation of man, but an aspect of the infinite God.

The vast nature of language is given some consideration by Poythress in his discussion on the creativity of it.<sup>18</sup> He considers all of the possible permutations of sentences with every word in the English language, leading to an uncountable number of ideas that could be expressed in it.<sup>19</sup> Consider, a step further, all of the different ways every language could have been, all of the nouns and verbs that could exist and have corresponding words in all possible worlds. God

---

<sup>15</sup> Gordon Clark, "Logic and Language by Gordon H. Clark | The Gordon H. Clark Foundation," May 11, 2015, accessed July 11, 2020, <https://gordonhclark.reformed.info/logic-and-language-by-gordon-h-clark/>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language: A God-Centered Approach*, 10. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>19</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language: A God-Centered Approach*, 43. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2009).

knows the infinite possibility of every combination of syllables that could be used to express every possible idea in every possible world and he has perfect command over all language. It is not so humble as it seems when men with a moderate command over a few languages at most presume to tell God what he can and cannot express in language. Language is not man's tool to which God must accommodate himself, it is God's gift to man. While the Bible contains a description of why there are many different languages,<sup>20</sup> its account of why man has language at all is contained in the simple fact that the speaking God created man in his image.

One area of theology that appears to go against the stream of this high view of language, is the puzzling, seemingly paradoxical doctrines of scripture. The idea of God being one and three and Jesus being fully man and fully God intuitively feel like points at which language fails in describing the transcendent God. Transcendence itself seems to necessitate ineffability. To be transcendent is to be beyond the realm of one's experience. Smith presents the issue as a kind of learner's paradox.<sup>21</sup> The idea of the learner's paradox is that it seems impossible for a person to learn anything because it requires them to know what they do not know and thus need to learn. If they already know it, then they no longer need to learn it.<sup>22</sup> In relation to God's transcendence,

---

<sup>20</sup> Gordon Clark, "Logic and Language by Gordon H. Clark | The Gordon H. Clark Foundation," May 11, 2015, accessed July 11, 2020, <https://gordonhclark.reformed.info/logic-and-language-by-gordon-h-clark/>.

<sup>21</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation*, Book, Whole, 161. (London;New York; Routledge, 2002), [http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwIV3dS8MwED\\_mhjIf\\_JiKn2NPexA32vTLCiLb2JzgFzrBt5K0qRa0k80N9gf7f5jLkjI2BX3rpbk05chdfpfcHYBF6kZtTicw02CxzSNGeBhFsRsZVGCy2I1DHjrMxvDnht4cLqXdrOTgy8dGqNTzNK3d\\_pDvANGruJNx4muNXWRqCN29DQZ5vVV8ykQKLj3i5iIRAWyPk9w6Z76YvNCfLrNt2TBHOmq7A-ZgkSzVmXsT2bXU4DiVzq3dXHdWTI7Q\\_4NjAAzpk7PU5GPHqWHx4Zi5nWgssQYEGHsvD2szroNXIVqRQJ8L-KwMtbYtASwJwILwkBkalEs-X9Y8wcZ\\_l289IEGF1MASWTAnLRTePym-VsVvkq35XmdBWtmZ2MnvLbq7A-7FMIEMMUD6MZS9zZgALH8IxNyPG0BMV7XYlhUoIVfb16C0qPH5yHrxWaRhUM1cSjg20wO-Ieq1ubHz9QLqXgQQ7WDuTTfsp3oSJOjs3FvskzuPgTxlgYMepQSnhE7dj9uD47-Pu\\_6fzARRlbRjpkDmEPAr7CJYVd3lBqmUoiL1G--Yb3hzeCw](http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwIV3dS8MwED_mhjIf_JiKn2NPexA32vTLCiLb2JzgFzrBt5K0qRa0k80N9gf7f5jLkjI2BX3rpbk05chdfpfcHYBF6kZtTicw02CxzSNGeBhFsRsZVGCy2I1DHjrMxvDnht4cLqXdrOTgy8dGqNTzNK3d_pDvANGruJNx4muNXWRqCN29DQZ5vVV8ykQKLj3i5iIRAWyPk9w6Z76YvNCfLrNt2TBHOmq7A-ZgkSzVmXsT2bXU4DiVzq3dXHdWTI7Q_4NjAAzpk7PU5GPHqWHx4Zi5nWgssQYEGHsvD2szroNXIVqRQJ8L-KwMtbYtASwJwILwkBkalEs-X9Y8wcZ_l289IEGF1MASWTAnLRTePym-VsVvkq35XmdBWtmZ2MnvLbq7A-7FMIEMMUD6MZS9zZgALH8IxNyPG0BMV7XYlhUoIVfb16C0qPH5yHrxWaRhUM1cSjg20wO-Ieq1ubHz9QLqXgQQ7WDuTTfsp3oSJOjs3FvskzuPgTxlgYMepQSnhE7dj9uD47-Pu_6fzARRlbRjpkDmEPAr7CJYVd3lBqmUoiL1G--Yb3hzeCw).

<sup>22</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation*, Book, Whole, 161. (London;New York; Routledge, 2002),

[http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwIV3dS8MwED\\_mhjIf\\_JiKn2NPexA32vTLCiLb2JzgFzrBt5K0qRa0k80N9gf7f5jLkjI2BX3rpbk05chdfpfcHYBF6kZtTicw02CxzSNGeBhFsRsZVGCy2I1DHjrMx](http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwIV3dS8MwED_mhjIf_JiKn2NPexA32vTLCiLb2JzgFzrBt5K0qRa0k80N9gf7f5jLkjI2BX3rpbk05chdfpfcHYBF6kZtTicw02CxzSNGeBhFsRsZVGCy2I1DHjrMx)



the paradox is that it seems impossible to know that God is transcendent because it requires knowing what about him is beyond their experience, which if they know, they no longer need to know.<sup>23</sup> A biblical account of how God expresses his transcendent reality through paradoxical doctrines can help provide an answer to this question.

The term, “paradox,” is defined by James Anderson as, “a set of claims which taken in conjunction appear to be logically inconsistent.”<sup>24</sup> He notes that his definition only implies the appearance of contradiction, not the necessity of it.<sup>25</sup> Anderson argues that the doctrines of the trinity and hypostatic union do indeed contain the appearance of contradiction, and that all attempts to remove the appearance of contradiction end in a heretical reduction that violates the doctrine being expressed in Scripture.<sup>26</sup> He presents a model for understanding paradoxes in Christian theology as instances of a, “Merely Apparent Contradiction Resulting from an Unarticulated Equivocation,” or in the acronym he coined, “MACRUE.”<sup>27</sup> Anderson argues that the terms causing the appearance of contradiction simply need to be articulated to avoid equivocation.<sup>28</sup> In the case of the trinity, the sense in which the Father *is* not the son, is different from the sense in which the Father *is* God.<sup>29</sup> Anderson argues that if the distinction between the

---

[vDnht4cLqXdrOTgy8dGqNTzNK3d\\_pDvANGruJNx4muNXWRqCN29DQZ5vVV8ykQKLj3i5ilRAWyPk9w6Z76YvNCfLrNt2TBHOmq7A-ZgkSzVmXsT2bXU4DiVzq3dXHdWTI7Q\\_4NjAAzpk7PU5GPHqWHx4Zi5nWgssQYEGHsvD2szroNXIVqRQJ8L-KwMtbYtASwJwILwkBkaIEs-X9Y8wcZ\\_I289IEGF1MASWTAnLRTePym-VsVkg35XmdBWtmZ2MnvLbq7A-7FMIEMMUD6MZS9zZgALH8IxNyPG0BMV7XYlhUoIVfb16C0qPH5yHrxWaRhUM1cSjg20wO-1eq1ubHz9QLxgQQ7WDuTTfsp3oSJ0js3FvskzuPgTxlgYMepQSnhE7djz9uD47-Pu\\_6fzARRIbRjpkDmEPAr7CJYVd3lBqmUoiL1G--Yb3hzeCw.](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/djrc/vol6/iss1/3)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>24</sup> James Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of Its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status*, 5. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Theological Monographs, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>28</sup> James Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of Its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status*, 225. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Theological Monographs, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 226.

“is” of personhood and the “is” of essence is maintained, there is no genuine contradiction.<sup>30</sup> In harmonizing this idea with God’s incomprehensibility he states that while these distinctions can be articulated, human beings lack the ability to, “see *how* God can be *F* in one respect and not-*F* in another respect.”<sup>31</sup> In summary, what Anderson is arguing, is that a Christian can rationally affirm paradoxical doctrines by believing they are instances of a MACRUE, and making the appropriate distinction to avoid equivocation, even if he does not claim to comprehend the distinction made.

One way of resolving the learner’s paradox is to argue that it is possible for a person to know what they do not know. Consider the case of a person who is made aware of a question they do not know the answer to, such as a person presented with a giftwrapped box who is asked what is inside. Such a person knows that they do not know what is inside the box. All paradoxes present a question. The learner’s paradox asks the question as to how anything can be learned. Genuinely contradictory paradoxes pose a question with no possible answer, whereas a MACRUE poses a question whose answer is not yet understood. In the case of the trinity, the question is how three persons can share one essence, not how one can be three in the same sense at the same time. The former can have an answer, even if it is beyond the realm of human experience, while the latter cannot because it is definitionally incoherent. This distinguishes the Christian expression of transcendence and paradox from obscure ideas found in Gnosticism such as, "Congratulations to the one who came into being before coming into being."<sup>32</sup> In this case, the question as to how one could come into being before coming into being has no possible answer because there is no unarticulated equivocation in terms. This statement simply negates

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer, trans., “The Gospel of Thomas Collection - Translations and Resources,” accessed August 3, 2020, <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gosthom.html>.

itself and communicates nothing. The trinity, however, only appears contradictory because it establishes categories that humans do not have normal experience with.

Andrew Moore makes distinctions in how language is meaningful, two of which, are semantic and teleological meaning.<sup>33</sup> He expresses this distinction with the promises of God by asserting that promises made to Israel have a semantic meaning easily understood by them, and a teleological meaning that awaited fulfillment by God at a later time.<sup>34</sup> With paradoxes in Christian theology, the semantic meaning of the individual propositions is apparent. The idea that Jesus is God has plain semantic meaning, as does the idea that Jesus is man. Taken in conjunction, however, they convey teleological meaning that awaits an answer to the question as to how one person can have two natures. So Christian paradox meaningfully communicates to a person what they do not know, but can hope to know when, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, believers will no longer see in a mirror dimly.

The Bible begins with the assumption that God really exists as a personal being who speaks the world into existence. This establishes the creator-creature distinction in such a way as to allow the creator to bestow knowledge about reality as it truly is to humans made in his image. It implies he is able to communicate with language because he is essentially a speaking person, implying language is not a development within creation. He is thus able to express who he is in language, though his expression necessarily introduces questions humans will not yet have the

---

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Moore and Inc NetLibrary, *Realism and Christian Faith: God, Grammar, and Meaning*, Book, Whole, 160. (Cambridge, UK; New York; Cambridge University Press, 2003), [http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE8wSDVOA\\_Z40YO2bIGpmnpxqbGJulgI6rN0U1EcBXxph5hhk6uFu4uTGxFCHfFpBRSX86i\\_EImek0xKhSQI8ywnaGQGZagWpgpxqC6kbbEuKSIPVIFs9QPOyailJtnk5qUnZEEYikOHoZ2toBDRfhBnYhzMwYWHgNzD08XQKjOf2o0PinR3hGcUQVPAbmRiD974C609QrQ47zQfGB1ZWAsX5iVCXGxgCGaVINZebIANrKmg7gxADU2qeMAMHbAWyCINOUCro7MNchcS8FAXIEOPAIKKOlphZkiHKYOjmGuLsoYtudDx0tCceaD-wz2RqDDp4Htj6Bza3xBhY8vLzUiUYFCxNUtISk4HFm6mlgYIJMrCnYGSZZJkZJhiYWqaZGwgyaBFvLIspCiWZuACr4IDj13IMLCAIKOWgR2qWw4jpAHpcKPO](http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE8wSDVOA_Z40YO2bIGpmnpxqbGJulgI6rN0U1EcBXxph5hhk6uFu4uTGxFCHfFpBRSX86i_EImek0xKhSQI8ywnaGQGZagWpgpxqC6kbbEuKSIPVIFs9QPOyailJtnk5qUnZEEYikOHoZ2toBDRfhBnYhzMwYWHgNzD08XQKjOf2o0PinR3hGcUQVPAbmRiD974C609QrQ47zQfGB1ZWAsX5iVCXGxgCGaVINZebIANrKmg7gxADU2qeMAMHbAWyCINOUCro7MNchcS8FAXIEOPAIKKOlphZkiHKYOjmGuLsoYtudDx0tCceaD-wz2RqDDp4Htj6Bza3xBhY8vLzUiUYFCxNUtISk4HFm6mlgYIJMrCnYGSZZJkZJhiYWqaZGwgyaBFvLIspCiWZuACr4IDj13IMLCAIKOWgR2qWw4jpAHpcKPO).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

answers to. People are therefore able to know and express true information about God, even though they are not able to comprehend how all of the information coheres. God's revelation about himself is not blatantly incoherent, however, it is intentionally designed to necessitate trust in him as to how it does cohere.

## Bibliography

Anderson, James. *Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of Its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status*. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Theological Monographs, 2007.

Barth, Karl, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance. *Church Dogmatics*. Vol. 3. Book, Whole. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936.  
[http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE0wtTU1S05ItU0xBScbINDXNwiAVdGNNWnKaqZkxaK-  
yo5ljkKmHu4mTGxPDRdjWGNgRs4k5uY1Y9juAdq6CVjpWwu6ass-  
ETrGDRpoMDH08nULjgb3gEBzRDI5RYM\\_aNhN07imwcWQMbLCYg5vNhmY68BFDVz-  
14rJksELnEH-  
1U3rM9Lz8oISQGO82AEgVSVFpalqZUBLkOy1guV4ZgZWYF\\_F2ISFgR9JOt7ZMYSbQaA  
4PxHqUQNDIKMUqYZzE2RgTQVtexBiYErNE2bggK1UFmEQgNwXpZCSnw4-  
3bVYIMHQzTXE2UMX3bx46FBQPIYfjcUYWPLY81IIGBQsQFtFjJNSE40sLUzSUoDtRvO0J  
FCD0cwoDdjNpBk0CLEXCISFEszcAGbkdCBDRkGFIBAjKwQ3XLYYQYAIhFtb4.](http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE0wtTU1S05ItU0xBScbINDXNwiAVdGNNWnKaqZkxaK-<br/>yo5ljkKmHu4mTGxPDRdjWGNgRs4k5uY1Y9juAdq6CVjpWwu6ass-<br/>ETrGDRpoMDH08nULjgb3gEBzRDI5RYM_aNhN07imwcWQMbLCYg5vNhmY68BFDVz-<br/>14rJksELnEH-<br/>1U3rM9Lz8oISQGO82AEgVSVFpalqZUBLkOy1guV4ZgZWYF_F2ISFgR9JOt7ZMYSbQaA<br/>4PxHqUQNDIKMUqYZzE2RgTQVtexBiYErNE2bggK1UFmEQgNwXpZCSnw4-<br/>3bVYIMHQzTXE2UMX3bx46FBQPIYfjcUYWPLY81IIGBQsQFtFjJNSE40sLUzSUoDtRvO0J<br/>FCD0cwoDdjNpBk0CLEXCISFEszcAGbkdCBDRkGFIBAjKwQ3XLYYQYAIhFtb4.)

Bavinck, Herman. *The Doctrine of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977.

Clark, Gordon. "Logic and Language by Gordon H. Clark | The Gordon H. Clark Foundation," May 11, 2015. Accessed July 11, 2020. <https://gordonhclark.reformed.info/logic-and-language-by-gordon-h-clark/>.

Frame, John. "God and Biblical Language: Transcendence and Immanence." Last modified June 14, 2012. Accessed July 11, 2020. <https://frame-poythress.org/god-and-biblical-language-transcendence-and-immanence/>.

Moore, Andrew, and Inc NetLibrary. *Realism and Christian Faith: God, Grammar, and Meaning*. Book, Whole. Cambridge, UK; New York; Cambridge University Press, 2003.  
[http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE8wSDVOA\\_Z40YO2blGpmnpxqbGJulGI6rN0U1EcBXxph5hhk6uFu4uTGxFCHfFpBRsX86i\\_Elmek0xKhSQI8ywnaGOGZagWpgpxqC6kbbEuKSIPVIFs9QPOyailJtnk5qUnZEEYikOHOZ2toBDrfhBnYhzMwYWHgNzD08XQKjQf2o0PinR3hGcUQVPAbmRiD974C609QrQ47zQfGB1ZWAsX5iVCXGxgCGaVINZebIANrKmg7gxADU2qeMAMHbAWyCIN0UCro7MNchcS8FAXIEQPAIKKQlphZkiHKYOjmGuLsoYtudDx0tCceaD-  
wz2RqDDp4Htj6Bza3xBhY8vLzUiUYFCxNUtISk4HFm6mlgYIJMrCnYGSZZJkZJhiYWqaZGwgyaBFvLISpCiWZuACr4IDj13IMLCAIkOWgR2qWw4jpAHpcKPO.](http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE8wSDVOA_Z40YO2blGpmnpxqbGJulGI6rN0U1EcBXxph5hhk6uFu4uTGxFCHfFpBRsX86i_Elmek0xKhSQI8ywnaGOGZagWpgpxqC6kbbEuKSIPVIFs9QPOyailJtnk5qUnZEEYikOHOZ2toBDrfhBnYhzMwYWHgNzD08XQKjQf2o0PinR3hGcUQVPAbmRiD974C609QrQ47zQfGB1ZWAsX5iVCXGxgCGaVINZebIANrKmg7gxADU2qeMAMHbAWyCIN0UCro7MNchcS8FAXIEQPAIKKQlphZkiHKYOjmGuLsoYtudDx0tCceaD-<br/>wz2RqDDp4Htj6Bza3xBhY8vLzUiUYFCxNUtISk4HFm6mlgYIJMrCnYGSZZJkZJhiYWqaZGwgyaBFvLISpCiWZuACr4IDj13IMLCAIkOWgR2qWw4jpAHpcKPO.)

Poythress, Vern S. *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language: A God-Centered Approach*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2009.

Smith, James K. A. *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation*. Book, Whole. London;New York; Routledge, 2002.

[http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwIV3dS8MwED\\_mhjIf\\_JiKn2NPexA32vTLCiLb2JzgFzrBt5K0qRa0k80N9gf7f5jLkjI2BX3rpbk05chdfpfcHYBF6kZtTiew02CxzSNGeBhFsRsZVGCy2I1DHjrMxvDnhtt4cLqXdrOTgy8dGqNTzNK3d\\_pDvANGruJNx4muNXWRqCN29DQZ5vVV8ykQKLj3i5iIRAWyPk9w6Z76YvNCfLrNt2TBHOHmq7A-ZgkSzMxS2bXU4DiVzq3dXHdWTI7Q\\_4NjAAzpk7PU5GPHqWHx4Zi5nWgssQYEGHsvD2szroNXIVqRQJ8L-KwMtbYtASwJwILwkBkalEs-X9Y8wcZ\\_1289IEGF1MASWTAnLRTEpym-VsVqk35XmdBWtmZ2MnvLbq7A-7FMIEMMUD6MZS9zZgALH8IxNyPG0BMV7XYlhUoIVfb16C0qPH5yHrxWaRhUM1cSjg20wO-1eq1ubHz9QLqXgQQ7WDuTTfsp3oSJ0js3FvskzuPgTxlgYMepQSnHE7djz9uD47-Pu\\_6fzARR1bRjpkDmEPAr7CJYVd3lBqmUoiL1G--Yb3hzeCw.](http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwIV3dS8MwED_mhjIf_JiKn2NPexA32vTLCiLb2JzgFzrBt5K0qRa0k80N9gf7f5jLkjI2BX3rpbk05chdfpfcHYBF6kZtTiew02CxzSNGeBhFsRsZVGCy2I1DHjrMxvDnhtt4cLqXdrOTgy8dGqNTzNK3d_pDvANGruJNx4muNXWRqCN29DQZ5vVV8ykQKLj3i5iIRAWyPk9w6Z76YvNCfLrNt2TBHOHmq7A-ZgkSzMxS2bXU4DiVzq3dXHdWTI7Q_4NjAAzpk7PU5GPHqWHx4Zi5nWgssQYEGHsvD2szroNXIVqRQJ8L-KwMtbYtASwJwILwkBkalEs-X9Y8wcZ_1289IEGF1MASWTAnLRTEpym-VsVqk35XmdBWtmZ2MnvLbq7A-7FMIEMMUD6MZS9zZgALH8IxNyPG0BMV7XYlhUoIVfb16C0qPH5yHrxWaRhUM1cSjg20wO-1eq1ubHz9QLqXgQQ7WDuTTfsp3oSJ0js3FvskzuPgTxlgYMepQSnHE7djz9uD47-Pu_6fzARR1bRjpkDmEPAr7CJYVd3lBqmUoiL1G--Yb3hzeCw.)

Taber, Tyler, and Tyler Dalton McNabb. “Is the Problem of Divine Hiddenness a Problem for the Reformed Epistemologist?” *The Heythrop Journal* 59, no. 5 (2018): 783–793.

White, Roger M. *Talking about God: The Concept of Analogy and the Problem of Religious Language*. Book, Whole. Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT; Ashgate, 2010.

[http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwIV3dS8MwED\\_mhqIPOnUyv8ae9iButGIXG0Gk--oGswPtnkvWplKYLWxu4L\\_uk7nalrIp6FuTXMORS693l\\_tdABTSkpobOoEqKvV0MmNM8oTK5IRx4kszkIOueNxH3LChGc\\_toal2BgX4TKExaYIZNn9jP-AdELmKmY4f6V1Tj0FyxI6RJkkejzpTR3jB9i9ijiUqPOuHAOueypqwillTErQizWdZuA\\_yede1OmDw01ycIVaxpSbPOLLYtxrLtRvP2LUnjVUreA2jBccO7sScItX7YsUba8FNjsH7VDXsQImgk1aEw9yw0zXsLHSEh3XCjkCYGiJP8WRSizFrWAtP0RS8h1BDywVHaFLXKqXM1bmKiZN2Rk8O4GgZsWThJVk8rHJ\\_3EEZShxhGMdQ4OEJ7KWZ06dQttkcw\\_v1OKW6bkZeBeRB3-4Om5sTOKlsytladOUMimEU8irU9ZkrtoRoiK-2VeJTnbttLjgVm44LXeSew83f5734D\\_El7H8nCWck5QqKKLBr2E3erm1JpgZVY\\_xkOFPLENvdtPo9ZzgZ90aW-flFW3jZ6A.](http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwIV3dS8MwED_mhqIPOnUyv8ae9iButGIXG0Gk--oGswPtnkvWplKYLWxu4L_uk7nalrIp6FuTXMORS693l_tdABTSkpobOoEqKvV0MmNM8oTK5IRx4kszkIOueNxH3LChGc_toal2BgX4TKExaYIZNn9jP-AdELmKmY4f6V1Tj0FyxI6RJkkejzpTR3jB9i9ijiUqPOuHAOueypqwillTErQizWdZuA_yede1OmDw01ycIVaxpSbPOLLYtxrLtRvP2LUnjVUreA2jBccO7sScItX7YsUba8FNjsH7VDXsQImgk1aEw9yw0zXsLHSEh3XCjkCYGiJP8WRSizFrWAtP0RS8h1BDywVHaFLXKqXM1bmKiZN2Rk8O4GgZsWThJVk8rHJ_3EEZShxhGMdQ4OEJ7KWZ06dQttkcw_v1OKW6bkZeBeRB3-4Om5sTOKlsytladOUMimEU8irU9ZkrtoRoiK-2VeJTnbttLjgVm44LXeSew83f5734D_El7H8nCWck5QqKKLBr2E3erm1JpgZVY_xkOFPLENvdtPo9ZzgZ90aW-flFW3jZ6A.)

Patterson, Stephen, and Marvin Meyer, trans. “The Gospel of Thomas Collection - Translations and Resources.” Accessed August 3, 2020. <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gosthom.html>.