IAN RAMSEY–A LINGUIST'S VIEW OF MIRACLE

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Ian Ramsey could be called a theological linguist for he is convinced that the contemporary philosophical interest in language can be so developed as to provide a novel inroad into the problems and controversies of theology, illuminating its claims and reforming its apologetic. As Ramsey sees it the theological linguist can both clarify the logic of theological language and provide a logical structure which relates religious key-words to all language logics. Disturbed by the cleavage between the findings of logical empirical philosophy and the dogmatic assertions of Christianity, Ramsey attempts to formulate the faith in terms congenial to logical empiricism. And logical empiricism may briefly be denoted as the attempt to describe and classify *all* those ways of using language that are of logical importance. The linguist sees it as his particular task to clarify the logic of theological language. "It is plain that contemporary philosophy lays on us an urgent task and duty, viz. to elucidate the logic of theological assertions; . . . to state a case for religious language; to try to elucidate the logic of some of its characteristic claims" (*Religious Language*, p. 14; hereafter *RL*).[1]

This article attempts to outline Ramsey's thought, particularly as related to the concept of miracle; and it is divided as follows. First of all, there is a straightforward presentation of Ramsey's three fundamental assumptions. Secondly, there is his specific approach to the concept of miracle. Finally, these assumptions and his treatment of miracle are critically evaluated.

I.

In order to carry out his taks of elucidation Ramsey asks: to what kind of situation does religion appeal? or what kind of empirical anchorage have theological words? Religious situations are characterized by two associated elements. First, religious situations involve a discernment which goes beyond the mere observation of an objective fact: and secondly, they involve a commitment which arises by way of an appropriate response to the discernment. A religious situation is characterized by a discernment-commitment: this is the first assumption of the linguist. But what specifically does Ramsey mean by discernment and by commitment?

[1]Ramsey, I. T. *Religious Language*. London: S.C.M. Press Ltd., 1957.

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Discernment is that virtue without which "no distinctive theology will ever be possible; a 'self-awareness' that is more than 'body awareness' and not exhausted by spatio-temporal 'objects.' Such a discernment lies at the basis of religion, whose characteristic claim is that there are situations which are spatio-temporal and more. Without such 'depth'; without this 'unseen', no religion will be possible" (*RL*, 15). In a religious situation, this discernment goes beyond the mere noting of an objective fact. Consequently, "religious language is no set of labels for a group of hard objective 'facts' glanced at by passive observers" (*RL*, 26). In such a religious situation, with such a discernment, the only appropriate response is commitment – total commitment, involving a personal revolution. "We see religious commitment as a *total* commitment to the *whole* universe; something in relation to which argument has only a very odd function; its purpose being to tell such a tale as evokes the 'insight', the 'discernment' from which the commitment follows as a response. Further, religious commitment is something bound up with key words whose logic no doubt resembles that of the words which characterize personal loyalty as well as that of the axioms of mathematics, and somehow combines features of both, being what might be called 'specially resistant' posits, 'final' end-points of explanation, key-words suited to the whole job of living – 'apex' words" (*RL*, 37). And such a 'key' or 'apex' word is 'God'.

The religious situation is characterized as a discernment-commitment. This means that such situations are complicated – even 'odd' – when compared with other situations in life. Consequently, the linguist believes that the language which applies to a religious situation will be appropriately odd in its logical structure, even if grammatically it appears similar to ordinary factual logic. That religious language *does* exhibit a suitably odd logical structure is the second fundamental assumption of the linguist. And religious language is logically odd in at least two ways.

First, if religious language has to talk about situations which are perceptual with a difference, perceptual and more: that is to say, object language which has been given very special qualifications, object language which shows logical peculiarities, then we should expect that language to be appropriately odd in logical structure. But have we any general guide to this logical peculiarity? "Does not the way in which distinctively *personal* situations closely parallel those which are *characteristically religious*, suggest a close logical kinship between 'I' and 'God'? Both, by the standards of observational language, are odd in their logical behaviour" (*RL*, 38). The true 'I' is something more than my body, my actions, even my thinking . The true 'I' escapes the categories of objective language, though the 'I' is at the

same time tied to this language. And Ramsey argues, the word 'God' stands in much the same relation to world-language as the word 'I' stands to body-language. "The central problem of theology is how to use, how to qualify, observational language so as to be suitable currency for what in part exceeds it – the situations in which theology is founded. At any rate, 'I' will never cease to be a useful guide for us when we are confronted with puzzles about 'God'" (*RL*, 38). The second characteristic of religious language is that it contains significant tautologies: "tautologies whose function is to command those key words – those ultimates of explanation – which arise in connection with religious language, and especially with its character as a commitment" (*RL*, 40). Such a tautology is 'God is Love'. "We all know the phrase 'God is Love' has been criticized as being a platitude, because it is alleged to say nothing. But may not this be because it has the logical form of a tautology? If so, we misunderstand it if we do not see it as a *significant* tautology labelling a commitment" (*RL*, 46).

What Ramsey is saying is that the religious situation demands and needs a logic of its own, and the theological linguist sees it as his task to formulate this religious logic. But he goes on to say more than this. As we have noted, Ramsey believes that religious language deals particularly with apex or key words, key words suited to the whole job of living. And the key key-word is, of course, 'God'. So while the linguist constantly reiterates that the concept 'God' has no place in strict scientific language, yet 'God' can act "in the sense of 'answering' limiting questions" not only in the field of science but in all other fields as well (*Miracles*, p. 13; hereafter *M*).[2] In other words, what is needed is a logical structure which relates the key or apex words to all language logics. Ramsey examines the language of science and the language of history and believes that "they each require, though in different ways, words with a different logic altogether. . . . It is the task of metaphysics both to organize the supply of all these supplementary words and at the same time to collect the simplest number of them to fulfill their task as ultimate co-ordinators, and then to offer the resultant group as a sort of index to the total language scheme, which comprises the index and the subordinate languages with their several logics" (*M*, 13-4). Thus the task of the linguist is two-fold: first, to clarify the logic of theological language; secondly, to provide a logical structure which relates such a key-word as 'God' to all language logics. Under the second task, Ramsey sees it as his duty to establish "'God's activity' on our language map" (*M*, 18), and so "to unite all the various languages of science" (M, 13). This metaphysical or meta-logical

[2]Ramsey, I. T. *Miracles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.

element, while not absent from *RL*, is given much clearer expression in *M*.

Having established that the religious situation is characterized as a discernment-commitment, Ramsey goes on to consider some of the traditional ways of talking about God. Typical of such language are the elements known as models and qualifiers. For example, in the phrase 'infinitely wise', we have a model, 'wisdom', taken from our experience of people whom we know as more or less wise. But the qualifier, 'infinitely', shows that the model has in this case an odd currency – it is to be developed until 'the penny drops' or 'the situation comes alive' – until the typically religious discernment is evoked and the response of total commitment effected. The linguist also uses the discernment-commitment characterization of the religious situation in talking about the language of the Bible and the language of Christian doctrine. It is the former of these – the language of the Bible – which is of particular importance for our discussion.

The third assumption is that the language of the Bible has an odd logical structure. Since the Bible records religious situations, we can expect a correspondingly odd language formulation. This does not mean that the gospel and epistle writers were all logical empiricists. But they were writing about religious situations – about discernment-commitment situations – and therefore the language of the Bible is written in an appropriately odd logical manner. "They could not help giving their language an odd structure if it was to be appropriate currency for their significant situations" (*RL*, 92). Of course, many of the biblical reports are ostensibly, or grammatically, straightforward factual accounts. But this does *not* mean that the Bible is logically simple and straightforward. In fact, many of the attempts to render the Bible meaningful and significant have failed just because scholars have not realized that the Bible is couched in an odd logical framework. Much biblical criticism approached the Scripture with the tacit assumption that the logic employed was the same as ordinary observational logic. "Let us recognize that, when biblical criticism was in full swing, there lay behind the scientific approach to the Bible the desire to establish biblical facts as incontrovertibly as those facts talked of by science. There was, in short, the desire to find, by means of science, a firm foundation in fact for the religion of the Bible" (*RL*, 97). This mood inspired the search for the historical Jesus, and this search has failed. With this failure went the accompanying attempt to subject the Bible to the logical structure suitable only to science. "We have now come to see, by the development of biblical criticism itself, that the empirical anchorage of the Christian faith is not the kind of situation with which any scientific language, as such, could ade-

quately deal" (*RL*, 97). "As source-criticism (with its *scientific* approach) yielded to form-criticism (with its *literary* approach) may not the time be opportune for form-criticism to give place to a *logical* approach?" (*RL*, 122). Ramsey discusses three ways in which scholars have attempted to give a suitably odd logical structure to biblical events.

First of all, there is the 'fact plus interpretation' theory, suggested in one part of Dodd's work on the fourth gospel.[3] This view holds that the same 'facts' were paraded before both believers and unbelievers; both saw the same 'objects'. But the distinctive thing about biblical history in comparison with secular history lies in the 'interpretation' put upon the 'facts' by the writers of the gospels and the epistles. "The point may be put in another way, and from the standpoint of language. If we say that the facts of the gospels are 'history plus interpretation', the language of the gospels would only be 'odd' in the sense that it was a rather complicated version of a simpler language, viz. the 'plainest' history" (*RL*, 99). Valuable as this attempt may seem, the concept 'fact' seems to rest upon an epistemology with a history dating from the time of Locke: an epistemology which holds that knowledge is acquired by minds which scrutinize isolated and objective 'facts', peering at them from a distance. And the concept 'interpretation' reminds one of nineteenth century idealism. But the philosophies of which these two concepts form a part are now obsolete. "The moral is not to separate facts and interpretation so sharply. . . . The situations to which Christianity appeals are ontological curiosities; they are odd" (*RL*, 102).

Secondly, there is the 'existential' theory propounded by Bultmann and his followers.[4] Here the determining factor is the division between the objective-historical and the existential-historical elements of Christianity. The objective-historical element refers to the events associated with the Jesus of history: his birth, ministry, message, miracles, crucifixion and resurrection. This objective-historical element is open to historical criticism. But the existential-historical element is my total response to God in Christ at the present moment, and this element is not open to historical criticism. True, this present decision is linked in some way with the events which occurred in Palestine some two thousand years ago, but the connection is somewhat tenuous: the existential-historical is related to the objective-historical only problematically. "On this view, the situations to which the gospels appeal are odd enough to be called 'existential-historical' where this description

[3]Dodd, C. H. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel.* Cambridge: The University Press, 1953, p. 447-53.

[4]Macquarrie, J. *An Existentialist Theology.* London: S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 1955.

implies a situation which can neither be identified with, nor made wholly independent of, the 'objective-historical'. An existential approach may be helpful in emphasizing the fact of these characteristics, but to do that, it comprises, and may even exclude any reasonable account of the other, and there we must part company" (*RL*, 106).

Thirdly, there is the 'significant event' theory, accepted as most satisfactory by the linguist, though it was suggested in the first place by Dodd in the above-cited book. Dodd points out that "the events narrated in the fourth gospel are intended to be understood as significant events, *semeia*. . . . To a writer with the philosophical presuppositions of the evangelist there is no reason why a narrative should not be at the same time factually true and symbolic of a deeper truth, since things and events in this world derive what reality they possess from the eternal Ideas they embody."[5] Such a view of 'significant events' involves a fundamental *Weltanschauung*, as both Dodd and Ramsey recognize. "What we have done then . . . has been to show that the claim that the Bible is 'history' is only substantiated if 'history' refers to situations as odd as those which are referred to by that paradigm of the fourth gospel: 'the Word became flesh' " (*RL*, 103). It is this third 'significant event' theory of the Bible which overcomes the difficulties of the first two theories, and best points to the logically odd structure of the biblical history. 'The 'facts' of the gospels in particular are never facts for which science is appropriate currency, or history is appropriate currency" (*RL*, 106).

Before passing to what Ramsey has to say specifically about the concept of miracle, consideration may well be given to his treatment of the resurrection. Ramsey points out that the question 'Did the resurrection occur?' sounds very like the question 'Did Queen Anne's death occur?' But a moment's reflection will show that the similarity is but superficial. If the word resurrection refers to such events as an empty tomb, visions and so on, all these may not only have happened but be believed in, without in any sense there being a Christian belief in the resurrection: that is, without the total commitment which the resurrection surely implies. Again, the qeustion 'Did the resurrection occur?' has not the same logical form as the question 'Did the empty tomb occur?', for the second can be affirmed, while the first is denied. There are even some who deny the empty tomb, and yet affirm the reality of the resurrection. Actually, the question 'Did the resurrection occur' is closely related logically to the question 'Is that a case of duty?' or to the question 'Is that a case of genuine personal devotion?' Think for a moment of the spectator who sees a man jump into a deep river in

[5]Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 142-43.

order to save a child. On the face of it, the action of the man looks like a heroic deed. But there are – to the spectator – other possible explanations of the action. The man may have wanted only the reward, or the fame and publicity resulting from such a rescue. "Here again we have a question, for the answering of which evidence is relevant; but the evidence might all be believed without the question itself being answered in the affirmative. In both the case of the drowning child and the case of the Resurrection, 'evidence' has a strange empirical reference. It must certainly be examined, and is undoubtedly relevant. But in each case the puzzle arises that no amount of 'evidence' alone guarantees that in relation to which it is considered, namely, the 'Resurrection' on the one hand, or 'duty' on the other" (*RL*, 128). For that reason, it is impossible to 'date' the resurrection in the same way as one can date Queen Anne's death. The language of the resurrection applies to a situation which is indeed spatiotemporal, but which is also more than this.

II.

What is a miracle? "Our answer must start from the point that a miracle is a non-conforming event, a *miraculum* whose non-conformity, whose oddness, evokes, gives rise to, what we have called a characteristically theological situation. With a miracle, a situation 'comes alive', the light dawns, the penny drops" (*RL*, 144). The linguist hastens to add that this non-conformity cannot be spoken of as a breach or suspension of natural law. Miracle itself is not a scientific category, it is a term excluded from the logic of science. "We could never conclude more than that 'miracle' had no place in scientific language. Indeed, there is no 'conclusion' about it; the scientist is bound, as a condition of using scientific words, to exclude 'miracle' from the start" (*M*, 8). It is scientifically meaningless to say that God caused such and such an act. "The word 'God' does not work as a high-grade scientific word at all. It is *not* a 'hypothesis'. God-sentences do not belong to the logic of science" (*M*, 9). The man using the logic of science can say: "Whether such events as are commonly designated as miracles have ever actually occurred is a question into which there is here no need to enter. For, even if they did occur, their occurrence would prove, not that the operation of the relevant laws could be suspended by a 'higher power', but simply that we were wrong in supposing them to be universal laws; and then we should be left with the task of trying to find some other laws to put in their place."[6] Thus

[6]Ayer, A. J. *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge.* London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1940, p. 208-09.

the phrase 'breach of natural law' has no special religious significance, if it be considered as belonging only to the logic of science.

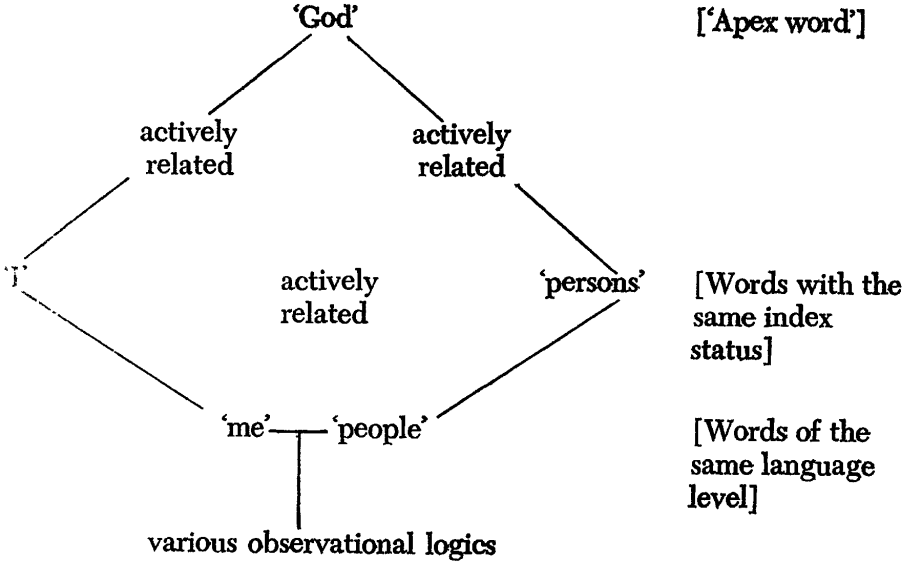
But what structure must the phrase 'breach of natural law' have, and what sort of event will it talk about, if it is to be theologically significant? Ramsey points out that this phrase 'breach of natural law' can be taken as a qualified model: 'natural law' being a model taken from the natural sciences, and 'breach' being a qualifying operator. Then we consider a law, contemplate circumstances to break it, reformulate the law, create a new situation to break it, and so on. The result is that one has the sequence: law, break, reformulate, break, reformulate, and so on. If at any time in this procedure we gain the insight that no scientific law, however often reformulated, ever gives an exhaustive explanation – that something more is needed: a metaphysical apex or key word to answer a limiting question; that the concept 'God' must be introduced to give an ultimate explanation – then one is in a characteristically religious situation (*RL*, 45). But considered as terms of scientific logic, neither 'miracle' nor 'breach of law' have any meaningful significance whatsoever.

Well then, has the concept of miracle any place in the logic of history? That depends, of course, on what one means by history. And Ramsey commences by saying that the language of history is concerned above all with persons. "We suggest that historical language is a technique for naming and organizing *at a concrete level of personal encounter*, such a selection of facts as endeavours to repeat certain 'events as they occurred', and thus to bring them into relation with contemporary experience. True, there are several varieties of history, economic and social history, constitutional history, historical geography and so on, but I still assert that what is most distinctive about historical language, what distinguishes it from law or economics or geography, when the distinctive features of those languages have been severally elucidated, is that history is pre-eminently concerned with *persons*. Its distinctive feature is to use person-words as part of its technique for comprehensiveness, to use person-patterns in its search for concreteness" (*M*, 11). Therefore, the logic of history, with its interest in persons, seems better suited than the logic of science to give meaningful expression to the concept of miracle: for "in a miracle story 'God' has been inserted into a language-frame from which a 'person' word has been deleted. Miracle stories are thus stories of a characteristically personal activity, with 'God' substituted for a person-word" (*RL*, 145).

But what do we mean by a person-word, by a 'person'? What person do I know best? Why I, myself. And as we have already seen, the linguist believes that 'I' cannot be talked about in terms of objec-

tive language. 'I' elude public gaze, yesterday, to-day, and tomorrow. "But what there, it will be said, does 'I' refer to? If 'I' can never be 'objectified' – but always (if the question is raised) distinguished from an objective 'me' – surely it can never be talked about. Hardly. All we can say is, it cannot be talked about in terms of language of ordinary 'observational' logic. . . . It will belong to a language of curious logic indeed; but there is nothing disreputable about that if this language is necessitated by the facts" (*M*, 15). The relation between 'I' and 'me' is the first stage in the lingual meta-logical system.

We are now prepared for a further step. As we have already noted, the word 'God' acts in relation to all world logics in the same way that 'I' acts in relation to 'me' logic. Therefore, the full meta-logical map looks something like this.



(*M*, 17 and 18).

Can a place for the concept of miracle be found on this meta-logical map? The linguist replies that "the question: Can we place 'miracle' anywhere on our language map? becomes: Can we place 'God's activity' anywhere on our language map?" (*M*, 18). And since we have located God's activity, there should be no difficulty in locating miracle, especially when we remember that "in a miracle story 'God' has been inserted into a language form which a 'person' word has been

deleted" (*RL*, 145). In a miracle, "we should be making the claim (to take as an example the simplest case of nature miracles) that there are groups of empirical facts to which the word 'person' is not normally applied which nevertheless demand for their description the word 'person' and in particular the word 'God'" (*M*, 22). In a miracle, we discern God's activity, to which the appropriate response is total commitment. It is true that not everyone may gain this insight, any more than that in the total language map everyone can find a meaningful place for 'God' or 'God's activity': there is, in some sense, a paradox about miracle. "Miracle stories are endeavours in terms of public language to express the fact that certain situations possess observable factors of a non-personal kind which by their odd pattern are nevertheless expressive of a characteristically personal activity" (*RL*, 150).

But now the question is asked: is God only active in those situations which demand a 'person' word to make the event intelligible? Of course, replies the linguist, this is not so. Ramsey makes an empirical distinction between two orders of God's activity. "God's 'first-order' activity would be that activity for whose description the logic of science is appropriate. His 'second-order' (or personal) activity, if and when it occurred, would need rather, we should expect, the logic of history, and be indicated in the empirical patterns appropriate to, and suggested by, historical techniques" (*M*, 20). This conception of different orders of God's activity may be schematized in the following manner.

The Phrase:	*belongs to:*	*In relation to which must be placed:*
1. Me-active	scientific language	God 'generally' active; God's 'first-order' activity – 'providence', a word in the theological supplement to science.
2. I-active	metaphysical language	God 'personally' active: God's 'second-order' activity – 'miracle', a word of (metaphysical) history.

(*M*, 21).

The linguist goes on to say that the question 'Do miracles happen?' when regarded as a question of historical language is no doubt better formulated thus: 'On such and such an occasion did a miracle 'M' occur?' If this is to be answered affirmatively, three things must be kept in mind.

First, if to the question 'On such and such an occasion did miracle 'M' occur?' we are to receive an affirmative answer, we must adduce

evidence for 'M'. But we must also remember that we are looking at 'M' from a historical and not from a scientific point of view. So, in looking at the *historical* evidence for 'M', we should keep in mind the two factors – 1) its historical selection and 2) its historical extension. This means that "the bare question as to whether some event 'M' did, or did not occur, is to be answered more, or less, affirmatively according as to whether 'M' does or does not, give a stable historical insight which never loses, but gains significance and relevance as other events (of course in other settings) are adduced" (*M*, 22). As I understand this conception of historical selection and extension, it means that any alleged miracle 'M' must be treated as to its appropriateness with other events of which it forms an integral whole. In brief, is 'M' suitable in the whole context? Does the changing of the water into wine 'fit' the character of our Lord? Is the blasting of the fig tree 'congenial' with the personality of Jesus? This whole conception recalls Lewis' test of appropriateness. "Each miracle writes for us in small letters something that God has already written, or will write, in letters almost too large to be noticed, across the whole canvass of Nature. . . . Their authenticity is attested by their style."[7]

Secondly, if to the question 'On such and such an occasion did a miracle 'M' occur?' we are to receive an affirmative answer, we must presuppose a meta-logical map where God has his rightful place; we must presuppose a fundamental *Weltanschauung* in which God is a meaningful term. "Ultimately the defense of miracle is the metaphysical defense of a personally active God. They stand or fall together" (*M*, 23). "In saying of an event that it is a 'miracle' we are in part commending a map which includes metaphysical words, and in particular the phrase 'God's second-order (or personal) activity'" (*M*, 22).

Thirdly, if to the question 'On such and such an occasion did a miracle 'M' occur?' we are to receive an affirmative answer, we must see in the event that the word 'God' has been inserted into a language from which a 'person' word has been deleted. Ramsey gives a number of biblical illustrations of this (*RL*, 145-56). For instance, the most characteristically personal activity is probably human reproduction: and so the Bible records stories of miraculous births, as in Gen. 21.7 (Sarah giving birth to Isaac).

III.

The attempt to make religious language logically significant is clearly a worthy and necssary attempt. And Ramsey has shown that many traditional controversies could have been avoided had the dis-

[7]Lewis, C. S. *Miracles*. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952, p. 13.

putants recognized different levels of language logic: and, in particular, had theologians recognized that biblical and doctrinal languages have appropriately odd logical structures. For this reason, Ramsey's discussion of the resurrection is most illuminating. So too are his criticisms of the 'fact plus interpretation' and 'existential' theories: he has rightly seen the difficulties involved in both of these attempts to explicate religious language. It is doubtful, however, if his own proffered solution is much better. For one thing, he does not seem to have a consistent understanding of history. This is illustrated in his discussion of the concept of miracle.

In his smaller earlier work, Ramsey believes that he has justified "a use for the word 'miracle' which gives it a distinctive place in historical language" (*M*, 23). In the same book, he says that " 'miracle' is a word of (metaphysical) history" (*M*, 21), a very significant alteration. And in his later book he declares categorically that "the 'facts' of the gospels in particular are never facts for which . . . history is appropriate currency" (*RL*, 106), yet among these facts are the biblical miracles. His confusion over the place of the concept of miracle in history goes back, it seems to me, to a more fundamental problem: the relevance of a particular *Weltanschauung*.

In replacing the 'fact plus interpretation' and the 'existential' ways of explicating biblical language, Ramsey substitutes his own 'significant event' theory, which theory demands a fundamental *Weltanschauung*, as he readily admits (*RL*, 102). But what is the nature of this *Weltanschauung*? In his later book (*RL*), Ramsey only hints at its nature, saying that 'God' is a key or apex word. It is in his earlier work (*M*) that the exact nature of the *Weltanschauung* comes more sharply into focus. There it is pointed out that if 'miracle' is to have meaning, 'God' and 'God's activity' must be placed somewhere on the language map. And the linguist feels that if 'I' can be placed on the map, so too can 'God'. There is "a close logical kinship between 'I' and 'God'. . . . Take 'I'. . . . The *same is true* about 'God' " (*RL*, 38, italics mine). If 'I' is a significant term, then the term 'God' is equally significant: so runs Ramsey's argument. This contention is open to question. True, we can extend the meaning of 'I' to the meaning of 'God', but we do so by analogy only: we must recognize that the two are not *exactly* the same logically. In other words, in going from 'I' to 'God' we are taking not an absolutely certain, but at most a highly probable, step.

One would feel much happier about the whole linguist approach if a tremendous 'as if' were held over it. The way the term 'God' works *can be likened to* . . . The event of a 'miracle' appears in history

'as if' . . . But the interests of a completely logical and inclusive *Weltanschauung* forbids such an analogical interpretation.

The treatment of miracle suffers from Ramsey's ambiguous understanding of history. In his eariler book (*M*), Ramsey lays down a schema whereby anyone can recognize a miracle: accept the overall map and details of the landscape (like the concept of miracle) will automatically and easily follow. And one will be enabled to recognize the difference between God's first-order and second-order activity. This particular conception – a dressed-up version of primary and secondary causation – is open to unfavourable criticism.[8] Moreover, the determination of a miracle by means of inserting the term 'God' where a person-word has been deleted is a procedure which anyone can understand and effect, once the index or key to the whole logical structure has been accepted and mastered. In all these ways, 'miracle' is a concept which any spectator can recognize, handle and manipulate. Yet there is a second and contradictory strain in Ramsey's thought in regard to this concept. He points out that the Bible, by its logically odd structure, *seeks* to arouse in its readers the religious situation; characterized by discernment and commitment. One may *hope* that the 'light will dawn' or that the 'situation come alive' when one reads the Bible, yet no one can guarantee that this will in fact take place. Therefore, on the one hand, a miracle is an event which *demands* for its description the word 'God' (*M*, 22); on the other hand, miracle can only come as an 'insight' of what is spatio-temporal and more: and the insight is in some sense a gift.

Ramsey's work is deserving of attention and praise – a genuine attempt to be a faithful witness in a contemporary manner. Yet his inconsistent understanding of history and his ambivalence about placing the key concept of God in a linguistic *Weltanschauung* leaves his treatment of miracle somewhat unsatisfactory.

[8]Cf. my article "A Contranatural View of Miracle", *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. XIII (1967) No. 4, p. 279-80.