BRILL

Does *Homily* Work as a Theory of Truth?

A Possible Bridge for Patristics and Philosophy of Language

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Summary

Patristics increasingly attracts new scholars. Both philosophers and students of human sciences deserve Patristics for its richness of topics, until now discussed under the label of semantics, ontology and theory of knowledge: Fathers are especially appealing for the content of their writings. Without disavowing such an approach, my paper would like to observe how the Fathers did work. Its concern is rather the *Signifier*, than the *Significatum*. How did the Greek Fathers approach the word of God? Before any writing, they held their talks, in a special form of speech, inherited by the synagogue-proclamation and termed a homily. From a logical point of view, a homily is more profitably approached if it is seen as a "language-game," whose goal was stating the truth-conditions of some crucial sentences proclaimed in their form of life. The homilist succeeded in his task by pairing each sentence of Holy Scripture with a sentence of his own. Thus, the truth-conditions were shown not as a matter of fact, but of replaceable pronouns and other referring expressions.

1 Part One: Landscapes

1.1 *Premise*[1]

Which sort of spin joins today contemporary philosophy to Greek Patristics and *vice versa*? Which trigger does spread many professionals of science and mind[2] to locate themselves into a world so far removed, often imagined as populated by monks, bishops, preachers and mystics? Noticeably, the world of the Greek Fathers, as it emerges to wise students frequenting it, is not so boring as it appears to common people looking from outside. However that may be, for six or seven decades we have been surveying an overwhelming engagement of two such commonly unconnected fields of study. In what follows I will suggest that a key point for this alliance is the notion of the language-game, for it is the better way to compare uses of languages with the forms of life they commit to. In my opinion, an often-missing point by theory builders is the role of the Significant in the characterisation of truth for a given Patristic language. I will try to propose a new account termed a homiletic theory of truth relative to some fourth-century Greek Fathers.

1.2 *A Singular Rescue*

At any rate, this reciprocity between philosophers and patrologists might draft a virtuous circle all around the scientific communities, for it could contribute to dissolving some platitudes on which the scopes and aims ought to be of the so-called post-analytic philosophy of language. Of course, a new alliance is *per se* a constructive fact, no matter how it appears to ordinary people. On the one side, however, how do we make so many people forget the never-ending controversies, such as "faith" *vs.* "reason," engaged by carriers of positivism and supporters of a wider-range knowledge? Moreover, we all are often told that analytic philosophy of language was born to clarify – and, in some way, to dissolve – the problems first posed to the metaphysics of Greek Late-Antiquity (and medieval scholasticism) and then arose, since an intriguing matching-point emerged of Greek philosophy and Christian revelation. On the other side, it is generally accepted that, broadly speaking, the word "Patristics" refers to historical phenomena rather than to philosophical ones. According to this view, modern Patristics could only provide documentary evidence about a rel-

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1   The author is grateful to Mrs. Roswita Bertelsons for her help. Many thanks also to the unknown referees. He would like to dedicate this work to his wise wife Roswita Bertelsons as well as to their children, Sándor Michele and Henrietta Teresa.

2   So Professor Diego Marconi expressed his feelings, specially applying the label "professional philosophers" to those scholars who claim a sort of "purity" as members of the analytic tradition (D. Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*, Turin, 2014).

evant milestone in the progress of humankind towards rationalisation; the study of ancient Fathers might exert just a historical appeal to modern scholars, having missed its very theoretical *pointe*.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that thinkers such as Basil of Caesarea or Gregory of Nyssa – not to mention Gregory the Theologian – become attractive for ever-increasing categories of wise readers. Some of them are philosophers especially attracted by the profundity and richness of the Eastern Christian theory of knowledge. Some others (and myself among them) gradually realised that the significance of the Fathers dwells in the theological-philosophical contents they wrote about, as well as in the significant forms they lived through. In other words, Greek Fathers deserve to be approached not only in virtue of what they *talked about* (i.e. Old and New Testament's sentences), but also in virtue of the languages they *talked through*. Since they commonly used both the verbal and the nonverbal languages, an approach is expedient that could be capable of accounting for the liturgical symbols they *talked in* as well the homiletic approach to the sentences they *talked about*, in addition to the contents of their writings. So conceived, the study of Greek Patristics will appear as a suitable method for accomplishing some crucial tasks of analytic philosophy of language. Still better, our method would be seen as a certain "anthropological way of looking at philosophical problems" connected to the Patristic use of languages and symbols in some given forms of life. Moreover, in my opinion, observing how Fathers did see the world through so many languages seems to be an intriguing way for suggesting some further (quite unusual, though genuinely philosophical) questions to contemporary philosophers. My concern here is to attract attention towards the role of liturgy seen as the form of life where ontology and language-game combine with one another.

1.3　　　*Articulations and Landmarks*

1.3.1　　　Three Ways to Look at Patristics

What is striking in such a discovery of the Greek Fathers is that it is a very recent event. It is perhaps striving to cite here a worrying passage by Jean Bernardi – a well-known historian of the early centuries of the Church – who once claimed in a famous book, how few Greek Fathers quoted in the Papal encyclicals written during the first half of the twentieth century.[3] More recently, Morwenna Ludlow has remarked that for a long time scholars were focused on dogmatic and now on mystical writings and/or authors.[4] Of course, this renaissance is mostly due to the work of thinkers like Urs von Balthasar and

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3　See J. Bernardi, *Les prèmiers siècles de l'Eglise*, Paris, 1950, p. 150.

4　Cf. M. Ludlow, "Contemporary Interpretations," in: *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. L.F. Mateo-Seco, G. Maspero, Leiden – Boston, 2010, pp. 170–174.

Jean Daniélou, who rescued Greek Patristics and opened the mind of Occidental man towards both the epistemological and the philosophical heritage of the Eastern Christianity. However, there could be something further that we may just suppose. Perhaps, the spin of the early modern continental philosophy exhausted; or, rather, the attractiveness of Eastern thinkers expanded its boundaries for causes to be investigated. Indeed, around the fifties of the last century a new territory of study was born, which allows more and more many-facetted accounts of Greek Patristics to emerge.

By just indexing some newly appeared titles, the very catalysing factor of contemporary scholars is the Cappadocian (or neo-Nicene) theology and philosophy, elaborated by Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus. More recently, a very attractive issue is the Cappadocians' philosophy of language (also termed 'neo-Nicene'). Apart from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan formulae, such a Cappadocian "turn" emerges in Basil's books *Against Eunomius*, and in Gregory's three books against the same antagonist (*Contra Eunomium libri tres*), as well as in many other occasional talks and writings.[5] The writing *Ad Ablabium, Quod non sint tres dii*[6] and the short discourse *Ad Graecos, de communibus notionibus* discuss the new "trinitarian semantics" of "God," announcing the threefold personhood of God the One.[7] The famous *Epistle 38*[8] recently returned to Gregory of Nyssa introduces, on the one hand the pivotal distinction of οὐσία and πρόσωπα, whilst, on the other hand maintains the logical equivalence among the notions of πρόσωπον and ὑπόστασις.[9]

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5   As for the Cappadocian philosophy of language see M. La Matina, "Philosophy of Language," in: *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. L.F. Mateo-Seco, G. Maspero, Leiden – Boston, 2010, pp. 604–611.

6   See G. Maspero, *Trinity and Man* (Suppl VC, 86), Leiden – New York, 2007.

7   M. La Matina, "Trinitarian Semantics," in: *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. L.F. Mateo-Seco and G. Maspero, Leiden – Boston, 2010, pp. 743–748; See also, M. La Matina, "Oneness of Mankind and the Plural of Man in Gregory of Nyssa's Against Eunomius Book III. Some Problems of Philosophy of Language," in: *Gregory of Nyssa Contra Eunomium III. An English Translation and Supporting Studies*, ed. J. Leemans and M. Cassin, Leiden – Boston, 2014, pp. 552–578.

8   The attribution to Gregory of such an epistle, previously taken as written by Basil, was recently proposed, on both linguistic and doctrinal arguments, by J. Zachhuber, "Nochmals: Der '38 Brief' des Basilius von Cäsarea als Werk des Gregor von Nyssa," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*, 7 (2003), pp. 73–90. See also: R. Hübner, "Gregor von Nyssa als Verfasser der Sog. Ep. 38 des Basilius zum unterschiedlichen verständnis der ousia bei den kappadozischen Brüdern," in: *Epektasis. Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, éd. J. Fontaine, Ch. Kannengiesser, Paris, 1972, pp. 463–490.

9   It is of common parlance the locution "the concept of person," or "the concept of hypostasis." We have some argument against such an oversimplification, or, perhaps, such a formal abuse of informal terms. As one could easily demonstrate, both terms πρόσωπον

Among the Cappadocians, Gregory of Nyssa became the most representative and original figure, perhaps because he worked in insecure fields between theology and philosophy. It is not easy to report in detail originalities emerging from the newly appeared books and articles, not to count the international colloquia and conferences, devoted to his thought in recent years.[10]

1.3.2   Three Ways of Troubling the Waters

In such great variety some restrictions might limit our investigation. Then, inspecting just those methods, which are more close to problems typically discussed by philosophers of language, it is per se noticeable that three branches of philosophy accomplished serious efforts to discover the forgotten treasures of these Fathers. These might easily be portrayed as follows: (**a**) one works at assigning a logical form to some special sentences and/or texts; (**b**) another aims at sketching the metaphysical framework emerging from the Trinitarian controversies as well as from the writings produced to state the crucial points of doctrine; (**c**) the third one is labouring to formalize the *dogmata* of Christian faith, in accordance with the basic postulates of modern logic. Now, without any pretention of exhausting numerous problems involved in such a partition, I would formulate some remarks about the above listed topics.

1.3.2.1   *Logical Form*

First, let me claim that all these approaches – if taken as mutually exclusive – show clear limits. As for (**a**), it ought to be noted that the study of logical form is confined to the study of sentential form; moreover the main concern of such a logic is the asserted proposition i.e., the sentence that expresses a judgement. One might wonder: "What is about the other languages throughout practised in the liturgy of the Church Fathers?"; that is the same as wondering what the analytics say about sentences and utterances expressing prayers, performative acts or formulae such as doxologies. Modern analytic approaches deal with just verbal elements of the Patristic language. A reasonable question is thus

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and ὑπόστασις are dummies, used just as meta-variables and only in the position occupied by the singular term of a proposition. In Wittgenstein's terms, we prefer not to call them "concepts" for the same reasons we don't call the word "object" a predicate-expression. *Persons* as well as *Things* or *Objects* are not real predicates, for *Quodlibet ens est unum*, as medieval philosophers said. They are better seen as Wittgentein's "internal-properties" or "formal-concepts" (see respectively *Tractatus*, 4.123, and *Tractatus* 4.126 to 4.12721). See also M. La Matina, "God is not the name of God," in: *Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism*, ed. V. Drecoll and M. Berghaus, Leuven, 2011, pp. 315–335.

10   As for Gregory of Nyssa, any new item is inserted with a very philological care by Matthieu Cassin in a running Bibliography.

arising: "Why not study sentences in the liturgical contexts in which they were performed (and accepted) as both having a sense and being-held true?" A complementary question could be formulated about the non-verbal languages as ceremonies or communitarian styles and forms of life; not to talk about the nonverbal symbols and languages also used as ways of assenting to sentences and actions having a propositional content (John Henry Newman gave a relevant contribution in his famous essay on this topic).[11]

1.3.2.2   *Metaphysics*

As for (**b**) metaphysics, its fundamental demand is still: "What is there?", or, even better, "Which structure has to have the world, for our held-true proposition to be true in a sense that justifies our own ontological commitments?" Typically, responses to these questions renounce the appeal to empirical explanation, for metaphysical parlance is formulated in a very general vocabulary of entities and essences or properties and relations. Although some metaphysical statements require it useful to take into consideration the emerging results of natural sciences, the aprioristic character of the discipline is not thereby dismissed. So – even applied to the Fathers – metaphysics overlaps theology, whose task is (as Jean Guitton used to say) separating the Absurd from the Mysterious on the inside of a bundle of statements missing any empirically available evidence. In my opinion this equivalence poses two problems to a philosophy of Christian language. First, some trouble exists as to the kind of entities to be admitted. For instance, the very metaphysical question is "Which the properties of God must be." An additional demand is "Which is the content of the notion of time when compared with the eternity of God?" If it is so, perhaps the question "Is it in the nature of God to have a son?" could be considered as not really a metaphysical demand. Consequently, the notion itself of economy of salvation is deflated of any philosophical stance and depth. The same applies to the following question: "Is it possible for God to be crucified?" It goes without saying that in answering such questions we cannot dismiss as irrelevant the historical aspects of the incarnation.

1.3.2.3   *Dogmata*

The third field is (**c**) that of dogmata. It is perhaps rather a theological than a philosophical ground of discussions. Some connected questions here appear, that are relative to the difference between "grammatical sentences," on the one

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hand, and "factual sentences," on the other.[12] What a grammatical sentence gives us is information relative to a given concept. Just as an example: if one says that "There is no resurrection of the dead," then one learns nothing about the experience of resurrection, whilst he is informed on how he/she uses the concept of being dead. This is what Wittgenstein termed a grammatical sentence. On the contrary, when the Apostle Paul claimed that "It is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead," his Corinthian addressees became aware about both a unique empirical datum and a given act enouncing this datum. The sentences of the Bible are multifarious and could result in ambiguity in some respect. No theoretical framework is known that can teach the modern reader on how to recognise, among the Holy Scripture's sentences, which ones are grammatical and which are not, without previously recognising something as a logical structure. In addition to this, it is noticeable that most dogmata seem to be formulated as nonsensical propositions because of their striking grammar. Let me take as an example the Nicene dogma assigning to the Christian God formula, τρία πρόσωπα, μία οὐσία, on which Richard Cartwright once observed:

> At this point I need to anticipate an objection. It will be said that a philosopher is trespassing on the territory of the theologian: the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery; beyond the capacities of human reason, and hence the tools of logics are irrelevant to it. The objection is based on a misunderstanding. The doctrine of the Trinity is indeed supposed to be a mystery. That simply means however that assurance of its truth cannot be provided by human reason but only by divine revelation. [...] Nor is a mystery supposed to be unintelligible, in the sense that the words in which it is expressed simply cannot be understood. After all, we are asked to believe the propositions expressed by the words, not simply that the words express such true prepositions or other, we know not which.[13]

In case we would share Cartwright's claim, then admittedly we are not requested to believe the sounds or the written words; on the contrary, we are demanded to assent to their content. Accordingly, we are invited to search for any possible device allowing us the correct understanding of what we assent to. Suppose, moreover, a jokingly stated dogma claiming "God is a square circle" had been once accepted as true by a given community of believers in the fourth

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12   The paired notions were clearly formulated by L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford, 1958.

13   R. Cartwright, "On the Logical Problem of Trinity," in: *Philosophical Essays*, Boston, 1990, pp. 187–200.

century. Of course, from a logical point of view it seems nonsensical for it commits to unacceptable semantics. On the other hand, since no evidence can either support or disconfirm such a claim, the believers go straight on. Independently of these ones, let us imagine that another community of believers held true to the same sentence, as manifesting, so to say, some portentous truth about the unconceivable nature of God. Such believers, however, accept the sentence not because they have some grasp of its meaning, but exactly because they do not. "God's form" – one is tempted to paraphrase – "does trespass the boundaries of human knowledge," so everything can be said. This is an amazing case, for we are hurting here at two different utterances, both somehow involving some Godhead by means of one and the same term 'God': are they hereby synonymic utterances? I think they are not. Though really homophonic as to the Signifier, nevertheless they differ in truth. The former is a nonsense, for it is not seriously uttered, whilst the latter is a nonsense for its meaning, if any, is out of range. In spite of this double-faced nonsense, each utterance is accepted by its own group, in force of its use, not by virtue of its form or meaning. No constant meaning or shared truth-conditions are here formulated. Meaning or truth do overlap the notion of use.

This means that, if we have some propensity for denotation-oriented languages, then an intruding worry there is on how to find evidence for checking the meaning of sentences such as this. Furthermore, it must be decided which formal and/or empirical bases one could take such homophonic statements as nonsensical. Unlikely, if we are close to endorse a "language-game"-oriented account of truth and meaning, we could be inclined to recognise that, as Wittgenstein frequently noted, discovering errors or nonsensical sentences is less a matter for grammarians, than is for gamers. If meaning and truth depend on use, then any word in a sentence can thereby be connected with some move of the given language-game. In this case, evidence is based on the form of life the language-move belongs to, as well as on the language-game it exists within.

1.4   *The Topic in Point*

In conclusion of this part, the problem remains of determining what is to follow a rule for a given utterer, when he/she shares a given sentence and/or assents to it. Without any reference to a speaker, or better to a community, these questions remain unanswered: what we need is a clear notion of *use*. Consequently, distinguishing sense from nonsense remains trouble for the analytical dream of regimenting any sentence. Anyway, if we remain with the logical criteria stated in the *Tractatus*, the distinction between sense and nonsense is theoretically possible, provided that any given sentence is neither a logical contradiction nor (at least partly) a meaningless sentence.

Things change if one tries to consider the question with the help of the view emerging from the *Philosophical Investigations*.[14] It is there that Wittgenstein rejects the idea of language as based on strictly syntactic-semantic constraints. Instead of such a monolithic structure, he introduces the flexible notion of "language-games." If utterances are parts of a game, then each word could absorb meaning from the contexts where it is used as a move, regardless of any pre-existing criterion of well-formedness. A context-bound move is a single event in the given shared gaming. As Ajit Sinha noted, since

> [s]uch contexts are like games with their rules known to the players, [t]he meaning of a word is neither attached to the things it names (a word is like a tool that can be used for many purposes) nor derived from the subjectivity of its user. The rules of the game are *objective* and are known to the players who use words in a particular language game.[15]

2 Part Two: On Rules

2.1 *Some Hints for Some Limits*

It seems we need a theory capable of absorbing the lost aspects above mentioned. It ought to be an integrate theory aiming at explaining not only the writings of the Church Fathers, as if they were nothing but theological and/or philosophical commentaries to the Septuagint and to the New Testament.

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14   L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, 1953.

15   See A.K. Sen, "Sraffa, Wittgenstein, and Gramsci," *Journal of Economic Literature*, 41 (2003), pp. 1240–1255. Our quotation is from: A. Sinha, "A Comment on Sen's 'Sraffa, Wittgenstein, and Gramsci'," *Contributions to Political Economy* (2009), No 28 (1), pp. 47–69. An original contribution to such a debate was recently offered by F. Lo Piparo, *Il professor Gramsci e Wittgenstein. Il linguaggio e il potere*, Roma, 2014, pp. 39–65. Lo Piparo's reconstruction of Gramsci's role as indirectly influencing Wittgenstein's concept of "use" is very intriguing and passionate. It is perhaps fruitful to report here a *Note* addressed to Wittgentstein from the economist Piero Sraffa (dated January-February 1932 and reported by both Lo Piparo and Sinha) claiming that: "*If the rules of language can be constructed only by observation, there never can be any nonsense said.* This identifies the cause and the meaning of a word. The language of birds, as well as *the language of metaphysicians can be interpreted consistently in this way*. It is only a matter of finding the occasion on which they say a thing, just as one finds the occasion on which they sneeze. And if nonsense is 'a mere noise' it certainly must happen, as sneeze, when there is cause: how can this be distinguished from its meaning?" Such a Note comes from: *L. Wittgenstein in Cambridge. Letters and Documents 1911–1951*, ed. B. McGuinness, Oxford, 1955. My Italics.

However, a more remarkable story is how to conceive it. Two different paths are present themselves, as shown below:

1.   Typically, at first sight, we *could* sketch an *insensitive theory* (where the label "insensitive" is meant to mark that the truth-conditions will be tested on the base of merely formal constraints). We have no comment to do here, apart from the above-mentioned gaps.

2.   On the contrary, we *would* like the new theory to have a sensitive format – where the label 'sensitive' means that, in addition to (or better, instead of) the formal constraints, further empirical criteria are taken into consideration. By "empirical" is here meant the complex of observations and notions relative to the forms of life of fourth-century Patristic thoughts and practice.

In the latter format, though not in the former, the proposed theory will deal with factual and empirical knowledge somehow referring to sentences both quoted and held to be true by Christian Fathers in their public reading of the Septuagint and New Testament sentences. Regardless of which one we choose, the claim is to be underlined that no present theory could eliminate the risk for the believers to accept nonsensical, or partly unexplained, sentences. We would now give a hint of both the insensitive and the sensitive, in order to compare their advantages as far as their limits go.

2.2   *Patristics in Genere Ritus for an Integrate Theory*
Now, let me briefly hint at a different plan of Patristic scholarship. Working on languages and symbols of the Greek Fathers means to accept learning not only by one's own scholarship, but also from the others'. Such a communitarian dimension of scholarship may perhaps be seen as having a marginal character. In fact, there are many academies requesting their members, coming from different countries and religions, languages and education, to share some form of living together, like attending a conference or a social dinner; if so, let us say, where is the beef? The very peculiarity of Patristic membership lies in everyone's attending not just his proper beliefs on religion and theology, but also the other's. This mix of intellectual stance and liturgical attendance was and is up to now a distinctive character of both the ancient and the modern scholarship of Patristic studies. If things are so, then entering the Patristic community is not inserting each one's well defined scholarship into the other's. Rather, it is recognizing that one's own scholarship just becomes perfect, if, and only if, a symbolic form of life is really – though temporarily – shared under the dimension of liturgies and prayers and hymns and any other language – and sensitivity – any Father did use (and uses up to now) during the ages of Christianity.

Sharing such a Patristics *in genere ritus* could have some relevant scientific consequences for how Greek Fathers are reached and branded. But, the idiom "in genere ritus" indeed suggests a different picture as to the relationship between analytic philosophy and Patristics. Two further possibilities may encourage the students of Patristics to pursue their own goal. The first one is the opportunity to become familiar with the well-known colloquia devoted to the Nyssen's works[16] as well as the famous Oxford Patristic Conferences.[17] And the second one is the opportunity of learning, by acquaintance with the most influential scholars, that what we mean by "Patristics" is not a corporation of scholars all belonging to one and the same group of people.

Rather, "Patristics" seems to be a line traced by continuous intersecting plans of interests. Theologians, philologists, philosophers and scholars of other human sciences endlessly pass through the Fathers and no one thinks of himself as a stranger. Such a feeling gave me the sincere persuasion that so "far-off" a *corpus* of writings, of persons and symbols may conceal some crucial symbols and words that could rescue our Occidental culture from its deflated attitude, also gaining an ever-increasing audience among the contemporaries. Namely, the symbols I present here are not only conceivable as the meanings of Patristic doctrines, or theological disputations. By "symbols" is meant in my project the signifier, or the bodily personification of texts and rites living up to now through the centuries, in spite of wars, plunders and wrecks. Patristics is, above all, a treasure of such reckoned signifiers and forms-of-life mainly achievable by acquaintance. Patristic symbols are words and symbols the Greek Fathers thought of and lived through. Because of the prolonged dereliction where the teaching of the Greek language was neglected, those words are up to now for many people wholly unknown, or known in a wrong way, which is perhaps worse.

2.3 *Attitudes towards Theory*

I would like to recall my crucial question: "How might a philosophical approach to Patristics be sketched?" or, better said: "Which format should it have, in order to be useful to other researchers inside and outside the philosophical

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16   The more recent colloquia were organised respectively in Athens (2000) by E. Moutsoulas, in Tübingen-Freiburg (2008) by V.H. Drecoll and M. Berghaus; in Leuven (2010) by J. Leemans, and in Rome (2014) by G. Maspero and M. Brugarolas. The next one will take place in Paris thanks to M. Cassin. The proceedings are published as *Vigiliae Christianae Supplements* (Brill Publishers, Leiden).

17   The well-known International Oxford Patristic Conferences are four-yearly meetings devoted to many aspects of Patristics and open to any sort of contribution to the Fathers of every time. The Proceedings are published by Peeters (Leuven), in the series *Studia Patristica* directed by various academics.

field?" Two main candidates are in view, whose worth depends on the role such a hypothetical theory-builder would assign to the relation of logic and forms of life.

Suppose, for instance, a theorist takes logic as a species-specific stance, or better as a device resulting from the evolution of a non-human brain. If it is like this, every question relative to the setting of both logical languages and "technologies of word"[18] will be taken as just a historical – but not a philosophical – question. The same will apply if our theorist is a Platonist who takes care of logic, as a world of eternal forms, being indifferent to human conditions.

On the contrary, we suppose another theory-builder who takes as relevant the way in which the philosophical tradition was built up, within the boundaries of a given culture. Moreover, imagine that, by means of a prolonged reading of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, he/she has been given a special sensitivity towards the matching processes of language-games and forms of life. In this case, a chance exists for him/her to accept our crucial question as a preliminary step for redefining the nature and goals of philosophy. In fact, applied to Patristics, Wittgenstein's transition from language to language-games indirectly allows the theory to satisfy the above mentioned sensitivity requirement. Consequently, our theorist could thereby be encouraged to adopt a heuristic method, in fact quarrelling with any other view based on a set of strictly formal constraints. If so, evoking the liturgical dimension of Patristic knowledge, as we did in the above paragraphs, will assume a germinal role, not reducible in principle by the simple question of how to apply some previously shared rules. Moreover, the pursuit of a theory will take into account, so to say, the reciprocal "sensitivity" of the demanded theory with respect to the forms of life to be investigated.

In other terms, aiming at a sensitive theory for Patristics would mean taking philosophy of language as not only a theory for checking propositions or assigning some sentences a logical form in terms of inferential rules or predicate logic. The philosophical approach we have in mind – although limited to just Greek Patristics of the fourth century – is slightly more ambitious. It could help to redefine part of the philosophical charges and objects of the traditional analytic thought. This project might start reconciling both the historical and the theoretical dimensions with the idea that philosophy is not only a system of propositions, but also a form of life. We all, scholars of human sciences,

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18   The relation between "technologies of the word," on the one hand, and "logic", on the other, is taken as very problematic by the so-called oralist scholars. E. g. see the seminal work by W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*, London – New York, 1982.

consider philosophy as a privileged exercise of living in the pursuit of sense. Sense is not a prize to gain, but rather the path. Searching for sense is what gives *the* sense *a* sense.

3 Part Three: A New Account

3.1 *Refusing the Intuition-based Approach*

Speaking in plain terms, scriptural sentences are very similar to any sentence of whatsoever text. Commonly, they are seen as chains of words obeying some syntactic rules somehow resulting in some sort of semantic interpretation. Any intuition-based approach to sentences or utterances suggests that the interpreters could take them as linear combinations of simple language-constituents. Moreover, some sentences are basic, for they do not contain other sentences as parts, while others are not. Accordingly, the supplementary idea is very common that any simple sentence with a "predicate" and just one "argument" is to be seen as true, provided that the argument-places in the predicate are filled-in by means of individual constants.

Just as an example, let me symbolise the sentence: [1] "*Peter is a Jesus' follower*" as [1a] "*To-be a Jesus' follower* (*Peter*)." For simplicity's sake, let us take "*To be a Jesus's-follower*" as non-structured general term. According to both Frege's and Dummett's method, the form [1a] is true, if the predicate "*To be a Jesus' follower* (ξ)" is true-of some given individual named by "Peter." The proper noun "Peter" replaces the symbol 'ξ.' As perhaps it is shown by our simple case, modern logic takes both meaning and truth of any sentence as proceeding together. Of course, things do change with complex sentences, for the scope – or domain – of their (complex) predicates could consist of objects for which we could not possess any proper name. The question arises on how could one extend *salva veritate* the scope of a given predicate. By the way, one must say that the predicate we are here testing, i.e. "ξ *is a Jesus' follower*," first is true-of the object named "Peter" (where the simple-bracketed symbol replaces the ξ). Second, that it is likewise true-of everybody among the twelve disciples. Third, unlikely, it is true-of any further follower, even not yet comprised among the twelve at the time t_0. Unfortunately, we do not know the names of any further follower so that we could replace by suitable proper names each occurrence of ξ in any open sentence. Thus, let us wonder first: "How do we refer to such an unnamed host of followers?" and, at second glance, "How do we determine which ones among the followers are disciples too?"

Let us summarize: the set of followers is the domain of the predicate "ξ *is a follower*": however, it includes at least two sub-sets of individuals. Now, if our tenet is just the system ruled by syntax, then the scope of our predicate admits

of double-rated individuals. Indeed, in the narrow sense the blank in the predicate is filled-in by just twelve disciples, also called apostles, while in the broader sense it applies to any other individual satisfying the open sentence "ξ *is a follower.*" As a consequence of this the open sentence, "ξ *is a follower,*" must be considered as becoming true in double way: on the one hand, if we apply its predicate to the narrow scope, and, on the other hand, if we apply the predicate to the broader scope. Consequently, the domain the predicate is true-of, could be thought of or as (*a*) or as (*b*). The former includes a given number of known objects (the twelve apostles), each one provided with his proper noun. The latter includes the twelve mentioned objects and/or any further object even not provided with any proper name.

3.2   *Two Types of Followers and Two Conditions for Holding a Sentence as True*

What does change as for the truth-conditions? Suppose we have now a context-free sentence like the following one:

[**2**]: *"Each one, who is a Jesus' follower, is a Jesus' disciple."*

Evidently, the truth-conditions for such a complex sentence cannot be stated by means of a list of proper nouns replacing the variables, for we do not know how many objects the given predicate is true-of. So, the symbolisation:

[**2 bis**] *"For any* ξ, IF (ξ *'is a Jesus' follower'*)*,* THEN (ξ *'is a Jesus' disciple'*)*,"*

does not tell us anything about the boundaries of the membership of Jesus' followers and/or disciples. Since the complex [**2bis**] has the form of a universally quantified sentence, it is useless for the purposes of our game. One wonders where the further affected objects are to be found. Or, again, whether a method can derive, from the platitude expressed by the [1], a wider-range application of the truth-conditions. That being the case, if proper names are not enough (or not known throughout), the truth-conditions depend, ultimately, on some device capable of extending the scope of predicates to further individuals having no proper nouns. The question arises as follows: how is it that one may pass from a sentence as "Peter is a follower of Jesus" to sentences like "*Everybody is a follower of Jesus is a disciple of Him,*" without troubling the truth?

If we rest at the solely formal constraints, the results are somehow an amazing ambiguity of scope. This happens for, in such cases, the scrutinized sentences are complex sentences in Dummett's sense.[19] That is, they are built up

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19   See: M. Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language,* London – New York, 1973.

not by enchaining simple symbols and single words (as in the intuition-based account of linear analysis). Complex sentences are somehow built up by means of devices coming from other sentences as *disiecta membra*. Let me quote, *à propos*, an acute remark by Dummett:

> In order to give a complete account of the structure of the sentences of a language, it is necessary to describe the process whereby an atomic sentence is put together out of its parts *as well as the various operations by means of which complex sentences may be constructed step by step from atomic ones*.[20]

This means that the complex sentences are obtained from complex of dismembered sentences, through a "stage-by-stage process of construction." Their truth-conditions seem different, provided that the scope is obtained by means of complex or by simple unsaturated predicates and other similar expressions. It was the German logician Gottlob Frege who, around 1879, taught us to conceive complex sentences as resulting from a staging process of composition. Thanks to his discovery, a new dimension of analysis appeared allowing the analytic processing of natural languages. However, this is too much notorious story for us to have to tell here again. A more interesting point is Frege's parlance of predicates as *unsaturated* expressions. As we have shown, predicate-expressions are the remnant part of a sentence, after the removal of all the occurrences of every proper name. As to this, Dummett explains:

> whenever we understand the truth conditions for any sentence containing (some occurrence of) a proper name, we likewise understand what it is for an arbitrary object to satisfy the predicate which results in removing (any occurrence of) that proper name from the sentence.[21]

First the removal and then the replacing of any 'ξ' does succeed in a true sentence, "provided that we know the truth-conditions of every sentence of the form" we believe expressed in the sentence we deal with.[22]

Of course, Sir Michael Dummett – who was the very discoverer of Frege's logical prominence – did not hide such a difficulty relative to the enlargement of the scope of predicates. Coming back to Jesus' followers, the problem remains how it is possible that we hold true the wide-range sentence, provided we do not know all the names of all the objects that given predicate was

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20   Dummett, *Frege*, p. 23. My Italics.

21   See Dummett, *Frege*, p. 17.

22   Dummett, *Frege*, p. 14.

true-of? The profoundness of such a question is better seen by use of the original words of Michael Dummett:

> What is in question is, rather, whether we can assume that, from a knowledge of the truth-conditions of '$A(c)$', we can derive a knowledge of the conditions under which the predicate '$A(\xi)$' will be true of all the objects in a domain, when we do not and could not have the means of referring to each of those objects.[23]

Frege's and Dummett's complex sentences are the best place for watching the link between semantic and, as we have proposed to call them, homiletic theories of truth.

3.3   *Sketching Worlds through Speech*

It is time now to conclude by fixing some key point of my philosophical project. My thesis is that the philosophy of the fourth-century Greek Fathers is up to now a model for answering many of the questions we posed in the previous parts of this paper. The Cappadocians were homilists. However, not in the modern sense: they were not preachers; their homilies were not sermons or preachings, filled with moral precepts or commands. The homilist's role is neither to admonish nor asceptically comment on the unmovable truth of the Holy Scripture.

Fourth-century homiletics, of course, contain also homilies written or pronounced to rescue a sort of moral sensitivity. However, the basic function of homilies was not a moral one. Basil and both Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa possessed many tools, among them also the rhetorical means of persuading and frightening; traces of perlocutionary behaviour are certainly present in their writings. In spite of this, the Cappadocians were homilists in the pivotal sense of the word. By delivering a homily, they renewed the essence itself of the Christian form of life, for the birth date of this was, properly speaking, the day when Jesus held his famous talk in the synagogue of Nazareth.[24] It happens when Jesus proclaims that "the spirit of the Lord is upon me," that the prophecy of Isaiah become true. Exactly in that point of time the Word did become flesh by means of a homily.

3.3.1   In the Beginning.

In modern times the scholar who investigated both the word and the reference of ὁμιλία, was Maurice Sachot. He considers such a practice as derived from

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23   See Dummett, *Frege*, p. 19.
24   See e. g. Luke 4:16–30.

the so-called "synagogue proclamation." Without entering into the details of his inquiry, it is enough to recall the general form of such a public speech. In the Hellenistic age, the Hebrew nation was dispersed all around the countries of the Mediterranean sea; so, the synagogue rite accomplished an important task in the building up the identity of Hebrew culture. This took place after the destruction of the Temple when the synagogue began the crucial part of the proclamation. In the same years, the same applied to Christian reunions and rites.

The proclamation had a more structured architecture, composed – as it happened since the first century, when the proclamation attained its stable form – of three readings. The first one was taken from the Torah: it was a piece of Mosaic law, or a passage from earlier history. It represented the historical foundation of the alliance between the God and his nation. The second one was from the Prophets: its central position was due to a displacement of the homily, which occupied the third and final place among the readings. The homily, thus, was seen as the conclusion of the synagogue rite as well as the fulfilment itself of history and prophecy.

Let me quote two passages by the most influential book of Sachot. In the first one, it is shown that the author characterises the synagogue proclamation as a complex space of symbolisation, where the notion itself of *reference* is re-formulated in terms of semantic opaqueness:

> Le « monde », entendu comme réalité totale dont l'homme, individuelle-ment et collectivement, fait partie, n'est pas une donnée immédiate, un milieu extérieur et objectivable, comme les sciences nous le font connaî-tre : l'expérience de l'exil a permis de le mettre à distance. n'est saisi dans la médiation d'une parole. Par rapport aux textes bibliques, ensuite, l'articulation tripartite le met à distance: pour être un dire sur le « monde », la parole de vérité (l'*homélie*) s'énonce comme un dire sur une parole écrite (la *Torah*) à travers une autre parole écrite (les *Prophètes*).[25]

In the table below these elements are synoptically shown:

Torah	Prophets	Derashah
Historical ground	Opening to future times	Fulfilment
PAST	FUTURE	PRESENT

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25   M. Sachot, *L'invention du Christe. Génese d'une religion*, Paris, 1998, pp. 35–36.

Maurice Sachot has applied such a threefold partition for exposing the novelty of the Christian announcement. Jesus – and thereafter his disciples – presented himself as the person accomplishing the *Torah*. Jesus was, in Maurice Sachot's peculiar parlance, the homily of Judaism. If this is plausible, the parallelism of synagogue, on the one side, and *ekklesía*, on the other, produced a very astonishing language-game, where the truth-conditions did not depend on being a given sentence true to the facts, as in any theory of truth as correspondence, from Aristotle to Tarski. Speaking with more a technical terminology, the person filling-in the blanks in the Torah's and/or *Prophets'* uttered sentences was involved into the game as having to do with truth. In the second quotation we will show how distinctly such semantics reformulated the truth-conditions for synagogal as well as Christian worship:

> La vérité n'est pas contenue de manière définitive dans la *Torah*. Elle résulte d'une confrontation avec un texte [...]. Elle n'est donc pas close; elle n'appartient pas au passé. Elle est diction constamment fondatrice. la *Torah* est et reste un texte de référence absolu et, de soi, insurpassable. Mais son texte appartient désormais au passé. On ne le modifie plus pour l'adapter à la situation présente. [...] Mais, comme le texte des *Prophètes* est lui aussi considéré comme clos, il ne peut être parole pour aujourd'hui que si, effectivement, s'y substitue une prise de parole nouvelle, une énonciation au sens strict qui, tout en disant en n'être que l'accomplissement, en est en même temps un dépassement. Ce qu'est précisément l'homélie.[26]

Translating this process in semantic terms, the matter may become more intriguing. The basic sentences of Torah and *Prophets* were *closed* sentences, for their predicates were true-of the given historical individuals referred to by proper names and descriptions. How to apply them to any new case of, say, "*being a Jesus' follower*"? The homily did so. During the homiletic talk, sentences were truly re-opened by means of homiletic proclamation. The task of the homily was to remove the historical names, so that life became a sort of filling-in the blanks by the use of true persons instead of solely disembodied symbols.

However, it is up to now an interesting hint for sketching the truth-conditions of Holy Scripture's sentences, according with some empirical constraints that were relative to the form of Christian life. Both the Twelve and the disciples imitated Christ in his ὁμιλεῖν. Both the Apostle Paul and the earlier bishops imitate Christ in the same way. In fact, the more the Fathers were true homilists the more they were true followers of Jesus. Nevertheless, it was during the

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26   Sachot, *L'invention du Christe*, p. 36.

fourth century that Christian homiletics assumed the genuine form of a theory for determining the truth-conditions of the Scripture's sentences. This is especially visible, approaching Basil's and Gregory of Nyssa's homilies, which until now preserve some original character of a public speech. The homiletic game was played by very wise homilists before a substantially unaware audience. The rules were the same ones since that primary talk held by Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth.

3.3.2 The Homiletic Game

If we take the sequence of Text (Torah, *Prophets*, on the one hand, and Homily on the other hand), we shall see that the second segment both contains and names the first one, so pairing two sentences: one from the Scripture and the other equivalent – or better, same-saying with that of Scripture. The homily does gives the Torah's or *Prophets*' sentences a doubled utterance structured as follows:

[3] "'*p*' is true, if *h*",

where '*p*' is the sacred text which is proclaimed, and *h* is the paired sentence taken by the homilist as equivalent or *same-saying* with the first one. If things are seen this way, then *homilèin* is a sentential language-game, searching for a demonstration of the truth-condition of the given sentence '*p*.' There is a difference between *p* (the quoted sentence) and *h* (the disquoting process obtained by a homily). It lies in the fact that I know by acquaintance that *h* is true, for *h* is expressed in my own language, no matter which one, Aramaic or Greek. The sentence '*p*' on the left is couched in the other's language, i. e., in the language of the Fathers, or, better, in the language of God himself. Now, watching carefully at the complex *sub* [3], one easily might note that it is very similar to the so called Truth-Convention (or T-Convention) elaborated by the logician Alfred Tarski:

[4] "'*p*' is true if, and only if, *e*"[27]

If we accept such a Tarski-style reading of the *proclamation form* (both the synagogue's and the church's), we could realise that a homily as such must accomplish the task of showing the truth-conditions of some sentence (bundle

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27 Tarski's seminal talk entitled "The Establishment of Scientific Semantics," was held in 1933 in form of an address given at the International Congress of Scientific Philosophy in Paris and appeared in 1935. English tr. in A. Tarski, *Logic, Semantics, Meta-Mathematics*, Oxford, 1956, pp. 401–408.

of sentences). And it does this, typically, by disquoting the chief sentences. The homily works if it is in some way capable of removing the quotation marks from Torah' and Prophets' proclaimed sentences.

Finally, my proposal is to study the homiletics of the fourth century, especially those which were held and written under the name of Gregory of Nyssa, as it was *en travesti* a theory of some language, the language of Holy Scripture. If this move is accepted, then the next step is to sketch further moves. For the present I cannot add anything, having tried the reader's patience for so long. The statement from my part is that, bypassing any syntax-bound and any semantic-bound theory, the building of our own theory could explain that understanding in the homiletic game is not a matter of fact, but a matter of replaceable pronouns. The work of a homilist is to assign the original person cited in the Holy Scripture a new pronominal reference. Understanding is the same as establishing what the reference of demonstratives[28] has to be for the disquoted sentences to be true of someone. Consequently, the Christian movement originates in Jesus for in his speech, for the first time, the pronoun bearer and the person referred to by such a pronoun do overlap.

I began my paper underlining the improvements accomplished by the Nyssen's scholars of today. I would like to end by stressing again the role of liturgy as the very Christian form of life. Accordingly, if understanding a language is the same as understanding a form of life, what is better than the rescue of the dynamic relationship between words and life? This is my hope and that is my argument.

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28   The demostratives – like personal pronouns, adverbs as well as other constituents pointing at the person-deixis – are commonly considered as an obstacle for Tarski-style theories of truth to be applied to natural languages. This is due especially to the formal constraints stipulated by such theories. Donald Davidson's attempts to bypass the problem seem to me to have resulted in a distortion of both the nature and the task of the demonstratives. On the contrary, in the homiletic conception, the truth-conditions of sentences are not established, as usually, by stipulation; rather, they assume demonstratives as the pivotal truth-bearer, for demonstratives necessarily depend on a context-bound act of confirmation in the proper sense. See: M. La Matina, "Seeing God through Language. Quotation and Deixis in Gregory of Nyssa's Against Eunomius, Book III," *Studia Patristica*, 67 (2013), pp. 77–90.