NAMING GOD: A QUANDARY FOR JEWS, CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

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Patrick J. Ryan, S.J.

Introduction: the Problem of Blasphemy

Henri IV, the Huguenot King of Navarre, finally succeeded in taking the throne of France in 1590 after he renounced his Calvinist roots. Apt but unlikely legend has it that he said, at the time, that *Paris vaut bien une messe* ("Paris is well worth a mass.") Despite his Calvinist upbringing and his subsequent conversion to Catholicism, Henri IV continued in bad habits: he kept mistresses and even made two of his illegitimate sons bishops, one at the age of six and the other at the age of four, and this despite the reforms introduced after the Council of Trent. Although many of the local clergy of Gallican sympathies disliked Henri IV, the French Jesuits did their best to deal with the reality of the only king they had, once he was established in Paris.[1]

The Jesuit Pierre Coton even served as the king's confessor. One of the prevailing vices of Henri IV was a habit of blasphemy. *Je renie Dieu*, he would cry out in a moment of exasperation: "I renounce God." In his typically Béarnais pronunciation, that exclamation by Henri IV would sound more like *Jarnidieu.* Hoping to help his penitent to renounce the evil habit of renouncing God on a regular basis, Père Coton suggested to Henri IV that he substitute for that blasphemy *Je renie Coton*, "I renounce Coton." In the Béarnais dialect that came out as *Jarnicoton*, and the non-blasphemous curse word entered into the French language. On the internet you can find information about a Connemara pony nearly forty years ago named *Jarnicoton*, as well advertisements for a pricey non-sulfite blend of Cabernet and Merlot from

the south of France called *Jarnicoton.* The Jesuits popularized many other non-blasphemous curse words in French of that era. *Sacre Dieu !* ("Holy God!) became *Sacrebleu!* ("Holy Blue!"), a favorite exclamation of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. I believe this French spoken curiosity is the origin of what we call today blue language.[2]

The name of God, and the very fact that human beings are or are not *allowed* to call God by name, has a long history in the world's traditions of faith. This evening, I will concentrate on the privilege and the danger—the quandary, perhaps—that confronts Jews, Christians and Muslims in naming God.

I. Naming or Not Naming God in the Jewish Tradition

In the Hebrew Bible two principal names are given to God, one rather generic and the other quite unique. The generic name for God, *'Elohim,* is plural in form but singular in meaning when it refers to the God of Israel. But other speakers of Semitic languages in the ancient Near East also used words with the same basic root, *'el* or *'il,* to denote a force or forces external and superior to human beings, gods or even something approaching God with a capital G.[3] In the first chapter of Genesis *'Elohim* dominates the action of creation: "When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen 1:1-3).[4]

A shorter version of the name *'Elohim,* or perhaps a vocative form of that name, *'El,* appears in what is called grammatically "construct": God of X, Y or Z or perhaps 'O God of X, Y or Z.' There are several such numinous names ascribed to God and by which God is invoked in the Hebrew Bible, not all of them entirely obvious in their significance. Many of them seem to

be archaisms, especially those found in the Book of Job and in the Psalms.[5] The fact that Biblical Hebrew uses a plural-sounding word to designate the utterly singular God of Israel more than two thousand times should not surprise us. When *'Elohim* is used with a singular verb, it quite obviously means 'God' with a capital G, and when it is used with a plural form of the verb, it sometimes means 'gods.' Psalm 82 plays on this ambiguity, imagining a divine triumph in judicial imagery picturing a single God demoting and finally condemning lesser gods to death: "God ['*Elohim*] stands in the divine assembly; among the divine beings ['*elohim*] He pronounces judgment" (Ps 82: 1). It should also be noted that the word, '*elohim*, apparently plural in form, resembles the plural form of abstract words like *hayyim*, meaning life, and may simply represent an abstraction, "the Divinity." In any case, the earliest Israelite perception of God may be better characterized as henotheistic: exclusive worship of one God ('our God', 'the God of Israel') without denying the existence, power and even threat of other gods ('the gods of the nations').

Such henotheism may have prevailed in Israel at least until the era of Second Isaiah (the late sixth century BCE), when that prophet, famous for his world-wide vision, speaks with God's voice to declare that "I am the LORD, and there is none else; besides Me, there is no god" (Is 45:5).[6] The God of Israel was sometimes addressed with respect as a king might be, or the owner of a slave, or the husband of a wife: *'adoni*: 'my lord.' That term of address was rendered in the plural when it referred to God, a plural that corresponded with the plural form of *'Elohim.* Thus God could be addressed as *'Adonai* ("my Lord"), even apart from the more usual substitution of this royal divine name in speech for the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), to be discussed below.

The text of the Book of Genesis and the rest of the Torah are ascribed by scholars to the human authorship of blended literary sources, referred to as the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E), the

Deuteronomist (D) and the Priestly source (P). All four sources use the more generic name for God, *'Elohim*, sometimes in combination with the unique name ascribed to God in the account of the experience Moses had at the burning bush. That unique name of God belongs to no category of common or proper nouns and is said to be the third person singular form of the name God gave himself (or did not give himself, some would say) when God was speaking to Moses. It is a combination of two identical first-person singular verbs linked by a pronoun: *'Ehyeh-'Asher-'Ehyeh*. Most English translations of the Bible opt for translating that Hebrew name as something like "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex 3:14), often in small capital letters, as does the New Revised Standard Version (1989). The Jewish Publication Society translation (1999) simply transliterates the Hebrew,[7] possibly as a way to avoid controversy as to how it should (or should not) be translated. The name so expressed can be construed as a revelation of the divine name or as a refusal to disclose the divine name, not unlike the refusal to reveal a name by the One who wrestled with Jacob by night: "Jacob asked, 'Pray tell me your name.' But he said, 'You must not ask my name!'" (Gen 32:30).

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, came into existence at various times between the third century BCE and the early second century CE.[8] In the Septuagint, *'Ehyeh-'Asher-'Ehyeh* is rendered in Greek as *Ego eimi ho-on*. Translating this Greek can prove as problematic as translating the Hebrew. Let me start with "I AM THE ONE WHO IS," most neutrally, or "I AM THE EXISTENT ONE."[9] As such this translation of the Hebrew original preserves the personal character of God, a God very different from the Greek philosophical term *to on*, which is neuter: "Being," in a general or overarching and non-personal sense.[10] But it must be said immediately that the Greek translation of the Septuagint not only suggests a metaphysical definition of God, but also, in using a masculine present participle made into a substantive,

suggests subliminally that "THE ONE WHO IS" or "THE EXISTENT ONE" is to be understood as "HE WHO IS." The choice of a masculine present participle serving as a substantive may be less significant than the fact that this Greek translation chooses a personal pronoun, in this case the "unmarked" or generic personal pronoun in the pairing of masculine and feminine possibilities,[11] and by choosing this personal substantive participle it insists on the Personhood of God over a concept of God as a transcendent It.

The Hebrew original of what God said to Moses does not specify or even hint at any gender, since first-person singular verbs in Hebrew have no gender; the same thing is true of the first-person singular verb in the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate.[12] For any human being to speak about God—even for the Scriptures to speak about God—is to stammer. For you to listen to me talking about the Scriptures talking about God may make you think I am not only stammering but even confused. I must also note, to further complicate this subject, that the pronoun between the two verbs of the divine name or the refusal to disclose a divine name need not be translated so personally; it could be rendered "I AM WHAT I AM."

But do the verbs in that name so clearly designate a present-tense God? It is quite possible that *'Ehyeh-'Asher-'Ehyeh* means "I AM WHO I WILL BE," or "I WILL BE WHO I AM," or "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE." Biblical Hebrew has no future tense,[13] dividing all verbs into the continuous (imperfect) and the completed (perfect) modes. Note that within the context of the same chapter of Exodus, just before the revelation of the divine name, future actions planned by God are mentioned: "'I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt . . . I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain" (Ex 3:10, 12).

The great medieval Torah commentator known as Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak, 1040-1104 CE) certainly interprets the divine name disclosed to Moses in the burning bush as future-oriented. According to Rashi, *'Ehyeh-'Asher-'Ehyeh* "means that God "'will be' with them [the Israelites] in this predicament [Egyptian bondage] 'what I will be' with them in their [future] subjugation by other kingdoms."[14] Rashi goes on to say that the next words that follow in Exodus 3:14, "*'Ehyeh* sent me to you," indicate that God is only informing the Israelites about divine accompaniment in their present Exodus distress, without telling them that there will be many more such situations of distress in their future from which they will have to seek rescue from God. Those future situations necessitating divine rescue are, according to Rashi, implied in the second and third words of the divine name (*'Asher-'Ehyeh*: "WHO I WILL BE"). Thus Rashi writes that "[Moses] said before [God]: "O Lord of the universe! Why should I mention to them another trouble? They have enough [problems] with this one."[15] Rashi here follows the lead of the tractate *Berakoth* in the Babylonian Talmud, a work probably completed no later than the sixth century CE: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Go and say to Israel: I was with you in this servitude, and I shall be with you in the servitude of the [other] kingdoms. [Moses] said to [God]: Lord of the Universe, sufficient is the evil in the time thereof! Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Go and tell them: I AM has sent me unto you."[16]

Much more could be said about the divine Self-naming in the Book of Exodus, or the understanding of that Self-naming in later Jewish writings.[17] Moses, of course, had to transform the first-person singular name of *'Ehyeh* into the third person singular ("HE IS/HE WILL BE"), to make clear to the people that he was not speaking in his own voice. The spelling of that third-person verbal name in Hebrew is called the Tetragrammaton, usually symbolized by the four consonants YHWH, or simply by writing twice the consonant *yod*, the first of the four

consonants in the Tetragrammaton. Although the people of Israel pronounced the Tetragrammaton before the Babylonian Exile, in the Second Temple period (approximately 515 BCE to 70 CE) it became customary to substitute for the Tetragrammaton another divine name mentioned earlier, *'Adonai* ("my Lord"), with the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton reserved to Aaron and his descendants, the High Priests, alone commissioned to bless the people with the divine name (Num 6:22-27). When the Masoretic scribes in the late first millennium CE supplied vowels above and below the consonants of the Hebrew Bible to aid in the pronunciation of the consonantal Hebrew text of the Bible, they put above and below the consonants of the Tetragrammaton the somewhat adapted vowels of the word *'Adonai.* Christian translators of the Hebrew Bible into German and some other languages after the Reformation mistakenly read the Tetragrammaton with the vowels of *'Adonai* in such a way as to create the ersatz word 'Jehovah.' Jehovah Witnesses continue this usage down to modern times. Most translations of the Hebrew Bible into English simply print "LORD" (the ordinary substitution for the Tetragrammaton) in small capital letters every time that unique divine name occurs.[18]

In parts of the Torah where the sources are blended, the name of God is, as it were, hyphenated: the Tetragrammaton precedes the name *'Elohim*, the combination translated as "the LORD God." Thus, in the second account of creation in Genesis, considered the work of the Yahwist, we are told that "When the LORD God made earth and heaven . . . the LORD God formed *ha-'adam* [the human being] from *ha-'adamah* [the dust of the earth]" (Gen 2: 4b, 7).[19] *Genesis Rabbah*, a commentary on Genesis written by rabbis between the second and fifth centuries CE, compares the combination of the two divine names, "the LORD" and "God," in the Yahwist's story of creation to the combination of hot water and cold water in one glass by a king; each type of water by itself would break the glass, but combined they temper each other.

God the King in this parable explains his creative process: "'If I create the world on the basis of mercy alone, its sins will be great; on the basis of judgment alone, the world cannot exist. Hence I will create it on the basis of judgment and mercy, and may it then stand!' Hence the expression, THE LORD God."[20] The Tetragrammaton, then, in this tradition of Jewish commentary in the early centuries of the Common Era, is the name of God's mercy and *'Elohim* is the name of God's judgment. We shall return to this tradition in what follows.

II. Jesus and the Names of God

Over fifty years ago I first heard someone from Upstate New York exclaim, "Judas Priest!" The exclamation patently served as a way to avoid the exclamation "Jesus Christ!", but I had never heard it before and presumed it must be some curious Upstate aberration. Christian avoidance of expressing exasperation with the name of Jesus points to what is new about the Christian tradition of faith that emerged from a Jewish matrix: its centering on Jesus as both Messiah and LORD. The Decalogue forbade the Israelites to "swear falsely [or take in vain] the name of the LORD your God" (Ex 20:7); Christians to the present day surround the name of Jesus, whose very name in Aramaic means "the LORD saves" (see Mt 1:21; Lk 1:31), with special reverence, such as a slight inclination of the head or even doffing of the biretta at the utterance of that name—for those who still wear birettas!

Until the Gospel was brought to Gentiles, there was no need for the preachers of the earliest Christian communities to insist on the theme of monotheism, something that could be presumed among Jews and Jewish Christians. Thus the first Jewish Christian evangelists, preaching to their fellow Jews, focused their preaching on two themes: the Messiahship of Jesus and his LORDship. To proclaim the Messiahship of Jesus could be deemed a political act,

encouraging allegiance to Jesus as a new king of Israel, even if Jesus eschewed such political aims, whatever may have been the ambitions of his disciples. To proclaim the LORDship of Jesus—his identity with the One who spoke to Moses in the burning bush—proved to be something utterly new in a Jewish setting: insisting on the meeting of the divine and the human in Jesus of Nazareth in a way that would strike most Jews as blasphemous. This proclamation of Jesus as LORD was something very new for Jews, even scandalous, as the Gospels make evident.

The Gentiles to whom Paul and other evangelists of the late first century CE brought the Good News about Jesus were peoples who revered "many gods and many lords" (1 Cor 8:5)[21] in their traditional religious setting, ranging from Zeus (Jupiter) on the most exalted level to *Divus Augustus,* the divinized Roman emperor, on the lower end of the scale. For such non-Jewish hearers of the Gospel, the first Jewish and Gentile Christian missionaries had to insist not only on the LORDship and Messiahship of Jesus but also on the oneness of God. Christian preaching ever since has had to steer a difficult course, as it were, through choppy theological waters between the rock of God's oneness and the shoals of the identity of Jesus as "true God and true man."[22] What eventually developed as the doctrine of the Trinity in the early Church took its origins from the New Testament, the first crystallization of how Jewish Christians understood and proclaimed Jesus in the second half of the first century CE. The Jews and eventually Gentiles who embraced the Way of Jesus had to find new language to express their faith in one God only, as well as their faith in Jesus as Messiah and LORD. How did they manage to do that? In some sense, the naming of God was all-important in this process.

Jews at the time of Jesus, the late Second Temple era, had for some time avoided pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, the unique name of God in the Jewish tradition. One technique for such avoidance simply referred to the Tetragrammaton as *ha-Shem*, "the Name."

Many references to "the name" (*to onoma*) of God in the New Testament would be better understood, in my opinion, if we recognized in those words in Greek a rendering of the Hebrew *ha-Shem* ("the Name"), the surrogate for the Tetragrammaton. Thus, for instance, in the prayer of Jesus quoted in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the phrase "the Name" occurs at the very beginning: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" in Matthew (Mt 6:9) and "Father, hallowed be your name" in Luke (Lk 11:2).[23] What does it mean to 'hallow' the divine Name? I would suggest that this first sentence in the Lord's Prayer, both in Matthew and Luke, is really an interjection, urging the first Christians, Jewish and especially Gentile, to keep in mind the contemporary Jewish tradition of the utmost reverential avoidance of pronouncing God's unique Name (*ha-Shem*). Paradoxically that avoidance of pronouncing the divine Name is combined with addressing the One whose name is so reverentially avoided as 'Father,' in Aramaic, *Abba*.

In his mortal lifetime the Aramaic-speaking Jesus called God *Abba*, especially in prayer. Mark tells us that Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane cried out: "'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want'" (Mk 14:36). The Aramaic word *Abba* is simply the equivalent of the Hebrew *ha-'ab*, "the Father," understood as vocative in form: 'O Father!' [24] In so addressing God as *Abba*, Jesus seems to claim a unique personal relationship to God, a relationship based on themes already adumbrated in the Hebrew Bible. But the relationship of Jesus to the One he called 'Father' seems more intimate, more individualized and uniquely personal than the Father-Son relationship of God to the whole of Israel, expressed with such eloquence in Third Isaiah: "Surely You are our Father: /Though Abraham regard us not,/And Israel recognize us not,/ You, O LORD, are our Father" (Is 63:16). [25] The closest parallel in the Hebrew Bible to the use of *Abba* by Jesus may perhaps be found in the Psalms where God suggests to David that he should address the LORD with such intimacy: "'You

are my father, my God, the rock of my deliverance'" (Ps 89:27). The Second Book of Samuel likewise promises a personal Father-son relationship between the LORD and King David: "I will be a father to him and he a son to Me" (2 Sam 7:14). Such family intimacy between David and God led to the tradition of the king of Israel being characterized as an adoptive son of God in a royal psalm, possibly one used at an enthronement : "Let me tell of the decree:/ the LORD said to me/ 'You are My son,/ I have fathered you this day" (Ps 2:7)

The use of the vocative *Abba* by Jesus so struck some of the writers of the New Testament that they simply transcribed the Aramaic word *Abba* in Greek. We have already seen Mark's transcription of that word in the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane. Paul in the Letter to the Galatians, written around 54 CE, tells us that those redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus become adopted children of God: "And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal 4:6). In his letter to the Romans, written a few years later, Paul returns to the theme: "You have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:15-17). One could perhaps say that Christian Trinitarian faith centers on the way Jesus addressed God as *Abba*, and the way God's Spirit enables those redeemed by Jesus to do the same.

Let me return to the importance of *ha-Shem*, the unpronounced name of God in the Jewish tradition, for understanding the New Testament account of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew ends with the so-called Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). I would suggest that the Greek of this verse in Matthew's Gospel has not been translated adequately in the New Revised Standard Version (1989) or in many other translations. So

translated, it give the impression that the disciples are deputized to baptize on behalf of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the text more radically declares that the first disciples should make disciples among all the Gentiles, and that they should do so by plunging those disciples *into* the Name (*eis to onoma*)—into the ineffable divine Reality (*ha-Shem*), the LORDSHIP of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having so plunged these new disciples into the inner life of God, and having taught them to obey "everything that I have commanded you," Jesus promises both the original Jewish followers of Jesus and their later Gentile disciples that the Exodus accompaniment of God's People will continue into their future: "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). There is perhaps a parallel here with the Talmud's tractate Berakoth and Rashi in their future-oriented understanding of the Tetragrammaton: "I was with you in this servitude, and I shall be with you in the servitude of the [other] kingdoms."[26]

The one who is praying, Jewish or Gentile, must remember the privilege involved in addressing God by Name with a capital N, *ha-Shem*. The secular Greek word *kyrios*, usually rendered in English as 'lord' with either a small l or a capital L, denotes in Greek what the Hebrew word *'adon* signifies. In the Septuagint, the related periphrasis for the Tetragrammaton, *Adonai* in Hebrew, is also rendered *kyrios*, LORD in small capital letters. Translators of the New Testament are sometimes unsure how to translate *kyrios* in key New Testament passages, and especially how to translate its vocative form, *kyrie*. In secular Greek it could be used for any gentleman, and especially for an exalted ruler. Should *kyrie* be rendered "Sir," or "LORD" in this passage or another? It depends on the context. Even when the word is addressed to Jesus, it may have begun its history as simply a polite "Sir," or even a somewhat ironic "Sir," as when the woman of Samaria reminds Jesus that he has no means to supply her with fresh water from a

well: "Sir [*Kyrie*], you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" (Jn 4:11). But even within that intriguing dialogue, the woman of Samaria comes to use the term with less irony: "Sir [*Kyrie*], I see that you are a prophet" (Jn 4:19). John's Gospel reaches one of its two conclusions with the clearest example of the divine use of the word *Kyrios*. The disciple Thomas, who had doubted the testimony of his fellow disciples about the risen Jesus, was confronted by the risen Jesus in the midst of the disciples a week later: "Thomas answered [Jesus], 'My LORD and my God!' (Jn 20:28). In those words of Thomas, linking the words LORD and God in reference to Jesus, one senses a certain parallel with the theme enunciated in Genesis Rabbah commenting of Gen 2:4, where we are told that those two divine names, '*Elohim* and the Tetragrammaton, express God's judgment and God's mercy, cold water and hot water combined so as not to break the glass. In this context the glass involved was the fragile faith of doubting Thomas.

Paul in his epistles uses the word *Kyrios* most obviously in the way that his Jewish contemporaries used *Adonai* or even *ha-Shem*. In a famous hymn he quotes in the Epistle to the Philippians, written in the late fifties of the first century CE, the divine name of the LORD (*ha-Shem*) is bestowed on Jesus in his resurrection and ascension as a result of his suffering and death: "Therefore God also highly exalted him/and gave him the name/that is above every name,/so that at the name of Jesus/every knee should bend,/in heaven and on earth and under the earth, /and every tongue should confess/that Jesus Christ is Lord,/to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11). That hymn echoes a passage in Second Isaiah in which the Lord exults: "To Me every knee shall bend/ Every tongue swear loyalty" (Isa 45:23). Note, however, that all those knees in Paul's hymn should bend not exactly for the name 'Jesus,' a not uncommon Jewish

man's name, but for the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), the unique divine name, "the name that is above every other name," bestowed upon Jesus as LORD.[27]

In John's Gospel, however, even if others address Jesus as Lord (*Kyrie*), Jesus himself seems to use the phrase "I AM" of himself in a way that signifies the same thing as *Ehyeh* in the Tetragrammaton, and in speaking of himself this way he astounds and even horrifies his hearers. Many English translations of John do no justice to that phrase, rendering the Greek *ego eimi* as if it simply meant "I am he." But Jesus says "I AM" quite starkly, without a predicate, several times in John's Gospel, three times in Chapter 8 alone: "I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I AM." (8:24); "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me." (8:28); "Amen, Amen, I tell you, before Abraham was, I AM." (8:59).[28] The third of those usages of *ego eimi* in Chapter 8 provokes outrage: "So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple" (Jn 8:59). In John's account of the storm at sea after the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus restores calm to the sea and his disciples with the same words: "They saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'I AM; do not be afraid'" (Jn 6:19-20). Another significant usage of that phrase strikes terror in the hearts of those who come to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I AM.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I AM ', they stepped back and fell to the ground" (Jn 18:4-6). [29]

Those theologians of recent centuries who have wished to deescalate the New Testament claims for Jesus have difficulties with John's Gospel; there are few clearer presentations in the

New Testament of the central paradox of the tenting of the LORD God in the Word made Flesh. Let me conclude these remarks with an attempt to translate the last verse in the prologue to John's Gospel "God no one has ever seen," John warns us. And yet, the evangelist insists that "God the Only Begotten, existing inside the Father's breast—He himself has made [God's] meaning clear" (Jn 1:18).[30]

III. The Most Beautiful Names of God in Islam

The use of a phrase that begins so much in a Muslim setting, "In the name of God" (*bi-'smi'llahi*) eventually developed into a noun in Arabic, *basmala,* designating the very process of so invoking God by name. Many activities performed in a Muslim setting begin with that short phrase: the eating of meals, the writing of books, the beginning of a journey. Every *sura* of the Qur'an but one (Qur'an 9)[31] begins with a more elaborate version of the *basmala*: "In the name of God, the Merciful One Filled with Mercy" (*bi-'smi'llahi-r-rahmani-r-rahim*).

To speak the name (*ism*) of any human person in Arabic is to address him or her by the single part of longer Arabic nomenclature that denotes the person as such apart from any relationship to other persons (parents, children) or other realities (ethnicity, profession).[32] Although there are traditionally ninety-nine "most beautiful names of God" (*asma' al-husna*), *Allah* is the quintessential name of God. To begin anything "in the name of God," then, does much more than signify a certain authorization by God of what follows. Rather it enables the person praying with the *basmala* to locate himself or herself spiritually *in* God's Name, giving them a certain entry into or presence within the Reality of God. All of the preliminaries to worship—purifications by ablution, formulation of the intention to worship, response to the call

to worship—lead up to positioning of the devotee in the Reality of God symbolized by the name of the One to whom prayer is directed.

Allah is a name for God that is not unique to Arab Muslims; it served as the name for God among other Arabic-speaking monotheists, even before the time of Muhammad. In *Allah* the word for a god, *ilah*, is combined with the article *al-* to become *Allah* (*the* god), not unlike the Septuagint and New Testament Greek *ho theos*. Thus the Qur'an states: "Say: As for me, I am only human like you; it has been revealed to me that your god (*ilahukum*) is an only God (*ilahun wahidun*). Then seek the straight path to Him, beg His forgiveness. Woe to those who ascribe partners to Him" (Qur'an 41:6). The pre-Islamic Arabs, however, seem to have included Allah as one among many in a loosely configured pantheon, even ascribing daughters to Allah: al-Lat, al-'Uzza and Manat (Qur'an 53:19–20). Each of these three goddesses was associated with territories economically and politically important for Muhammad and his first followers. The strict monotheism of the revelation that Muhammad received regarded all cultus directed toward these three goddesses or any other divinities as *shirk,* the sinful ascription of associates to God.

In the Islamic tradition ninety-nine "most beautiful" names of God are enumerated, traditionally thought to be mentioned in the text of the Qur'an: "To God belong the most beautiful names. Call on Him with them; scatter those who blaspheme with His names" (Qur'an 7:180). In actual fact, more than ninety-nine names of God can be found in the Qur'an, and the lists of those names are not consistent. Most writers consider the name *Allah,* which occurs more than 2500 times in the Qur'an, to be the first of the ninety-nine, although a few scholars claim that it is the hundredth name. The names of God in most lists emphasize the numinous nature of

God, his *jalal* (majesty), as well as his *jamal* (beauty). Muslims in celebration or in distress glorify God in pungent exclamations like the *takbir*, "God is greater [than anything]!" (*Allahu akbar*). The devout hedge every future hope, trivial or profound, with a wish that it may come to pass "if God allow" (*in sha' Allah*). Immediately after pronouncing the name of God many Muslims interject *subhanahu wa ta'ala* ("Praised be He and exalted!").

The first words of revelation, according to much of Islamic tradition, were the initial verses of *Surat al-'alaq* (the *Sura* of the Blood Clot: Qur'an 96). These initial verses epitomize in brief the Quranic proclamation about God, as well as its own self-definition as God's Word made available for recitation by human beings: "Recite: In the name of your Lord who created,/ Created humankind from a blood-clot/— Recite: Your Lord is the most generous,/ Who taught by the pen,/ Taught humankind what it did not know " (Qur'an 96:1–5). In the first two verses of Qur'an 96 the creative power of God, intimately disclosed to the already monotheistic Muhammad not simply as "the Lord" but as "your Lord," is particularly concretized in terms of one demonstration of God's creative power: the conception and birth of a new human being "from a blood-clot." The basis for some of the ninety-names of God can be glimpsed even in those five brief verses: God as Creator (*al-Khaliq, al-Bari'*), God as most generous (*al-Karim, Dhu'l-jalali wa'l-'ikram*), God as Knower and Teacher (*al-'Alim, al-Khabir*).

In my somewhat clumsy translation of the *basmala* ("In the name of God, the Merciful One Filled with Mercy") and of the two most common of the "most beautiful names" of God enshrined in the *basmala*, I am striving to grasp the interrelatedness of these two words in Arabic. Both *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim* derive from the tri-consonantal root *R-H-M.* The former, *al-Rahman*, seems to have been a name for the supreme god presiding over a hierarchy of lesser

gods in pre-Islamic south and central Arabia.[33] This root connoting mercy points imagistically to the womb (*rahim* or *rihm*). To connect the mercy of God with feminine characteristics or connections is to understand God's perfection as including all that is most tender in created reality, including the generative and loving characteristics of mothers. A famous *hadith* attributed to Muhammad narrates that he restrained a companion from engaging in struggle in the path of God (*jihad*) precisely because the companion's mother was still alive. That companion would not attain heaven by a martyr's death, Muhammad averred, but by filial devotion to his mother: "Then stay with her and look after her needs. Your heaven lies under her feet."[34] The male-centeredness of so much contemporary Islamic rigorism loses sight of these very tender elements in the Qur'an and in the Prophet's thought.

Of the great medieval Muslim commentators on the first verse of the Opening Surah of the Qur'an, Abu Ja'far al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) has the most to say, relying on earlier exegetes of the Qur'an. He quotes the seventh-century Qur'an expert Ibn 'Abbas to the effect that the *basmala* meant, in its original context, "Recite with the invocation of God, your Lord. And stand and sit with the invocation of God."[35] From Ibn 'Abbas he also derives the definition of *Allah* as "He Who possesses the attributes of divinity (*al-uluhiyyah*) and of being worshipped (*al-ma'budiyyah*) with respect to all his creatures."[36] On the names of God as *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim* al-Tabari concludes with his own judgment that the former name, the one of greater import, is reserved to God alone: "God speaks of Himself specifically as *al-rahman*: 'Say: "Call upon Allah, or call upon *al-rahman* ; whichever you call upon, to him belong the Names Most Beautiful'" ([Qur'an] 17:110), and He has forbidden any of his creatures to be so called, even though there are some among His creatures who deserve to be named with some of its meanings . . . .Therefore *al-rahman* comes second to His name Allah. However, as for his name *al-rahim*,

we have already said that it is permissible to describe someone other than Him by it. . . . this is why His name Allah come before His name *al-rahman,* and his name *al-rahman* before His name *al-rahim.*"[37] Muslim men as a result can be called 'Abd al-Rahman ("Servant of the Merciful One"), but never simply Rahman, although I must say I have known some men named 'Abd al-Rahman who are familiarly called 'Rahman.'

Sufis, the mystics of the Islamic tradition, have often speculated about the names of God and have even asked if there is a "greatest name" of all. The thirteenth-century Egyptian mystic Ibn Ata'ullah of Alexandria sought from God "to make me know by means of Your treasured-up Knowledge, and protect me by means of the mystery of Your well-guarded name."[38] Shaykh Nizam al-din Awliya, a mystic of Delhi in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, when asked about "the greatest name" cited a saying of the early Muslim mystic, Ibrahim Adham: "'Yes, I do know it, and I will tell you about it . . . First, you should cleanse your stomach of unlawful food, then you should empty your heart of love of this world, and then after that by whatever name you call upon God that is the Greatest Name.'"[39]

At least where the puritanical influence of Saudi Arabia's neo-Hanbalism (so-called 'Wahhabism') has not been intensely felt, the *subha* [40] or 'Muslim rosary' is often seen entwined in the fingers of the devout. Some practitioners of this devotion recite the ninety-name names of God on the ninety-nine beads of such a rosary; more recite three times thirty-three beads, each third concentrating on one or another of the many ejaculatory prayers that serve Muslims as succinct recollections (*adhkar*) of God. The most common form of this devotion entails thirty-three utterances of *Subhan Allah* ("Glory be to God"), followed by thirty-three utterances of *Al-hamdu l'illah* ("Praise be to God"), ending with thirty-three utterances of the most basic

expression of praise for God in the Islamic tradition: *Allahu akbar* ("God is greater [than anything]").

The recitation of the names of God as well as simpler recitations of *adhkar* with beads bring God close to mortal human beings. A folk tradition, known in many parts of the Islamic world, maintains that the principal lines in a left hand mimic the number 81 in Arabic (٨١) and the lines in the right hand mimic the number 18 in Arabic (١٨). Thus the palms of their two hands, extended before faithful Muslims in prayer, remind them quite simply of both the majesty and the closeness of God. A more literal than usual rendering of the Throne Verse, a Quranic verse replete with names for God, might suggest similar reflections: "God—there is no god but He, the Living, the Eternal! Neither fatigue nor sleep seizes Him! To Him belong whatever is in heaven or on earth. Who can intercede with Him unless He allows it? He knows what lies in their hands before them and what lies behind their backs. They cannot comprehend anything He knows except by His leave. His Throne encompasses both heaven and earth: His maintaining heaven and earth does not tire Him. He is the Exalted, the Glorious One!" (Qur'an 2:255).

Conclusion: Wrestling with God

Merely mortal words—Jewish, Christian or Muslim—can never completely wrestle God to the ground. We cannot force the divine Wrestler to reveal to us the ineffable name in any exhaustive sense. Perhaps that is part of what Ludwig Wittgenstein meant when he formulated his famously unexplained seventh proposition: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."[41] Wittgenstein went through many stages of understanding that proposition. The late philosopher and theologian, Paul Ricoeur (d. 2005), notes more positively that in hymns of

celebration, supplication, and thanksgiving, "God becomes a 'you' to the human you." Ricoeur goes on to assert that "the word 'God' cannot be understood as a philosophical concept, not even 'being' in the sense of medieval philosophy or in Heidegger's sense. The word 'God' says more than the word 'being' because it presupposes the entire context of narratives, prophecies, laws, wisdom writings, psalms, and so on. The referent 'God' is thus intended by the convergence of all these partial discourses. It expresses the circulation of meaning among all the forms of discourse wherein God is named." [42]

Preachers on television who babble on about God so confidently, as well as teenagers who text each other with the acronym OMG! ("Oh My God!"—I translate for those of you who are neither teenagers nor texters): both populations could imbibe wisdom by contemplating the history of the naming or non-naming of God in the monotheistic traditions that trace their historical origins to the Middle East. Whether we avoid pronouncing the ineffable name of God, or bow our heads at the personal name of the Word of God made Flesh, or follow the mention of God's name with the exclamation *subhanahu wa ta'ala* ("Praised be He and exalted!"), we who put our faith in one God recognize deep down the mystery with which we are forced to deal so tentatively. Words may elude us.[43] Still, in the words of T. S. Eliot, "Words, after speech, reach/Into the silence."[44] But perhaps we can and must do more than keep silence. Silence about God seems too gloomy a conclusion to my reflections this evening. We must, like Jacob, struggle with the nameless divine Wrestler by night. Other verses from Eliot may help to illuminate the darkness of that wrestling: "I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you/ Which will be the darkness of God."[45]

NOTES

[1] See Eric Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy: Catholic Reform and Political Authority in France (1590-1615)*, (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company for the Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu, 2005).

[2] I am grateful to a French Jesuit who recently visited Fordham to use its archives, Nicolas Steeves, who introduced me to this aspect of French and Jesuit history.

[3] In ancient Ugarit, a cultural area that flourished on the Mediterranean coast of present day Syria in the second millennium BCE, the name ’El designated the highest god in their pantheon. Like many of the so-called “high gods” in African traditional forms of faith, the Ugaritic *’El* “generally fades into the background and plays a minor role in the preserved myths” (Louis Hartmann/ S. David Sperling, “GOD, NAMES OF,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA/Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 2007), 7:672b, available online. The same cannot be said of the homonymous God in the ancient tradition of Israel.

[4] Here, as in other quotations from the Hebrew Bible that follow, I use the *JPS Hebrew English-Tanakh*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999/5759).

[5] Examples of such preserved but not entirely understood ancient titles of God include *’El ‘elyon*, often translated as God Most High, *’El ‘olam*, often translated as God the Everlasting, *’El shaddai*, usually but probably erroneously translated as God the Almighty, ’*El ro’i*, translated either as God of Vision or God Who Sees, and finally *’El berit*, fairly obviously meaning God of the Covenant. The name *’Eloah*, found forty times in the Book of Job, may well be a more formal singular form of *’Elohim* than *’el.* See Hartmann/Sperling, “GOD, NAMES OF,” 7: 672b-674b.

[6] See John L. McKenzie, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary,* ed. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. and Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1287a.

[7] The *JPS Tanakh* does this as "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh." Franz Rosenzweig in 1929 wrote a most insightful essay on the problems involved in translating the Tetragrammaton and the difference between the translation he was working on with Martin Buber and the much earlier translation of the Torah by Moses Mendelssohn (d. 1786): "'The Eternal': Mendelssohn and the Name of God," reproduced in Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation,* tr. Lawrence Rosenwald with Everett Fox (Bloomington& Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, ca. 1994), 99-113.

[8] See Patrick W. Skehan, "Septuagint," *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Supplement* (2009), 920b.

[9] The early Christian writers who relied on the Septuagint Greek of the Book of Exodus often derived rather metaphysical notions of God from this passage. See examples in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament III: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy,* ed. Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J. in collaboration with Ronnie J. Rombs (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 19-23.

[10] It may have been the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides who first used the term 'being' (*to on*) as an abstraction. See "The Poem of Parmenides," 8.35. For commentary on this passage, see *Plato and Parmenides: Parmenides'* Way of Truth *and* Plato's Parmenides, ed. and tr. Francis MacDonald Cornford (Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs-Merrill, ca. 1957), 43.

[11] On these linguistic categories, see "Marked and Unmarked Terms, *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language,* ed. Tom McArthur (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), available online at www.Encyclopedia.com . The article gives a pithy example: "In the pair

horse/mare, horse is the more general, unmarked term, while *mare* is marked for femaleness. In the pair *cow/bull*, cow is unmarked, while *bull* is marked for maleness." In the last forty years or more, the unmarked quality of masculine pronouns in the English language has been radically challenged.

[12] Furthermore, the Greek is not content with the purely verbal form of the first person singular of the verb 'to be' (*eimi*), a grammatically possible parallel to the Hebrew *Ehyeh*. The Greek insists on the emphatic specification of "I" (*ego*) as the subject of the verb, as does the Latin Vulgate.

[13] Modern Hebrew does have a future tense, created in imitation of European languages.

[14] See *The Complete Jewish Bible With Rashi Commentary* on Exodus 3:14 available online at www.chabad.org.

[15] Ibid.

[16] See the Tractate *Berakoth* of the Babylonian Talmud, folio 9b, in *Berakoth*, tr. Maurice Simon, ed. Rabbi Dr. I Epstein, available online at www.come-and-hear.com.

[17] See, for a recent example, Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus* (New York: Image/Doubleday, 2000), 74-77.

[18] When the translators of *The Jerusalem Bible* in English (1966) followed the example of the original French *Bible de Jerusalem* (1956) and rendered the Tetragrammaton as "Yahweh," the Bishops of England and Wales asked them to substitute 'the LORD' in lectionaries for liturgical usage. The Holy See took up this topic later and in 2008 Cardinal Francis Arinze, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, forbade the usage of the Tetragrammaton in liturgical texts. See the Catholic News Agency report of this on September 3, 2008

(www.catholicnewsagency.com . Bishop Arthur Serratelli (Paterson, NJ), chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Divine Worship, is quoted in the same source as saying that it might have "some impact on the use of particular pieces of liturgical music in our country." It would seem that hymns like the very popular "Ýahweh, I Know You are Near," composed by Dan Schutte, might be affected. From the Blogosphere it looks like the revision of this hymn—if it ever happens—w ill not be popular.

[19] This is my rendering of the Hebrew, not the JPS translation.

[20] "Genesis" in *Midrash Rabbah,* tr. Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1939), I:99.

[21] All New Testament quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of 1989 (NRSV) unless otherwise noted.

[22] See *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 2nd ed. (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), #469.

[23] Luke's version may be more original while Matthew's, beginning with "Our," reflects the liturgical use of the Lord's Prayer in the early Church. The late first-century *Didache,* a catechetical treatise in Greek written most likely in the late first century CE contemporaneously with most of the New Testament writings, orders that the Our Father in Matthew's form be said by Christians three times a day (*Didache* 8.2). See *The Didache or The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles,* available on line at www.annomundi.com/bible/didache .

[24] Note that this interpretation modifies the supposed status of the name 'Abba' as a term of childlike endearment, not unlike 'Papa' and 'Daddy.' See Máire Byrne, *The Names of God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: A Basis for Interfaith Dialogue* (London/New York: Continuum, 2011), 56-75.

[25] The prophet Jeremiah (3:19 and 31:9) as well as Malachi (1:6 and 2:10) both allude to God as a Father to Israel in a corporate sense.

[26] See pages 5-6 and note 13 above.

[27] "Concealed within the name of Jesus is the tetragrammaton, the mysterious name from Mount Horeb, here expanded into the statement: God saves." Thus Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* (New York: Image/Crown Publishing Group, 2012), 30. The name 'Jesus' in its Aramaic and Hebrew origins, *Yeshua'* and *Yehoshua*, literally means "The LORD saves."

[28] I have here adapted the NRSV translation.

[29] The late Raymond Brown, S.S. (d. 1998), a leading American scholar of the New Testament, succinctly points out the ambiguity suggested by the use of the words 'I AM' in John's Gospel, especially when those words are used without a predicate: "Since the usage goes far beyond ordinary parlance, all recognize that the absolute *ego eimi* has a special revelatory function in John. . . Divine theophanies . . . often have this formula: Do not be afraid; I am the God of your ancestors." *The Gospel according to John* [The Anchor Bible 29] (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), I: 533-34.

[30] This is my own translation. The NRSV renders these words more simply: "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." The New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE) of 2011 renders it thus: "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him." The one word in Greek translated as "has made him known" by the NRSV and "has revealed him" by the NABRE, *exegesato*, suggests the work of an interpreter, even an exegete. Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) suggested just this in an early work: "One could almost say, in reference to

the Greek text, that it [the Word made Flesh] has become the 'exegesis' of God for us." See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, tr. J. R. Foster, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 54. Hans Urs von Balthasar has even written an article using such imagery in its title: "God is his own exegete," *Communio* 4 (Winter 1986), 280-87. I wish to thank my colleague, Joseph Lienhard, S.J., for directing my attention to this article of von Balthasar.

[31] Why Qur'an 9 does not begin with the *basmalah* is a matter of much speculation.

[32] The usual sequence of traditional Arabic nomenclature includes at least four and sometimes five elements. The first is the *kunyah*, which relates the one named to his or her child (Abu X :'Father of X'), Umm Y('Mother of Y'). Normally a *kunyah* is followed by the second element in nomenclature, a person's own proper name (*ism*). The *ism* is often the name of some great figure from the past, preferably with a Muslim historical referent, but not always. The *ism* is sometimes constructed from the word for 'servant' (*'Abd*) and one of the names of God ('Abd Allah, 'Abd al-Rahman, and the like). The third element in nomenclature is the *nasab*, an indication of the person's personal descent: *Ibn* X or *Bint* Y (son or daughter of X or Y). Such a descent group can be traced back many generations and usually names both men and women by their descent from male ancestors. The fourth element is the *nisbah*, the adjectival indication of the person's tribal, geographical, juristic, mystical or professional connections, for example: *al-Khazraji* (the member of the tribe of the Banu Khazraj), *al-Iskandari* (the Alexandrian), *al-Maliki* (the adherent of the juristic school of 'Abd al-Malik), *al-Tijani* (the member of the Tijaniyyah Sufi confraternity); *al-Khayyati* (the member of a clan of tailors; if the person so named is actually a tailor, the long *i* is omitted from the professional *nisbah*). The fifth element in some Muslim nomenclature, the *laqab*, is sometimes called in English 'the nickname.' Early Muslim nicknames can be honorific (*al-Rashid*, 'the Just') or mocking (*al-Himar*, 'the Jackass');

they sometimes begin with the Arabic words *Dhu* (masculine) or *Dhat* (feminine), indicating possession, real or metaphoric, of something. Other popular varieties of *laqab* indicate political importance: *Nizam al-Mulk* ('Order of the Realm'). Many famous Muslims in past history are best known by their *laqab*. See Editors, "ISM," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960-2009), 4:179a-181b. Henceforth this source will be cited as *EI* 2.

[33] See B. Carra de Vaux and Louis Gardet, "Basmala," *EI* 2: I: 1084b-1085a.

[34] The source of this famous *hadith* (saying of Muhammad) is the ninth-tenth century CE collector of hadith, Ahmad al-Nasa'i. It can be found in his famous *al-Sunan al-kubra*, the "Large Hadith Collection." There are several fond references to this *hadith* on Muslim websites, most notably www.islaam.org . I first learned the *hadith* from my *shaykha* in Islamic studies and dissertation director, the late Annemarie Schimmel (d. 2003), who quoted the *hadith* on the memorial card for her late mother, Anna Ulfers Schimmel (d. 1978), for whom Professor Schimmel took the greatest care until her death.

[35] Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān*, ed. and trans. J Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Hakim Investment Holdings (M.E.) Limited, 1987), I: 54. Henceforth this work will be referred to as Tabari. I.

[36] Tabari, I: 55.

[37] Tabari, I: 58-59.

[38] Ibn 'Ata'illah, "The Book of Wisdom" (*Kitab al-hikam*), tr. Victor Danner, in Victor Danner and Wheeler Thackston, *Ibn 'Ata' Allah/Kwaja 'Abdullah Ansari* (New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1978), 124.

[39] Nizam Ad-Din Awliya, *Morals for the Heart*, tr. Bruce B. Lawrence (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992), 193.

[40] The beads used are often called *misbaha* or *tasbih.*

[41] *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. C.K. Ogden (London/New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), 188-89. The original German is just as succinct: "*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.*"

[42] "Naming God," in Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and the Imagination*, tr. David Pellauer, and ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 227-28.

[43] On the theological theme of divine incomprehensibility, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 104-12.

[44] "Burnt Norton," *v*, in "Four Quartets," T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963), 180.

[45] "East Coker," *iii*, ibid., 186.

On the Power of the Name

Jewish Response to the Spring 2013 McGinley Lecture

Daniel F. Polish

I am so glad to be back with you and to learn again from Father Ryan and Dr. Hussain. My thanks to Father Ryan for inviting me to be with you. And to President McShane for the gracious hospitality of the University. It never fails to impress me. And to Sister Anne-Marie Kirmse for all she does to bring these talks to reality.

I feel kind of like Charlie Brown in the ongoing struggle with Lucy over the football. Once again Father Ryan has superbly articulated the issue at hand leaving me only to annotate his remarks. I am grateful to him for causing us to focus on a dimension of Jewish religious thought and practice which we do not customarily recognize or make explicit, specifically the role of the Divine Name. And he does us great service in reminding us that attention to the Name itself is a living part of all of our three faith traditions. Since Father Ryan has left me nothing to say, I will simply reiterate what he has taught us and venture to offer some of my own perspectives on the general issue at hand in the Jewish tradition.

I would start by noting that there is a multiplicity of ways in the Jewish tradition of relating to G-d. We find expressions of outright awe and a sense of the ineffability of G-d or the tremendous power of G-d. We encounter it in the biblical portrayal of the theophany at Sinai. It is expressed in so many Psalms and is the theme of the Book of Job. Elsewhere we see a tremendous intimacy: the many times in the Torah where G-d is addressed as Abba/Father; the audacity of Abraham in challenging G-d about G-d's plan to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; Moses' virtual bickering with G-d on numerous occasions and yet identifying G-

d as a "Friend" (Exodus 33:11). We see the intimacy of this relationship in the numerous times in Psalms where the author challenges, even berates G-d as in "wake up, why are you sleeping Lord" (Psalm 44:24) or the practice in more recent times of referring to G-d as *Tatanyu*/Beloved Father. Neither the Bible nor later Jewish tradition speak of or to G-d in a single idiom. And then there is the modality that is the subject of tonight's reflections where we do not refer to G-d at all but to the Name.

I suggest that we are not confronted with a single phenomenon here, but two distinct phenomena. On one hand there is the issue of numinal power, and on the other there is the question of delicacy or circumspection. Of course ultimately these two modalities are two sides of the same coin: an appreciation of power; and an appropriate reticence about too casual an encounter with that power. Let us begin with the idea of name itself. Anthropologists tell us "…the name…for something comes to be viewed as tantamount to the thing itself, and power over your name comes to mean power over yourself."[1] I assume it worked the same in the Bible as it does in various basic societies.

Certainly this seems to be the meaning of Adam naming the animals in Genesis. He is being given dominion over them. When someone is to be extirpated–obliterated not merely from life, but from memory, indeed being itself–the Torah says that their "name" is blotted out. Similarly, when someone's fundamental nature is changed, when their essence is changed, that change is signified–or effected–by a change in their name. Thus Abram becomes Abraham (literally father of a multitude) when he is destined to be the father of a multitude of people. And Sarai becomes Sarah (Princess) when she is to be the mother of many. Jacob becomes Israel, etc.

And, of course, G-d is depicted in Exodus 3 and 6 as getting named anew–or named differently–as Father Ryan has taught us. Names have power and your name is to be protected.

We can speculate about the history of the change of G-d's Name. It has been suggested that Moses superimposed the worship of a new god onto the ancestral god of the Hebrew people. But we won't follow that line of speculation. We will merely note that Exodus contains extensive discussion about how G-d is to be designated. In Exodus chapter 3 in the space of five verses, G-d answers Moses question about G-d's name by saying *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh* and then instructs him to tell the Israelites that he was sent to them by "the Lord the G-d of your fathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac and the G-d of Jacob" and then tells him to tell Pharaoh, "The Lord, the G-d of the Israelites has met with us." While in Exodus 6 G-d maintains that "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as *El Shaddai* but by My name *Yud Hey Vav Hey*, I made Me not known to them." The attention to G-d's Name seems not to be an incidental matter.

As Father Ryan suggests, this Tetragrammaton does initially seem to have the qualities of a personal name though it ultimately came to have the more generic quality of the English word G-d (with a capital G). And we can infer that by virtue of being an essence revealing name from the beginning, this word itself came to have a quality of potency. The rabbis later designated it as *Shem Hamephorash*/the distinctive Name, the Name set apart. In English, of course, we refer to it as the Ineffable Name.

Already in the Biblical period The Name becomes a symbol and not a sign; i.e., it comes to participate in the reality of that to which it attests. The Name itself has clear importance. Thus in the Ten Commandments in addition to abjuring idol worship we are instructed not to take the Name of the Lord in vain (Exodus 20:7 and Deuteronomy 5:11). Looking back to the very beginning of its faith, the Bible asserts that Abram, even before his name is changed, built an altar and, "Called on the Name of the Lord" (Genesis 13:4). In the remarkable theophany of Exodus 34 G-d in G-d's own self is represented as pronouncing The Name:

> And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with ….[Moses] there and proclaimed the Name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed Adonai, Adonai… (Exodus 34: 5-6).

In one of the poems that constitute Moses' farewell addresses he invokes:

> "I will proclaim the Name of the Lord,
> Ascribe greatness to our G-d" (Deuteronomy 32:3).

Long after Moses, the Book of Samuel depicts one of the great moments in the life of King David:

> And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baalei Yehuddah , to bring up from there the Ark of G-d –upon which is pronounced the Name, the Name of Adonai…(II Samuel 6:2).

Clearly the Name itself is of consequence. And as a result the Name came to be seen as having a kind of power. Especially in the Bible it appears that the very Name of G-d possessed its own independent power, very much like the Ark of the Covenant which seems to have had the power to liberate itself from Philistine capture and could inflict mortal injury if inappropriately touched. So there are places in the Bible where G-d's Name itself was hypostasized and seems to have an autonomous agency:

> All the peoples of the earth shall see
> that the Name of the Lord is called upon you;
> and they shall be afraid of you" (Deut 28:10).
> The Lord answer you in the day of trouble
> The Name of Jacob's G-d keep you safe (Psalm 20:1).
> Our help is in the Name of the Lord

The maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 124:8).

What are we to make of the words in Psalm 118:

Blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord

We bless you out of the House of the Lord

Does it mean that we bless you on behalf of the Lord? Or does it suggest that the Name itself has the power to confer blessing? We will return to the power dimension of the Divine Name when we encounter it more graphically in post-Biblical Judaism.

Let us now turn to that other dimension of the use of the Name in the Bible and later tradition, a stream that reflects a certain delicacy or circumspection in speaking about G-d. I believe we see that same kind of circumspection with relation to the appearance of angels in the Bible. More often than not the appearance of an angel serves as a way of introducing G-d decorously into a scene. Almost always the angel will disappear and be revealed to be nothing other than the appearance of G-d. So too with the issue of the Divine Name. There are places where reference to the name of G-d stands in for the presence of G-d. We see this with some frequency in Isaiah and others of the prophets, for instance:

Behold the Name of the Lord comes from far off

With His anger blazing and thick in smoke

His lips are full of indignation'and his tongue as a devouring flame (Isaiah 30:27).[2]

And in Psalms:

May His Name endure forever

May His Name be continued as long as the sun (Psalm 72:17).[3]

In each of these cases, I believe, reference to the Name is a delicate way of representing the very presence of G-d.

In various places the Bible talks about bad human behavior of various kinds as having the power to "profane the Name of your G-d."[4] Here, too, I suggest reference to the Name is a circumspect way of making the remarkable assertion that G-d in G-d's own self can be degraded by the actions of those who are supposed to attest to G-d. The Name is a circumspect invocation of the One to whom it attests.

It is against this background that we can appreciate the way the Divine Name was employed in the post-Biblical period during the second Temple period. One Talmudic citation (Sota 7:6) implies that the Name may perhaps have been pronounced by the priests when they invoked the Priestly benediction (Numbers 6:22-27). We are more certain that the high point of the observance of Yom Kippur was the single moment when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies and in the midst of his prayer would pronounce the Ineffable Name. There is a description of this in the *Mishna*:

> And when the priests and the people who stood in the Temple court
> Heard him pronounce the divine Name they would kneel and bow down and fall on their faces and recite the words of Psalm 72:19 (*Yoma* 6:2).

Given the peculiar nature of Hebrew, that verse from Psalms can have various meanings. It can mean "Praised be His Name whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever." Or it can mean "Praised be the glorious Name of the One whose kingdom is forever and ever." And I dare to venture that in this context it had the latter meaning: the Name itself was glorious and worthy of praise.

But even in the Temple there seems to have been some circumspection about pronouncing the Name. Rabbi Tarphon who came from a priestly family remembers:

> Once I followed my uncles on to the dais and I inclined my ear to catch what the High Priest said. But he caused the Name to be drowned out by the singing of his fellow-priests (B. Kiddushin 71a).

The same circumspection is reflected in the writings of another scion of a priestly family. Josephus in his *Antiquities* writes:

> Whereupon G-d declared to…[Moses] His Name, which had not been revealed to men before, which it is not lawful for me to utter (ii.xii.4).

We don't know what the practice was in biblical times itself about pronouncing the Name, but a certain circumspection about uttering that Name characterizes the post-Biblical Jewish tradition. The rabbis state:

> In the Sanctuary the Name was pronounced as written. But beyond its confines a substitute Name was employed (Sota 7:6).

In sacred texts that Tetragrammaton continued to be written, though often rather than writing it out even in sacred texts it would be replaced with designated abbreviations. This is consistently the case even in prayer books where the Tetragrammaton never appears.

And more. However it was written out that Name would never be pronounced. In the Jewish liturgy whenever the Tetragrammaton appears one says Adonai, (which is conventionally–at least before gender sensitivity prompted change–translated as Lord) a kind of euphemism. This practice is made explicit in the Talmud. In Kiddushin 71a we read:

> Not as I am written am I pronounced
>
> I am written *Yud hay vav hay* [the Tetragrammaton]
>
> I am pronounced *aleph dalet* [*nun yud–Adonai*].

Elsewhere in the Talmud (Pesachim 50a) the rabbis express the belief that in the world to come the Name will be pronounced as it is written.

And this is not the end of how post-biblical Judaism deals with the Divine Name. The Name came to play a significant, if not overtly acknowledged role, in the liturgy. The closest that Judaism comes to possessing a creed are the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. They are included in every worship service, often referred to as the "watchword of our faith": "Hear O Israel the Lord our G-d the Lord is one." When those verses are included in the worship service the flow of the Deuteronomic text is interrupted by interposing between verses 4 and 5 the words of Psalm 72:19, "Praised be His Name Whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever" or "Praised be the glorious Name of the One whose kingdom is forever and ever," a direct re-enactment of the practice of the congregation at the Temple when the High Priest pronounced the Name. Which has the effect of causing contemporary worshippers, whether they know it or not, to express praise for the divine Name itself before returning to the rest of the verses from Deuteronomy ("And You shall Love the Lord your G-d with all your heart...").

And this is echoed in the traditional practice of another interjection in the liturgy. Whenever one reads the words *Baruch Attah Adonai*/Blessed are You O Lord, which is the standard opening phrase of blessings, the congregation interjects, *Baruch Hu u'varuch Shmo*/ Blessed be He and blessed be His Name." The *Kedusha*, an essential element in the liturgy of every worship service, has separate variants for morning and evening services. In its evening iteration it asserts, "You are Holy, Your Name is holy and the Holy ones praise You every day." And in the morning it adverts to the Book of Isaiah and states, "We sanctify Your Name on earth just as You are sanctified on high." And then there is the prayer that concludes every service, the

Kaddish. It functions as a memorial prayer for the dead, but is in fact a doxology the opening words of which state:

Glorified and magnified be His great Name

In the world which He has created.

In each of these instances the very Name of G-d itself is treated with veneration G-d in G-d's own self is not mentioned but represented by the hypostasized Name.

Another standard rubric of the liturgy for every worship service is the *Aleinu*, which quoting the prophet, Zechariah (14:9) concludes with the messianic hope, "On that day the Lord shall be one, and His Name shall be one." Whatever this formula may have meant in Zechariah's time, to the modern ear it is a complex concept to decipher. Perhaps it alludes to the hope that at the end of time all humanity will join in affirming the one G-d. As we shall see below, the notion of unifying the Divine Name came to have a very specific meaning for Jewish mystics.[5]

Reverence for the very Name of G-d carries over to *Halachah*/Jewish "law" which instructs us that one cannot destroy any text that has The Name on it, or dispose of it in an undignified way. Rather, it must be buried as you would bury a human being who is similarly understood to be a representation of the divine: created in the image of G-d.

Additionally, the rabbis elaborated on the biblical concept we have already encountered in the Bible: profanation of G-d's Name/*Chillul ha'Shem*. They advert with some frequency to the fact that if you act in such a way that your actions bring disgrace to the G-d to whom you attest, it is a chillul *ha Shem*/profanation of G-d's Name–perhaps the most serious of sins. It is written in the Talmud

> He who is guilty of profaning the Name cannot rely on repentance, or upon the power of the Day of Atonement to gain him expiation, nor upon sufferings to expunge it. Only death alone can expunge it (B. Yoma 86a).

A later text asserts that the person guilty of

> *Chillul haShem* is among the five types of sinners for whom no forgiveness is possible (Avot de Rabbi Natan 39).

In contradistinction to *chillul haShem*, the Rabbis introduce the category of *Kiddush ha'Shem*/the sanctification of G-d's Name. This term is usually reserved for those who died as what Christians would call martyrs, whose death was a testimony to their faith. In the Middle Ages, for instance, the Jews of the communities of the Rhine who suffered murder at the hands of Crusaders or who chose suicide over victimhood or forced conversion were said to have died *Al Kiddush haShem*/for the sanctification of G-d's Name. And in our day Jews often apply this term to all the six million who perished in the Holocaust. They died *Al Kiddush haShem*.

To these categories one other was added, with largely mystical overtones: *L'Yached shmo*, quite a presumptuous idea, literally the unification of the Name. It expresses the belief that our actions can have the effect of making G-d one. It suggests that our fulfilling a religious imperative has the capacity to unify G-d, but is expressed in the circumspect terms of G-d's Name.

It is in the more overtly mystical streams of Judaism that we re-encounter the notion that the Name possesses a potency. We see this in the earliest expressions of Jewish mysticism, the use of various combinations of the divine name to work miracles, including cures. It is expressed, as well, in the creation of mystical amulets making use of the Divine Name. Clearly for mystics the very Name itself was thought to have a power accessible to certain people.

Perhaps the most famous of Jewish Mystics was the Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name), the founder of the Chasidic movement. People may assume that his name derives from the fact that he acquired a good reputation. But what it really signifies is that he had access to the *Shem Tov*, the (Good) Name. And he used that Name as a wonder worker. There are many legends and folk tales about how the Baal Shem Tov came into possession of the Name.

And the power of the Name is reflected unconsciously in practices current among Jews today. We have seen how the Tetragrammaton evolved a euphemism: *Adonai*. But even that is not regarded as circumspect enough among many pious Jews. In more recent times the euphemism itself was euphemized. Other than in prayer or formal reading of sacred texts even that euphemism is not employed. Rather one replaces it with the neologism: *Adoshem*, a euphemism for a euphemism which seems to be built on the word *Adonai* and the word *shem*/Name. Or, more overtly some merely replace the now-unpronounceable euphemism with "*HaShem*" –the Name.[6] Similarly, there are many who, when writing in English avoid writing out the word G-d, replacing it with the characters G dash D. Recently I saw it written in more dramatic form: G exclamation point D (G!d).

So though we never actually make it explicit, when we look at it as Father Ryan has caused us to, it becomes clear that the Name has great valence in Jewish life. It runs through every stratum of Jewish history and is manifest in every aspect of religious life. It is dealt with both reverence and circumspection. We might assume that attention to the Name would thus be the province of the pious or theologically sophisticated. But in truth it is even an element of everyday conversation. I learned it from my grandmothers. And I heard it in a conversation just this afternoon. It is a convention that you never say anything positive about yourself. "How are you?" You wouldn't say "I'm fine," not even "thank G-d I'm fine.".And similarly you don't

express gratification, gratitude, or relief. In all these cases what you say is "*Baruch HaShem*/ Blessed be The Name."

"How are you?" "*Baruch haShem*."

"I got to the train just in time, *Baruch haShem*."

"The boss really liked the report I turned in, *Baruch haShem*."

"I talked to the Doctor and everything is negative *Baruch haShem*."

So we have travelled together a great distance: from Abraham our Father to a conversation I had this very afternoon. And now we have reached the end. For those who have found the journey arduous or tedious this is a time to say

Baruch haShem.

NOTES

[1]Barber, Elizabeth Wayland and Paul T. Barber, *When they Severed Earth From Sky* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 97.

[2] Isaiah 18:7; 24:15; 56:6; 59:19; Joel 2:26.

[3]And elsewhere: 48:11; 103:1.

[4] This same theme is found with some frequency in both the Torah and prophets: Leviticus 18:21; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2 and 32; Ezekiel 36:20-21; 39:7; 43:7-8 and Amos 2:7.

[5] This verse offers the Talmud another opportunity to reflect on the difference between the way the Name is written and the way it is given verbal expression:

> Not like this world is the world to come. In this world the Name is written one way, but pronounced another. In the world to come …it will be pronounced the same way it is written (Pesachim 50a).

[6] I once witnessed a most subtle religious dispute over the issue of "name." At an interfaith Thanksgiving service the Catholic priest violated ecumenical etiquette by insistently and repeatedly concluding the prayers he read with the words "in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" –in a synagogue no less. The Jewish Cantor, offended, "retaliated" for the rest of the service by pointedly inserting the word "*haShem*" in places where, during a worship service, one would customarily say *Adonai*, as if to say "whatever this is I am participating in, I no longer consider it a worship service."

Naming God

A Muslim Response to the to the Spring 2013 McGinley Lecture

Professor Amir Hussain, Ph.D.

Al-salaamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatahu, peace be upon you and the Mercy and Blessings of God. I am honoured and delighted to be invited back to Fordham to offer a very brief response to the wonderful Spring McGinley lecture that we heard from Fr. Ryan. A very simple and a very sincere "Thank you" to all of you here. I need to single out, as always, Fr. President Joseph McShane for his hospitality, Provost Stephen Freedman for his support, Sr. Anne-Marie Kirmse for her help with the arrangements, James McCartin and Christine Hinze for their very kind introductions, Rabbi Polish for his wise words, and of course to Fr. Ryan for inviting me to respond to his lecture.

I really don't have much to add to Fr. Ryan's lecture, which will become apparent in the next few minutes. However, let me make a few observations. First, I suspect that Fr. Ryan knows much more about Judas Priest than he cares to let on, although I always pegged him as more of a fan of that other English Heavy Metal band, Motörhead.

In a more serious vein, I'm struck by his comments about special reverence for the name of Jesus among Christians, and the ways in which devout Muslims will add phrases of blessing (such as "may God bless them and give them peace") after saying the name of **any** prophet, not just the Prophet

Muhammad (May God bless him and give him peace). When I moved from Toronto to Los Angeles in 1997, one of the first films I saw was Robert Duvall's little masterpiece, *The Apostle*. That was his love song to Southern Pentecostal culture, and there is a marvellous scene where Duvall's character, the Rev. Eulis "Sonny" Dewey is preaching first in a Black church, and then in a tent revival to a Latino/a audience.[1] That scene echoes the "I Am" passages from the Gospel of John which Fr. Ryan spoke about. It also helped me to understand the power of the name of Jesus for Christians.

In thinking about that name, my third observation comes from my teacher, Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Over 50 years ago (1959) in a festschrift for one of **his** teachers, Philip Hitti, Wilfred wrote almost in passing (to the untrained eye, I hasten to add. To those of us who knew the master, he **never** did anything in passing): "This brings us on to another parallel which has long intrigued me. Provocative and far from fully congruent, certainly, it is one that it has seemed to me might tentatively be drawn in general between the Trinity in Christian thought and the 'ninety-nine names' of God in Islamic. The similarity is not so much in content as in the form of relationship. I once suggested such an analogy to a liberal Muslim, a scholar of literature with a London doctorate: the intensity of his shock and the swiftness of his repudiation were revealing, but, I felt, not convincing."[2]

Here, I think of one of those names that Fr. Ryan didn't mention in his talk, *Al-Haqq*, or The Real. But Fr. Ryan, of course, knows all about *Al-Haqq*, as that was key to the work of Louis Massignon, who Fr. Ryan wrote about in an

article entitled “The ‘Catholic Muslim’: The Conversion of Louis Massignon” for the January 25 issue of *Commonweal* magazine. William C. Chittick, who teaches down the road in Long Island at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, describes *Al-Haqq* in this way: “God is the Real; there is nothing real but the Real; everything other than God is unreal, ephemeral, transitory, illusory, vanishing, nothing. In short, every quality and characteristic of things that has a positive side to it derives from a divine quality and owes its existence to God. Everything good, praiseworthy, permanent, and real belongs to God. Therefore, ‘Praise belongs to God,’ and to no one else.”[3]

In making a connection here with Christian thought, I was reminded of the words of St. Paul. At weddings, one often hears the magisterial text of the 13th chapter of Paul’s first letter to Corinthians. In the chapter immediately preceding, Paul talks about spiritual gifts, how the Spirit of God is manifest in the world. I read the text now as I first read it, in the majesty of the King James Version. I know that other translations are more accurate, but other translations didn’t shape the English language the way the King James Version did. And I read this in my own way, not as a wedding text, but as a funerary text. To my reading, Paul is describing, in his own way, the experience of Al-Haqq, the Real:

> 1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
> 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

A fourth observation is the gift of naming given by God to the first created human being. Fr. Ryan talked of the Jewish tradition, where the first human, *ha-*

'adam, is created from clay. In the Qur'an, God speaks to both creating the human being and then breathing into it to give it life:

> When I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down to him in prostration. So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together: except Iblis, he was proud and he was one of the unbelievers. God said: "O Iblis! what prevented you that you should prostrate yourself to him whom I created with My two hands? Are you proud or are you of the exalted ones?" (Quran 38:72-75).

This is one of several versions in the Qur'an where the story is told of the fall of Satan, or Iblis. In the second chapter of the Qur'an, we are given the Islamic version of the story in Genesis of Adam naming the animals:

> And the Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said: "Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?–while we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holiness?" God said: "I know what you know not." And God taught Adam the names of all things; then God placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell me the names of these if you are right." They said, "Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise." God said: "O Adam! Tell them their names." When he had told them, God said: "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?" (Qur'an 2:30-33).

I see a connection here with the very first word of the revelation to Muhammad,

iqra, recite. It means to speak out loud or proclaim, but I see it in the tradition of Adam, to name.

My final observation is on the gender nuances that Fr. Ryan calls us to. In the Qur'an, God's love for creation is often called *rahma*, mercy or compassion. Etymologically, as Fr. Ryan reminds us, *rahma* comes from *rahim*, or "womb." The word's basic sense is a mother's sheltering love for her children. A number of sayings of the Prophet make the connection between God's mercy and a mother's love. For example, "Surely God is more merciful toward God's servant than any mother toward her child."[4] We need to be mindful, I think, of the Mercy of God, and the feminine imagery in which God's Mercy is expressed.

NOTES

[1] This scene can be found on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSmYRKBcgTM.

[2] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Some Similarities and Some Differences Between Christianity and Islām," in *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 243.

[3] Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1994), 61.

[4] William C. Chittick, "The Role of Love in the Qur'anic Worldview," unpublished essay, 16.