

Fran. D. Magdalena Tebi  
in Fortsetzung unserer Diskussionen

M. Bochenski

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The Logic  
of Religion

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by  
Joseph M. Bochenski, O.P.



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# The Logic of Religion

*Joseph M. Bochenski, O.P.*

This is the first attempt to use modern, mathematical logic to establish a general logic of religion applicable to all great religions.

Such a logic, Father Bochenski shows, is not a proof of or an apology for a particular religion—or for religion in general. Rather, it is the application of the rules and laws of logic to religious discourse.

The book is organized about four major heads: *Religion and Logic*, *The Structure of Religious Discourse*, *Meaning in Religious Discourse*, and *Justification of Religious Discourse*, with two technical appendices, “On Analogy” and “On Authority.”

As a venture into largely unexplored territory, *The Logic of Religion* opens new horizons for further study. It is a book of unusual interest to all serious students of religion and to logicians and philosophers as well.

JOSEPH M. BOCHENSKI, President of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, is one of the best-known logicians of the twentieth century. He is the author of some thirty volumes concerned with formal logic and contemporary philosophy, including Soviet philosophy.

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*The Reverend Charles Force Deems, born in 1820, was deeply concerned with the relationship of science and philosophy to religion. In 1881 he founded the American Institute of Christian Philosophy for the investigation of the most significant questions pertaining to the relationship. In 1895, two years after the death of Dr. Deems, the American Institute of Christian Philosophy endowed a "Lectureship of Philosophy" at New York University in his honor and for a continuation of the purpose for which the American Institute of Christian Philosophy had been founded.*

*Father Bochenski's lectures were sponsored by the Deems Fund.*

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## Preface

A book on logic of religion must, by its very title, cause some surprise; it may even be somewhat shocking. Although the legitimacy of a logic of religion is one of the major questions discussed in the body of the present work, it will perhaps be useful to try to dispel at once some of the misunderstandings which might be caused by the title. First, no proof of or apology for religion is offered; in other words, no attempt will be made to justify the correctness of any beliefs. Second, a full philosophy of religion will not be supplied; only such aspects of it will be studied as are accessible to logic—and, it must be added, to logic at its present stage of development; for we do not as yet possess sufficient logical tools to analyze fully even those aspects of religion. Third, the contention that the logical aspects of religion are the most important aspects is not made here; it is simply claimed, and an attempt is made to justify this claim, that there are such aspects, whatever their relevance might be. And, finally, no formalization of religious discourse is supplied; only people who do not know what a formalized system really is may doubt this.

The author is very much aware that he is working in a relatively unexplored field. Not that there does not exist in different theologies and Buddhologies an ample literature on most of the problems

touched upon here, but the tradition of such research has been broken and, with the exception of the problems of meaning, the author found himself in a situation not dissimilar to that described by Aristotle at the end of the *Topics*. Also, so far as he knows, no attempt has ever been made to formulate a general logic of religion applicable to all great religions rather than to a particular religion. This is said not to praise the author's work but instead to offer some mitigating circumstances to explain its inadequacy and to appeal for that indulgence which the Founder of Logic himself felt compelled to ask for.

For the inadequacies are many. The book describes the idea of a logic of religion rather than offering a complete system; if a limited number of problems—and certainly not all problems—are mentioned, few are resolved. Moreover, whatever is supplied here belongs to that stage of difficult and not very satisfactory thinking which precedes formalization.

An effort has been made to keep the text in the body of the book as untechnical as possible. However, the reader who is not familiar with the current terminology of logic and semantics must be warned that many terms are used here as they are in the context of those sciences and not in the sense they may have elsewhere. To illustrate this by one example: the author was amazed when a learned theologian declared to him that a meaningful sentence is necessarily true. Obviously, by "meaningful" he meant something quite different from what logicians usually do. It is doubtful if the reading of the present book would be of any utility to that particular scholar.

No quotations and references are to be found in the book. It seemed to the author that they would be out of place in a purely speculative (that is, non-historical) work. Some philosophers are mentioned, but it was not thought useful to indicate where, for example, Kant spoke about his postulates or Tarski discussed the concept of truth.

The content of the present book is a re-elaboration of a series of lectures which the author had the privilege of delivering in March, 1963, at New York University. The same topics later formed the subject of lectures at Fribourg, Basel, Amsterdam, and Utrecht. Each of these lectures was followed by discussion. The author wishes to express his thanks to the Committee of the Charles F. Deems Lectures and to all those scholars who made suggestions during the discussions.

J. M. BOCHENSKI, O.P.

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## Main Abbreviations

- “BD” for “basic dogma” (Section 19)
  - “OR” for “object of religion”
  - “PD” for “profane discourse”
  - “RD” for “religious discourse”
  - “TD” for “total discourse”
  - “ $\pi$ ” for “the class of profane sentences”
  - “ $\rho$ ” for “the class of sentences belonging to the objective faith” (Section 19)
  - “ $\tau\rho$ ” for “the class of sentences derived from the elements of  $\rho$ ” (Section 24)
- Instead of “elements of  $\pi$ ” the expression “ $\pi$ -sentences” is used, and similarly for “ $\rho$ ” and “ $\tau\rho$ .”

## Remark on Semantic Terminology

No semantic term is intentionally used in this book as presupposing any philosophy. Thus, when speaking about “meaning,” it is not supposed that meanings are separated entities, etc. The same is true of the expression “proposition.” The term “expresses” is often used whenever it is not desirable to make a distinction between meaning, reference, and so on.

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## The Logic of Religion



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# I

## Introduction

In this general introduction the idea of the logic of religion (abbreviated as “LR”) will be described and its main classes of problems stated. In order to do this, we shall have to enquire into the meaning of “logic” (Section 1); then we shall examine the concept of applied logic and the conditions of existence of such a logic (Section 2). This having been done, a similar analysis will be performed on “religion” (Section 3) followed by an examination of the concept of LR (Section 4) and its relation to theology particularly with respect to Buddhology (Section 5). Finally, a program for LR will be established (Section 6).

### 1. *On general logic*

The term “logic” has many different uses, and it is notoriously difficult to supply a convenient analytic definition of it. But if we limit ourselves to what is being really carried out now under that name in Western Europe and in the United States, we shall

find that, if not a definition, at least a description of what is meant by “logic” is not impossible. As a matter of fact, there are at least four sorts of studies which used to be called “logic” in the broad meaning of the term. They are: Formal Logic, Semiotics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Logic.

1.1

1. *Formal logic.* By formal logic is meant the study of some very general laws, namely, those in which, in addition to variables, only so-called logical functors occur. What a logical functor is may be best determined by listing the basic (undefined) functors of the present-day systems. Among them are Sheffer’s functor, the existential quantifier, and similars. Another way of describing formal logic is to refer to some classical work on it, such as the *Prior Analytics* of Aristotle or Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*.

2. *Semiotics.* By semiotics is meant the most general analysis of symbols. If this analysis is carried on by logical (that is, formal-logical) tools, semiotics is a part of logic, in the broader meaning of the word. It is, in a way, applied logic; but at least some parts of logical semiotics are so strictly connected with formal logic itself that they have always been studied by formal logicians for the sake of their formal-logical enquiry. Therefore, semiotics is considered a part of general logic. It is divided, traditionally, into syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, of which semantics is perhaps of greatest relevance to many logical studies.

3. *Methodology.* This is the study of the applications of formal-logical laws and rules to the practice

of science and possibly to other fields of human activities. While special methodologies of concrete fields are usually studied in the respective sciences, general methodology has been, since Aristotle, part of logic in the broad meaning of the term.

4. *Philosophy of logic.* Aside from the three disciplines mentioned above, there is still the study of logic itself and of some basic questions concerned with its foundations and relations to other sciences. This is usually termed “philosophy of logic” and is also usually carried on by logicians.

The logical order of these disciplines is such that formal logic appears as basic; all other logical disciplines presuppose it. However, in formal logic some principles of semantics and of methodology (methodology of deduction) are used. This is the reason why the first three disciplines together form one science, general logic.

General logic thus described has two outstanding characteristics: it is concerned with discourse and with objective structures.

1.2.1 A. LOGIC IS CONCERNED WITH DISCOURSE. In the whole history of logic, formal or otherwise, there is no known case of any serious study which has not been carried out on the basis of some discourse. It is true that some philosophers (especially since Descartes) have talked about the study of concepts “in themselves”; however, logicians have always dealt with concepts as expressed by words, that is, with discourse. This tradition started with Plato and is still absolutely general. There seem to have been

two principal reasons for adopting this method. (1) Concepts do not subsist in themselves (as against Cartesian mythology) but are meanings of terms; therefore, they should be studied through the terms, that is, through discourse. (2) Written (or spoken) terms are material things (or events) – and it is a basic methodological principle that, whenever it is possible, we should start with such things (or events), because they are much easier to study than mental entities.

This does not mean, of course, that the logician is concerned with discourse only. On the contrary, his interest is directed toward meaningful discourse, and not toward the material terms alone. But in practice he always deals with discourse.

1.2.2 B. LOGIC IS ABOUT OBJECTIVE STRUCTURES. There is a practically unanimous consensus among logicians that they are primarily dealing with some of the most general structures of objects, and not with subjective acts of the mind. It is true that the general rules of correct thinking can be immediately derived from some logical laws; but these laws are certainly not about mental activities. For example, when a logician states that, if no *A* is *B*, then no *B* is *A*, he is not talking about the rules of reasoning but, at least primarily, he is establishing a necessary connection between two states of things.

In order to avoid misunderstandings the following remark may be made. This is not a book on philosophy of logic, and an explicit position as to

the different philosophical theories of logic does not need to be taken here. Therefore, the terms used—even if they seem to be drawn from a particular philosophy of logic—may be interpreted according to the reader's own views. This may be illustrated by the following example. We constantly talk about meaning. Now the term “meaning” itself is completely neutral with regard to philosophies of logic. Some philosophies of logic assume that there are entities called “meanings”; others assume that there is nothing of the sort. Yet even the latter have to make a distinction between meaningful and meaningless discourse—and such a distinction alone is presupposed here, not any particular interpretation of “meaning.”

The same applies to the term “expresses,” which will often be used in what follows. It has been chosen because of its apparent neutrality. We shall therefore say that a term *t* expresses something if and only if it conveys something to the user of *t*. Thus, “expresses” may be understood as “denotes,” “means,” etc. An effort has been made in this work to remain as neutral as possible toward such specifications.

## **2. *On applied logic***

Applied logic is to be distinguished from pure or general logic. It consists, as the name indicates, in the application of pure logic to a certain extralogical field.



However, logic can be applied to a field, say *f*, in two different ways:

1. Every field in which there is any reasoning, ordering of sentences, etc., may be said to be applied logic. What is meant, then, is that some portions of formal logic are used, and that some extra-logical terms, axioms, and, perhaps, rules are added. In this sense, for example, contemporary physics or any sort of theology is applied logic. However, this is not the proper use of the term.

2. Second, we may mean by “applied logic” the study of those logical laws and rules (including the laws and rules of semantics and methodology) which are used in a given field. This differs from one field to another. It has been shown, for example by Professor Woodger, that biology uses some parts of formal logic which are hardly ever considered by the mathematician; and Professor von Wright and others have elaborated systems of modal logic, especially needed – according to them – in the field of morals. Another instance may be historiography, which is notorious for its use of many sorts of weak implication. The study of such peculiar parts of logic – which very often have to be developed *ad hoc* – is applied logic in the proper meaning of the term.

The following question occurs in connection with the concept of applied logic: under what conditions can there be an applied logic of a field? The answer is readily supplied by the two general properties

of pure logic. It may be formulated in the following theorem:

- 2.1 *For all f: if f is a field of human activity, then there is applied logic of f if and only if f includes discourse which embodies or expresses some objective structures.*

It must be stressed that this theorem contains as its main functor an equivalence; therefore it has far-reaching consequences which appear to open wider possibilities to applied logic than those considered by logicians up to now.

As a matter of fact, the historical situation in Western logic has been this: it has practically always been developed for the sake of science and especially of mathematics. This was the case with Plato, with Aristotle in his *Posterior Analytics*, and finally with Whitehead and Russell. But science is uniquely interested in propositions. Consequently, the scope of logic, especially formal logic, has been limited to propositions and their parts. Moreover, since in science all propositions which are not logical are factual, logic has been constructed in such a way as to be able to deal with the factual only.

But this is by no means a necessary limitation of logic, at least not where formal logic is concerned. During the twentieth century a broadening of the scope of logic has been carried on in at least two directions. One is the previously mentioned formal logic of morals, that is, of a field in which most formulae are not indicative sentences but imperatives. As to the second, the late lamented Austin

convincingly showed that certain formulae—called by him “performatives”—can become the object of a formal-logical study. As is known, these performatives can be neither true nor false, but they have two analogous properties, called by Austin “happiness” and “unhappiness,” and nothing forbids the construction of a formal logic for them.

On the other hand, our theorem also shows the limits of applied logic. There can be no applied logic in two cases:

1. Where there is no discourse at all.
2. Where discourse is present, but does not embody or express an objective structure. This may occur in two ways:

- a When the discourse is completely meaningless.
- b When, although it is meaningful, it expresses only subjective states and not objective structures.

Condition (b) must be mitigated with respect to one part of logic, namely, semantics. There can be semantics of a discourse which conveys only subjective meanings. But neither formal logic nor methodology can be applied to it.

Moreover, for methodology there is one more severe condition: in order to become an object of methodology, the discourse must express not only objective structures but propositions. For methodology is essentially a theory of truth-conditions, and only propositions can be true.

We have now arrived at a more detailed statement of conditions of applied logic:

- 2.2 *If  $f$  is a field of human activity, there is applied formal logic of  $f$  if and only if  $f$  contains discourse which expresses objective structures:*
- 2.3 *There is semantics of  $f$  if and only if there is meaningful discourse in  $f$ .*
- 2.4 *There is methodology of  $f$  if and only if there is discourse in  $f$  which expresses, at least in part, propositions.*

### 3. On religion

“Religion” is another term which, exactly as is true of “logic,” can hardly be defined analytically if all uses of it are concerned. There are simply too many divergent phenomena which are referred to by it. For the scope of the present study it will therefore be necessary to limit the reference of the term to some religions. Here we shall apply the term “religion” only to the so-called great religions of the present, by which we mean Brahmanism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And even the meaning of these religious terms must be restricted to the “great” churches, with exclusion of sects. This is, of course, not an evaluation, but simply a linguistic convention which is thought to be necessary in order to achieve a certain degree of precision with regard to the object of this study.

But even described in this way, religion offers a stupendous multiplicity of aspects. It is, most certainly, a psychological phenomenon and an object of psychology (psychology of religion); it is also

a social phenomenon and, as such, it forms the object of sociology (sociology of religion). Further, each of the religions has a discipline of its own, which is called "theology" or (in the case of Hinayana Buddhism) "Buddhology." As to the behavior, linguistic and otherwise, of the believers of religions, it is often very widely different from one religion to another.

However, there are in all religions, as described above, at least a few constant common traits. We may enumerate the following:

- 3.1 1. Religion is a social phenomenon. By this we mean that it is a complex of events present in human groups. These groups are characterized by a sort of behavior called "religious;" by this we mean that there are common behaviors of the members of such groups.
- 3.2 2. One outstanding characteristic of this behavior is the use of a particular language, called religious discourse; this expression will be abbreviated here as "RD," or in case of the RD of a religion *a* as "RD'*a*."
- 3.3 3. The class of utterances forming RD contains a non-empty subclass which is called the "Creed."
- 3.4 4. The acceptance of the Creed is of such paramount importance for every religion that a believer of a given religion may be defined by his acceptance of all elements of the corresponding Creed.

Because of the use of "religion" as described above, several kinds of discourse may seem to lie

outside the scope of the present research. For example, the discourse of ideologically bound political parties, such as the National Socialist Party or the Communist Party, is outside the scope of this enquiry.

However, even if there are considerable differences between religion, as understood here, and other such phenomena, there is still much that they have in common. As far as, for example, Communism is concerned, its discourse is formally organized in a way very similar to that of religion. Because of this similarity, the present enquiry may be helpful, at least insofar as its formal-logical and methodological parts are concerned, for the understanding of the logic of such other kinds of discourse.

#### 4. *On logic of religion*

Logic of religion will be, according to what has been said above, logic as applied to religious discourse. In connection with this definition two questions merit brief consideration.

1. *What logic should be applied?* The answer is that in the establishment of logic of religion there will be two successive stages. The first will consist of the application of such laws and rules of general logic as have already been constituted for general purposes. This will hold true equally of formal logic, semiotics, and methodology. An assumption made here which has still to be examined later on is that

RD is subject to these laws and rules as is any other human discourse. Of course, only the general part of logic is meant, not those parts which were elaborated for some particular purposes. It may happen, indeed, that some peculiar branch of logic, constructed for another field, is also applicable to religion. Yet in each case this must be examined, whereas the general principles of logic are universally valid and applicable.

The second step will presumably consist of the developing of special logical—formal, semiotic, and methodological—tools, which may be needed for the sake of analysis of RD. This is, indeed, what practically always happens when we try to apply logic to an extra-logical field.

It should be stressed that in the present research we will try to do the most we can with conventional logical tools before building up new theories. On the other hand, the field of logical laws and rules being infinite and RD having some very peculiar characteristics, it is *a priori* highly probable that special parts of logic will have to be elaborated for its analysis.

2. *To what material should logic be applied?* The answer is that this material must be the empirically given RD as it is, namely, the discourse factually used by religious communities. This is also the case with other departments of applied logic; for example, logic of biology does not deal with a

discourse conceived *a priori* but with the empirically given discourse of biologists.

This suggests that the situation of applied logic and in particular that of the logic of religion is very different from the status of general logic, which is supposed to be purely *a priori*. This author's opinion is, however, different. He thinks that even general logic is ultimately analysis of some structures embodied in concrete discourse; only general logic deals with structures common to all such discourse, hence the impression that it is *a priori*.

One classical instance taken from the field of semantics will help in understanding the aforementioned empirical element in applied logic. This instance is Professor Tarski's well-known definition of truth. This is constructed in the frame of reference of an artificial language established *ad hoc* and is reached with the help of high abstract logical procedures. However, the avowed aim of the author is to supply a definition which fits the meaning of the everyday "true" and, as a matter of fact, a convenient definition of that term is supplied by him. Tarski's procedure will be an ideal for every sort of applied logic and, in particular, for logic of religion.

We meet here, however, with one major difficulty. In order to base our analysis on a solid foundation we would need extensive empirical research in RD



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