Onomastics between Sacred and Profane

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Series in Language and Linguistics

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Foreword

Despite the increasingly rapid modernization of society and the more and more salient secularization of the Western world in the past century, the sacred is still regarded as a fascinating topic, which challenges, incites and creates debates. For a better understanding of the phenomenon, the sacred has been analyzed in relation to the profane. In fact, the twentieth century is marked by the names of numerous historians of religion, philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists who wrote a significant body of literature on the topic in question. Among the representative authors and works, one should mention Rudolf Otto – *Das Heilige/The Idea of the Holy*, 1917, Émile Durkheim – *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse/The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912, Roger Caillois – *L'Homme et le Sacré/Man and the Sacred*, 1939, Mircea Eliade – *Le sacré et le profane/The Sacred and the Profane*, 1956, Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *La fête, le jeu et le sacré* [Feast, play, and sacredness], 1977; *Le sacré* [The sacred], 1981, 1986.

The onomastic perspective on the sacred and the profane has been explored from Antiquity (Plato, *Cratylos*; Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names. Mystical Theology – De Coelesti Hierarchia*) until today in works that appeared in various spaces and cultures. Some of the noteworthy publications of the past decades include *The Lord Is God – The Translation of the Divine Names and the Missionary Calling of the Church* (1956), by Hellmut Rosin; *All the Divine Names and Titles in the Bible* (1975), by Herbert Lockyer; *Nomi e titoli de YHWH alla luce del semitico del Nord-ovest* (1976), by L. Vigano; *Dieu et dieux: noms et Nom. Actes du Colloque du 20 février 1982* (1983), edited by Michel Taillé; *Les noms divins en Islam? Exégèse lexicographique et théologique* (1988), by Daniel Gimaret; *Numele lui Dumnezeu în Coran și în Biblie* [The name of God in the Quran and the Bible] (2005), by Monica Broșteanu; *The Names of God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: A Basis for Interfaith Dialogue* (2011), by Máire Byrne; *Numele lui Dumnezeu în Vechiul Testament* [The name of God in the *Old Testament*] (2012), edited by Mihai Vladimirescu; issue 48/2013 of *Onoma*, on *Names in Religion*; the *Fourth International Conference on Onomastics "Name and Naming": Sacred and Profane in Onomastics* (Baia Mare, Romania, September 5-7, 2017), and the corresponding proceedings volume (http://onomasticafelecan.ro/iconn4/).

Given the fact that the hundreds of studies published throughout the years did not cover all the aspects that can be discussed with respect to the sacred and the profane manifested in anthroponymy, toponymy, literary names, and other subfields of onomastics, I decided to further explore this captivating topic. To this end, I invited colleagues and researchers from various parts of the world, pertaining to diverse religions/faiths, to contribute to the realization of this book, with studies that would examine facets of the sacred and the profane in onomastics that scarcely (if ever) constituted objects of research.

Religiously, God is the creator of everything seen and unseen; thus, one can ascribe to Him the names of His creation as well, at least in their primordial form. In the mentality of ancient Semitic peoples, naming a place or a person meant determining the role or fate of the named entity, as names were considered to be mysteriously connected with the reality they designated. Subsequently, God gave people the freedom to name persons, objects, and places. However, people carried out this act (precisely) in relation to the divinity, either by remaining devoted to the sacred or by growing estranged from it, an attitude that generated profane names. The sacred/profane dichotomy occurs in all the branches of onomastics, such as anthroponymy, toponymy, and ergonomy. It is circumscribed to complex, interdisciplinary analysis which does not rely on language sciences exclusively, but also on theology, ethnology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, geography, history and other connected fields, as well as culture in general.

The material is structured into five parts, as shown below. The presentation of the chapters is in agreement with the summaries submitted by the contributors.

Part One: Onomastic Theory. Names of God(s) in Different Religions/Faiths and Languages

God's Divine Names in the Qur'aan: Al-Asmaa' El-Husna (Wafa Abu Hatab). Prophet Mohammad was quoted as saying that prophets are brothers, their mothers are different, but their religion is one. This entails that Islam, Judaism, and Christianity have the same source and Muslims, Christians and Jews worship the same God though they may refer to Him by different names. This chapter is an attempt to explain the concept of divine names or *Alasmaa' Al-Husna* that refer to God in the *Qur'aan* with examples, distribution, syntactic and semantic explanation as well as collocations. The researcher adopted the methodology followed by prominent Muslim scholars who basically relied on the *Qur'aan* and Hadith.

Planning the Name of God (and the Devil). A Short Route, between the Sacred and the Profane, in Linguistic Creativity. Looking for Some Constant Logical Primary Pattern (Davide Astori). This contribution aims to show how God's and his Antagonist's names are coined in some of the invented languages of utmost importance: Volapük, Esperanto, Ido, Interlingua, Solresol – the musical language conceived by Sudre –, and Emojitaliano, a recent pasigraphy proposed by F. Chiusaroli, full professor at the University of Macerata, Italy. The chapter proposes a short route, between the sacred and the profane, in linguistic creativity, looking for some possible common feature.

Names of Gods and Goddesses in Old Romanian Culture (Gheroghe Chivu). Names of gods and goddesses in Greek and Roman mythologies are commonly considered proofs of speakers' classical culture. The information on Greek-Latin mythology and the employment in texts of names of divinities illustrating it, have been interpreted, almost without exception, as signs of cultural renewal in modern Romanian writing. However, in old Romanian texts, the occurrence of proper names designating gods and goddesses in Greek-Latin culture and mythology is scarce. The dissemination of these names can be explained especially through the type of text (secular or religious) and the form and content of the sources used by translators. Nevertheless, the rare citation and use of the names of Greek or Roman divinities in old Romanian writing must not be linked with the lack of knowledge of Greek-Roman mythology. They should be related to the prohibition imposed by church officials (constantly promoted by canonical texts) on the use of names of "idols, false gods", which were considered elements resulting from the influence of heathen beliefs.

Theoretical Outlook on the Sacred and the Profane in First Names (Daiana Felecan). Starting from specialized bibliography regarding the parameter investigated and some personal observations, this chapter reinterprets the semantic sphere of the terms *sacred* and *profane* in association with the noun *name*, the head of the noun phrase. Taking into consideration the lexicographical entries of the two terms and the acceptations established in anthropological studies, the author delineates between *sacredness per se* and *sacredness surrogate* (*substitute*), while defining the *profane* as that which is characterized in opposition with the attributes corresponding to the two types of sacred identified. Daiana Felecan believes that the phrase *sacred given name* (see the term *rigid designator*) implies a single referent (*God* and its equivalents in other natural languages). However, one can talk about *names that refer to the idea of sacredness* (through mediation) by developing this quality in a certain context (for instance, names of saints).

Methodologically, the demonstration is grounded in the research perspective specific to onomastics, linguistics, theology, ethnology, and philosophy.

The Name Giver (Alexandru Gafton, Adina Chirilă). The chapter adopts an exclusively Christian perspective in analyzing the one who gives names to all beings. The process of naming in the *Bible* reflects certain fundamental aspects concerning the spirituality and mentality which generated the text. One of these is the belief in the demiurgic force of the word. Since the word is the true and real name of a given reality, evoking the word can create, alter or stir that reality. It follows that the name giver knows the essence of the reality (s)he names and controls it.

Names of Sects: Between the Unusual and Manipulation (Artur Gałkowski). The chapter presents a study of the names of sects that function in social communication as titles of organizations and works/actions. *Sectonyms* constitute a specific group of *ideative chrematonyms* (*socioideonyms*). The author develops a discussion about public space associated with sects, the activities of which are not universally approved. This space affects the value of discourse that a given sect creates, including its name, which reveals the characteristics of the message in the form of an atypical, unusual, strange and manipulative expression in rhetorical and communicative context. The research is carried out on the corpus of sect names in English, French and Italian. Such aspects as the structure and functioning of the onyms identifying sects are taken into account, but above all the analysis focuses on their content (conceptualization) and pragmatic values obtained by considering the sectonyms through their specific semantic implications (key ideas).

Onomastic Configurations within Japanese Shintoism (Leo Loveday). This study explores four onomastic configurations related to Japan's native religion, Shintoism. It proposes that the shamanistic appellation of the principal Shinto deity together with the first recorded name of the country's ruler both indicate the interlocking of the sacred with the earthly plane through the power of a matriarchal spirit medium. It explicates the operation of name taboo according to an animistic worldview that posits an interdependent relationship between a personal name and its bearer's soul. The animistic legacy is observable in contemporary Japan where onomantic practices assign numerical values to the names of newborns to determine the degree of auspiciousness contained therein.

The Deity Concept among the amaXhosa of South Africa (Bertie Neethling). The *Xhosa* or *amaXhosa* refers to an ethnic group of people in South Africa, belonging to the family of Bantu languages. The *ama* in the word *amaXhosa* represents a class prefix marker. All nouns in the Xhosa language are

characterized by a class prefix marker. The origin and movement of the amaXhosa into what is known as South Africa is not clear. Many believe that they originally came from the Great Lakes area in Central Africa, and moved to the southeast of South Africa where they settled. The aim of this contribution is to explore some of the appellatives for the concept of the deity or 'God' amongst Xhosa speakers. The approach is interdisciplinary – religious, historical, etymological, linguistic and also covering cultural aspects.

Some Considerations on Jewish Names of Monotheism's Only Deity (Ephraim Nissan). The author surveys Jewish names for 'God'. The themes include, as the titles of sections indicate, "The most frequent name of God in the Hebrew *Bible*: The Tetragrammaton, Jewish substitutes owing to tabooization, and Christian reconstructions of it"; "The evidence of Biblical theophoric personal names, and pagan Graeco-Roman occurrences in post-*Septuagint* non-acquiescent yet appropriative responses to Jewish monotheism"; "*'Allāh* in Judaeo-Arabic and Christian Arabic usage, and its recent proscription for non-Muslims in Indonesia"; "The divine name *Šaddáy*, and the compound *'Ēl Šaddáy* 'God Almighty'"; "The Tetragrammaton's transition from Jewish into Christian Kabbalah"; "Other major names for the only God in the Hebrew *Bible* and within Judaism: *'Ĕlōhím* and (in a poetic register) *'Ēl, 'Ēlóah* and *Yāh* 'God', and *'Elyón* 'The Most High'"; "Written and spoken modifications of *'Ĕlōhím* because of tabooization"; and "Sandra Debenedetti-Stow's claims concerning *Domedet* or *Domeded* as a divine name in Judaeo-Italian texts, in relation to Christian Old French texts".

Part Two:
Toponymy between Sacred and Profane

Prayers in Place Names (Vladislav Alpatov). This chapter aims to contribute to the research into the human ability to attach highly un-spatial cognitive markers to spatial landmarks. In particular, it explores a rare toponymic type of place names incorporating the word *prayer* or the name of a prayer, or a piece of a religious invocation, such as the field names *The Psalms* or *God Speed Furlong*. A typology of such names is drawn and inferences are made as to the cognitive value of the relation between the figure and the background, as well as to the cultural value of the reference to the prayer in such instances.

Transylvanian Oikonyms between Sacred and Profane. Etymological Hypotheses and Onomasiological Framework (Nicolae Felecan). This chapter analyzes the etymology of certain oikonyms starting from the reasons that led to their replacement. From this viewpoint, the author mentions designations that can be subsumed under the category of religious names – *Iad* ('hell'), *Iuda* ('Judas') –

, terms related to migrating peoples – *pecenegii* ('the Pechenegs') and *besii* ('the Bessi/Bessoi') in late Latin historiography – and many names referring to ancient occupations and professions. Giving up such names implies an impoverishment of the historical testimonies to the history of the Romanian people and a linguistic accentuation of the artificial nature of the official nomenclature of settlements in Romania, by ignoring the motivation existing between a linguistic sign and its referent (the locality designated).

Transylvanian Oikonyms and Hodonyms: Between Sacred and Profane (Oliviu Felecan). As opposed to the previous chapter, which is markedly applied in nature, this chapter proposes an overview of Transylvanian space, a region in Romania where there are numerous religiously opaque and transparent hagionymic oikonyms. They coexist with secular oikonyms since the early Middle Ages, emphasizing the likeness between Transylvania and Central European or even Western civilization. Diachronically, oikonyms are related to monasteries, to the patron saints of churches, ministers of various faiths, as well as various religious objects and practices. Thus, they are objectively motivated due to the direct referential landmark and provide important data about the history and traditions of a certain region. In Transylvania, religious names confirm the coexistence of Orthodoxy and Catholicism with Romanian, Slavic, Hungarian and German aspects, depending on the ethnicities living together. As regards street names, the contemporary hodonymic landscape is to a large extent desacralized, as local administrative authorities believe that in the act of naming routes of communication priority must be given to cultural, national, political, social and ethnic aspects. Communism aimed at erasing all traces of religiousness from the Romanian inventory of streets, but after 1989, religious names began to reappear. Some were motivated geographically, through reference to a sacred landmark in the area (church, monastery, cathedral etc.), whereas others were in agreement with the confessional configuration of a settlement or aimed at evoking the memory of saints, martyrs and prelates from the region in question or who carried out their activity in the respective towns.

Ethnophaulic Toponyms in the United States (Frank Nuessel). Profane place names in the U.S. still exist in the 49 continental United States. This chapter addresses the phenomenon of ethnophaulic (ethnic or racial slur) toponyms in U.S. toponyms. These place names slander African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Italian Americans. The data include examples of derisive place names from several categories. This analysis falls within the paradigm of *linguistic landscape theory*. The study also discusses the role of the U.S. Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) of the

United States Geological Survey in cooperation with the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN), which seeks standardization of feature names.

Restoration of Urbanonyms with Sacred Allusions in the System of Urban Object Names in the Russian Language of the End of the Twentieth and the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century (Roman Razumov, Sergey Goryaev). A hundred years ago, the change in the social system in Russia from the monarchist to the socialist system was reflected in the system of urbanonyms – the names of urban structure elements: avenues, streets, squares, etc. In particular, due to the atheistic nature of the new dominant ideology, the names referring to religious ideas, for example, the names of the streets after the churches located on them, were subjected to systemic changes and the appearance of names of this kind for new objects under construction was impossible. At the end of the twentieth century, the ideological situation changed, but the cases of the re-creation of old names and the emergence of new names with religious meaning remain relatively rare. The authors of the chapter consider several similar examples and highlight the reasons that the exit of the atheistic ideology from the political arena did not lead to the automatic mass emergence of "religious" names in urban linguistic space.

The "Profane" and the "Sacred" in the Major Toponymy of the Ebro River Basin (Spain) (Joan Tort-Donada). This contribution undertakes a study of the motivation underpinning the attribution of toponyms, examining what might be considered the "sacred" or "profane" meanings guiding this choice. To do so, the author takes as reference a selection of twenty major toponyms (including oronyms and hydronyms) found in the basin of the Ebro River in the northeast of Spain, which occupies more than a sixth of the national territory. The results of the analysis point out the prevalence of the profane over the sacred in most of the toponyms studied. Nevertheless, in some cases, such as when a name refers to *water* as its "foundational element", one can detect a sacred meaning that is inseparable from the strictly profane.

The Sacred and Profane in Toponyms: Settlement Names Formed from Patrociny and Personal Names in Hungarian (Valéria Tóth). The chapter offers a comparative analysis of a characteristically religious name group, patrociny settlement names, and a secular name type, settlement names formed from personal names. As a part of this analysis, the author introduces the circumstances of their emergence, discusses the intra- and extralinguistic components of name-giving, and provides a detailed analysis of the chronological layers of relevant settlement names, while also highlighting the correlations between settlement names and their bases. The main finding of the analysis is that there are fundamental taxonomic differences between the

two name types, primarily due to the fact that settlement names formed from anthroponyms were created naturally, based on the needs and cooperation of a wide range of speakers, while patrociny settlement names were born as artificial, cultural name types, mostly based on the initiative of those in power, those representing the Church.

Part Three: Anthroponymy between Sacred and Profane

Secularization of Sacred Anthroponyms in Modern Ndebele and Shona Communities (Sambulo Ndlovu, Tendai Mangena). Both the Ndebele and Shona of Zimbabwe, as with other African ethnic groups, have what one could call *anthroponomastic taboos*. This means that there are restrictions on how names (in particular first names) of people are used within both private and public spheres. In both contexts, this has to do with social relations that are mainly sustained through respect. In this chapter, the authors concentrate on social, political and religious scenarios in which people find it difficult to respect such naming and name use conventions. In particular, they argue that the current modern spaces are sites from which the sacredness of names of elders, in-laws, political and religious leaders, and of the dead is routinely violated.

Theonymy in Anthroponymy: A Socio-Pragmatic Study of Selected Yoruba African Religious Names (Idowu Odebode). This chapter examines selected Yoruba African anthroponyms (personal names) to unravel their religious etymology vis-à-vis African deities and orthodox God(s). Forty names are purposively selected and analyzed within the framework of contextual theory and as speech acts. The study indicates that informing and asserting are the dominant illocutionary acts exhibited by the names. The study further indicates the polytheistic nature of the Africans and the fact that most names patterned after God(s) reflect the religious beliefs of the name givers. However, the names do undergo certain *morphological-cum-semantic* changes to manifest specific meanings which indicate a transition in religious systems and beliefs.

Connections of the Sacred and Profane in the History of Hungarian Given Names (Mariann Slíz, Tamás Farkas). The contribution provides an overview of the history of Hungarian given names in the context of connections between the sacred and the profane. The name stock, name-giving, and name usage are examined separately. As a result, the connections between the sacred and the profane can be examined more systematically in different periods, areas and communities. The concepts of the profane and the sacred are understood broadly. Alongside Christianity names from other religions are touched upon, and the sacredness of the period before Christianity is also

examined. Differences between various denominations are analyzed, and it is argued that a form of national sacredness can be observed. Several examples from the history of given names are listed to illustrate category changes and the possible connections between the two concepts.

Naming and Renaming as Sociocultural Signification in Bukusu and Shona Cultures (Solomon Waliaula, Tendai Mangena). This chapter examines selected practices of (re)naming among the Bukusu and Shona of Kenya and Zimbabwe, respectively. A key assumption in this study is that names operate within a matrix of sociocultural signification. Consequently, the names do not only serve nominal functions of identifying people and objects but also work within a wider framework of symbolic signification, where they serve social and cultural functions. This is an ethnographic study that uses theoretical precepts from social interactionism and symbolic anthropology to examine selected cases of Bukusu and Shona (re)naming. The study's major finding is that in these linguistic groups (re)naming plays an important role in the mediation of sociocultural relations between the mundane and the sacred.

Part Four: Ergonomy between Sacred and Profane

Sacred Aspects of Names in the Context of Place Branding (Angelika Bergien). This contribution seeks to explore the usefulness of personality association as a local planning instrument in place branding. Personality association implies that places associate themselves with a named individual in the hope that the unique qualities of the individual are transferred to the place. Using the names of the most important figures in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century in Europe as an example, the aim of the chapter is twofold: firstly, to show that some historical personalities prove more suitable in place branding than others, and secondly, to argue that associating a modern city or town with the religious or philosophical attributes of a sixteenth-century Church Reformer is a challenge that cannot always be met.

The Influence of The Kalevala *on Finnish Commercial Naming* (Paula Sjöblom). The national epic of Finland, *The Kalevala*, was published in 1835. It is based on Finnish oral poetry and old mythology. The epic has influenced Finnish culture, arts, society, and economy in many ways. The personal and place names of *The Kalevala* are in use in the contemporary nomenclature, as well. *The Kalevala* has had a special effect on commercial naming in Finland. In this chapter, some examples of Finnish company and product names which are inspired by *The Kalevala* are examined. All these names have a metaphoric or symbolic meaning: they do not say anything about the referent directly, but their function

is to arouse more complicated associations in people's minds. The material consists of company and product names from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as well as of contemporary commercial names.

Names of Natural Pharmaceutical Products (Mihaela Munteanu Siserman). After the Revolution of December 1989, mutations in paradigm occurred at several levels of the Romanian society (its economy, culture, and industry, to mention only a few), and they were also salient in the field of pharmaceutics. This chapter analyzes names of natural pharmaceutical products and underlines the sacred and profane aspects in their structure and function. The taxonomy of the designations recorded takes into consideration several criteria: lexical-semantic, structural (grammatical), etymological (referring to the language of origin) and pragmalinguistic.

Part Five:
Literature and Onomastic Wordplay between Sacred and Profane

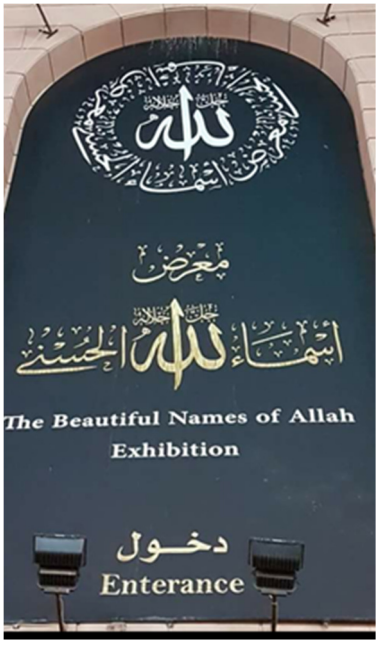
Semantics of Names of Tarot Cards between Sacred and Profane (Alina Bugheșiu). This chapter contains an analysis of names of tarot cards from an interdisciplinary perspective, in view of highlighting sacred and profane aspects that can be identified in these names and their use. Thus, the author employs concepts and precepts specific to onomastics, semantics (especially referential semantics), semiotics and pragmatics to show how, in this case, turning to the profane is considered a means justifying the ends, i.e., gaining access to the sacred. Furthermore, the chapter demonstrates what semantic changes are undergone by the lexemes included in names of tarot cards as a result of their onymization.

Onomastic Wordplay in Roman-Age to Medieval Rabbinic Biblical Exegesis, and Beyond (Ephraim Nissan). Onomastic wordplay is a conspicuous device in early rabbinic homiletics (the Aggadic Midrash) from late Antiquity. It was not an entirely new phenomenon in relation to the Hebrew biblical text, because onomastic wordplay is also frequently enmeshed in the Hebrew text of the *Bible*. In the Midrashic corpus spanning late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, however, the involvement of wordplay is much more overt, and importantly, it is displayed in the context of what is purportedly a meta-linguistic, or at any rate, meta-level discussion of the biblical text or narratives analyzed in the given Midrashic passages. An Appendix briefly considers Islamic Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic onomastic wordplay in relation to religion.

Profane in Literary Anthroponomastics (Based on S. Townsend's Adrian Mole *Diary Series)* (Anna Tsepkova). The chapter analyzes the profaning potential of

charactonyms in contemporary British comedic prose fiction. In particular, the focus is on S. Townsend's eponymous character, named *Adrian Albert Mole*. The profaning potential of the character's nominations is revealed by means of etymological and interpretational analyses aimed at connecting the meanings potentially inherent in the name with the features of the main character as a social type. The eponymous character is viewed as a source of the profane, representing an eccentric type, a fool, who depicts the world in his diary in an upside-down, absurd form. The names attributed to this character highlight his grotesque, contradictory nature, functioning as linguistic means of parody and clues to understanding the character types and their social relevance.

Despite the contributors' cultural diversity (29 researchers from 16 countries – England, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Nigeria, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Spain, U.S.A., and Zimbabwe – on four continents) and their adherence to different religions/faiths, the studies in the volume *Onomastics between Sacred and Profane* have a common goal which consists of the analysis of names that reveal a person's identity and behavior, or the existence, configuration and symbolic nature of a place or an object. From one civilization to another, names fulfil a more or less important role, and in addition to their denotative, referential meaning, their connotations are also worth investigating. As meaning carriers, names may be indicative of religious symbols, beliefs or attitudes – see, for instance, the more than 99 names of God in the Quran. In this respect, the permanent exhibition of God's names in the Holy City of Medina (*Madinah elmonoura*), Saudi Arabia, is illustrative (stills taken from: https://youtu.be/6qE87aCgqK0).



Figures 0.1-4 Exhibition about God's names (Medina, Saudi Arabia)

At the same time, names may also be suggestive of the complexity of profane, secular phenomena, in an etymologically explicit or implicit way.

In conclusion, one can state that names are tightly connected to the surrounding reality, be it profane or religious, in every geographical area and every historical period, and this phenomenon can still be observed today. The particularity of this book lies in the multicultural and multidisciplinary approach in theory and praxis.

Oliviu Felecan

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Preface

This volume makes a significant contribution to our understanding of language and of standard philosophical distinctions between the sacred and profane. Naming is the most elemental function of language insofar as it epitomizes the way in which we refer to the phenomena of our lives, and the religious and secular are certainly different types of phenomena.

There are also distinctive ways in which language is used to refer to the vast expanse of human experience, and the various types of mental reference are well understood philosophically. That is to say, we refer to all things with *signs* 1) that are similar to the phenomena, 2) that are in some way linked to them as effects (as thermometers signal temperatures), or 3) that are associated with other signs simply by the rules of language. In terms of semiotic theory, names are a type of *sign* that make references in these three ways, and are thereby said to function as *icons*, *indices*, and/or *symbols*.

A *sign* works as an act of reference insofar as it evokes in the mind a pre-existing image, and in our scientific age it is assumed that all such pre-existing images are based on sensory experience. However, sacred phenomena are generally assumed to be essentially mysterious, and so references to sacred things have a special status that justifies the special and welcome attention given by this volume to the onomastic differences between the sacred and profane.

As noted in the following introduction and repeated in many of the essays, our world has become increasingly secular. Yet religious references remain vital in the names continued from previous times, in efforts to restore social identities, and even in current expressions of sanctity. The organization of this volume clarifies the naming process and makes the philosophical issues clear.

The first section of this book begins, quite appropriately, with theory and the intractable problem of referring in any way whatsoever to divinity, something assumed to be essentially unknowable. A direct, fixed reference to sacred essence presumes an understanding of something beyond human comprehension. The simple question is how can humans pretend to know either the vagaries of animistic deities or the purposes of a supreme deity.

Naming divinity is technically beyond language, and direct references will often violate cultural taboos, or be seen as prideful heresy. In terms of language theory, religious meaning needs to be indirect; it needs to be

without direct reference, and yet it must be evocative of a numinous experience. Dante strives for the effect in *Paradisio* with many images of light.

The idea of the holy depends a lot on the *iconic* effects of language, its prosody and orthography. It needs a degree of vagueness, which seems to contradict the very idea of reference and naming. In religious language, a fixed designation should actually be avoided. In many religions, a firm distinction is maintained between a "true" name and a "public" name. In the Abrahamic religions, God is the inscrutable "I am" of *Exodus* 3:14, or the Elohim, in *Genesis* 1:2. The deity of major religions is that which created all that can be named. It cannot itself be known, named, and thereby controlled.

In the religious use of language, naming is clearly paradoxical, and yet religious references abound, competing with references to the sensory images generated by our daily lives. Our references are easily focused on the mundane, and this focus is clearly illustrated in the following sections of this book – toponymy, anthroponymy, ergonymy, and literary onomastics. Among these types of names we see a preponderance of secular naming, but we also see resilience in religious naming – e.g., in the restoration of traditional place names, and the continued use of personal names from one generation to the next.

Even though this compilation of essays demonstrates the preponderance of secular naming, it also shows the unique status of religious language, the sacred echoes of intellectual humility, the yearning for community cohesion, and the enduring flux of naming patterns.

This compilation provides an invaluable survey of the relevant issues, and we should all be profoundly grateful for the individual authors and for Professor Felecan's efforts in putting it together.

Grant W. Smith
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