

Sundry Remarks on Religious Metaphors

To embark upon so vast and complex an enterprise as attempting a new theory or definition of metaphor would be both naive – for what remains to be said on such a weary subject? – and ambitious – for who has ever managed to find a wholly satisfactory formulation? The amount of literature on metaphor has grown so vast that anyone but Warren Shibles (1) would be frightened by the herculean task of reading and compiling it all. The subject, then, must be approached with considerable care and modesty. It is possible and instructive, however, to start from a number of texts in which metaphorical discourse, or a particular kind of metaphor prevails, and thus, following the lines of thought that have been trodden before, to glean from each theory the elements that are borne out by one's corpus. In the present essay, the corpus is constituted by a series of prose texts that I would label *religious thought* – texts whose central point of reference is the word or concept "God" (2), or the relationship between God and man. The phrase *religious thought* is meant to include professional and popular theology, though not uniquely, and to exclude "religious texts" such as the Scriptures, hymns, or prayers. In the texts I have perused, the divine is not addressed or listened to, but referred to and reflected upon.

It is not the aim of this essay to enter into the nature of religious discourse. For the present purpose it is sufficient to note that a divine being or reality is taken for granted and referred to in a highly metaphorical language because that reality is considered to transcend the limits of what can be directly expressed by the words coined to describe what exists and takes place in our world. The point is not without importance for our study: the pre-supposition of a given reality or mode of being exterior and prior to the expression is a working-hypothesis we must necessarily adopt, as it is implicit in the kind of language we have chosen to deal with.

Whether human language, however oblique, achieves an adequate reference to divine categories is another problem I must leave to the philosophers of theology to solve: the common basis of their otherwise diverging views is the gap between human language and divine reality. Whereas for the most extreme forms of logical positivism, the chasm cannot be bridged, most other

(1) SHIBLES (W.) *Metaphor: An Annotated Bibliography and History*. Whitewater, Wisc.: The Language Press, 1971. References to works and authors quoted in the present study can be found in this bibliography.

(2) Cf. CRYSTAL (D.) & DAVY (D.) *Investigating English Style*. London: Longman, 1969, pp. 165-166.

McQUARRIE (J.) *God-Talk: An Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology*. London: SCM Press, 1967, p. 99.

hypotheses venture a leap across the abyss of meaninglessness by positing human language as describing relations and realities analogical to divine relations and realities. To assert that this analogy should be "given" by God to provide man with an insight into His nature (the path followed by Aquinas and Karl Barth) is conceivable within the frame of a theology of revelation, but otherwise untenable: the fact of representing the immaterial by means of the material does not necessarily predicate the physical as a manifestation of the spiritual.

The oppositive view also supposes a metaphorical or analogical relation, but here the process finds its origin with human thought and expression, and hence can only reflect a tentative insight into divine nature and reality. According to Paul Van Buren, human language must be "stretched" beyond the point of its everyday use and reference in order to cover categories which do not belong to the common meaning-world. In the process, the words lose their physical reference, their apophantic status, and when extended beyond the "edges of language", lapse into the void of meaninglessness. Ian Ramsey, the late Bishop of Durham, held the view now become classic that human language describes and constitutes a "model" at the human scale, which is only given a metaphysical dimension by a number of "qualifiers" which should lead to a situation of "disclosure" — a dawning of insight upon the user. The drawback of this hypothesis, as of the cartographic projection (3) which nevertheless stresses the incompleteness of the transposition, is that it presupposes a pictorial, rather than a paradigmatic relation between the word and its referent. To endow religious discourse with an essentially mimetic, or descriptive quality leads to the identification of God by means of a "picture" in one's mind — a process which often results in the construction of a "myth" or verbal idol in which the image or projection retains the realities and potencies of its referent.

Apparently, if we exclude the act of faith which allows one to accept God-statements as somehow describing the Divine, and what Alasdair McIntyre calls the "atheistic" alternative which translates them into language of human concern, (the line taken by Feuerbach, and in a different sense by Bultmann) we are left with a linguistic phenomenon which I venture to call *metaphor* — relations, qualities, attributes belonging to one category of reality are referred to in terms of another, different reality or substance. In this particular case, the divine, the "otherworldly", the relatively unknown is spoken about in terms of the human, the this-worldly, the familiar. It is not surprising that many of these metaphors are based upon the words which describe quite common human experiences. The fact that all men are submitted to, say, the effects of the law of gravity provides a useful basis for the analogical communication of meaning just because the experience is so commonplace. Yet "common" is not meant to imply "universal" — the value associated with a phenomenon may change or be lost as one crosses the barriers of a culture or civilisation. The images used are as numerous and varied as the sources from which they stem, and may be bound to a particular period's

(3) Cf BAILEY (D M) *God was in Christ* Faber, 1948 p. 109.

world-view "Made by", "rebelled", and "redeemed" are respectively metaphors from homo faber, social oppression, and slave economy; the Deists related God to the universe as a watchmaker to a watch; Dorothy Sayers proposed to substitute the relation of a playwright to his play; according to Harvey Cox, man is now to find an idiom which is relevant to the inhabitant of the present-day technopolis whose symbols are the "switchboard" and the "cloverleaf". Other images, of a wider appeal, are rooted in the language of anthropomorphism or interpersonal relationships (*Loving Father*), temporal (*Eternal God*) and spatial relations (the *inner Christ*, the *profound truth*, the *Highest Being*). It is upon this last set of images that I shall more particularly focus my attention throughout the re-assessment of the phenomenon metaphor.

In the example "the disciple stands in a decisive position between Christ the Lord and the world over which he is Lord", *position* and *between* (as well as *stand* and *in*) are borrowed from the arsenal of spatial terms to express a relation of a wholly different nature. Christ and the world, one might say, are viewed, indeed imagined as two points in space, and the disciple as a third point, line or medium establishing a relation between those two. This sort of analysis, however, conducts a meta-reasoning, and formulates a mental transfer-process which is not consciously or deliberately applied by the author — except when creating a highly original metaphor. *Between*, basically a prepositional indicator of a spatial relationship, here points to the nature of the "position" and relates nonphysical entities. The instance allows us to make the classic distinction between the two terms of the metaphor. Something is to be expressed or communicated — in this case a religious relation, the "function" of the disciple with regard to Christ and the world. This meaning, apparently prior to the metaphor, we shall label the tenor and the word used to convey that meaning vehicle, since the terms for the purpose have already been provided (Richards). The vehicle is said to stand for, or replace a "proper term" — which on the one hand suggests that the metaphor is "improper", "a kind of lie", "smuggled in from outside", and on the other, that a "proper" or literal term for the tenor exists. The reasoning held by those regarding the metaphor as a "mere ornament", as saying in an oblique and imaged way what could have been said more clearly and directly in nonfigurative language, is not applicable to all instances of metaphorical expression. Though it is possible indeed to find expendable metaphors, and to substitute literal equivalents for them, the procedure remains theoretical as long as we deal with given examples. In substituting *involvement*, a more commonly accepted image, for "absorption into the world", we cannot be certain to translate the whole constellation of meaning intended by the author. Except when the metaphors belong to a set of generally adopted images (*source* for origin), univocal equivalents are bound to remain tentative unless they are provided by the author himself. Thus one could consider "from without" expendable in "revelation is something given 'from without', from the God whom by nature we cannot know".

What becomes clear in the argument is not the "impropriety" of the vehicle, but the existence of its two different levels of reference: the *subsidiary subject* or "original" referent of the word used, and the *principal subject* the

new and different meaning it acquires when used as a metaphor. This feature, a *sine qua non* in the definition of metaphor, is usually referred to as *plurisignation* (Wheelwright). In the example "The Church's orthodoxy ceases to be the right way and becomes a prison in which she tries to entrap the living spirit", *prison* refers to the lack of liberty suffered by the spirit in an orthodox scheme of thought. Literally, it means a place of captivity. The original, local meaning has given way to something belonging to a different category. The same happens when God is spoken about as the *Centre*, or sin as a *wall* between man and God: a state, being or circumstance is defined, described or expressed by means of another word which has another, spatial or local referent. This does not mean that all the attributes and qualities associated with the original referent are lost; they may indeed constitute the very basis upon which the metaphor or its extension is constructed.

When the transferred meaning of a word comes, through frequent use, to be commonly accepted, even to the point of losing its original denotation, the metaphor is "dead", or "lexicalised" since the dictionaries acknowledge these meanings (as figurative or ordinary uses) under the entry of the basis word. To "stand" in a relationship no longer suggests an upright position: the image of God *sitting on His throne*, unless mythified, will hardly be understood as a localisation. Yet it is possible for a dead metaphor to be resuscitated in a new context: whereas *ground*, in its figurative use, means foundation, basis, motive, justification, the word takes on a theological meaning in Tillichian usage and may, in particular collocations, come to stand for *God*, in which case it is capitalised: Ground of Being, Divine Ground, Ultimate Ground. But this new dimension of meaning remains closed to whoever keeps thinking in terms of "ground-floor, ground-bass, ground-level" (4). A similar misunderstanding condemns the qualifiers which attempt to span the chasm between language and divine reality. Whereas "supremely good" seems to put God's goodness no "higher" than the quantitative peak of human performance, "infinitely" should be understood as placing divine attributes beyond the limits of the human, in the realm of the qualitatively different, the utterly transcendent. Nevertheless, it is a dangerous language-game to define a polar opposition in terms of a binary one — and the vast misunderstanding springing from it should inspire its users to caution.

Genuine creations or original extensions are relatively rare. When the image is unexpected, the author feels the need to explicitate its meaning e.g. by a genitive of-phrase. "*Spokes of relationship*" makes sense only as part of the total image "wheel" in which the categories of centre and periphery are thrown together.

When the metaphor is read univocally, i.e. when only the original meaning is attributed to the vehicle, a logical or empirical absurdity may arise. *Prima facie* contradictions like "raising things to a profounder level" (a phrase intended as a joke by its author) are not impossible when a same meaning is associated with vehicles of opposite dimensions: "transcendent depth", understood at its face value, seems to confuse the dimensions "abo-

(4) Cf PACKER (J I) *Keep Yourself From Idols*. Church Book Room Press, 1963 p. 6
VIDLER (A) *Soundings*. Cambridge University Press 1966 p. 208

ve " and " beneath ". But as Beardsley points out, the contradiction is inherent in the mechanism, in which different units are thrown together. The " polar circle of the mind " will remain invisible to anyone expecting a round figure; to give a geometrical form to a non-physical entity is what Ryle calls a " category-mistake " : material attributes cannot be predicated of the spiritual, lest the proposition give rise to a non-sense. " God is in heaven ", compared with the empirically verifiable statement " Joyce is in the kitchen " sounds like an acceptable proposition. But the former predicates personality and localisation — two attributes which do not apply to God in non-incarnated form. To apply categories which do not produce a first-sight absurdity to divine realities may increase the danger of mistaking the vehicle's subsidiary meaning for the literal truth about the tenor. The absurdity is not always obvious or striking. Only the more original and unusual images require a mental effort (which often amounts to " finding the analogy ") to overcome the feeling of non-sense. To the average reader it might not be immediately clear what is meant by " God is the pole " unless he enters the frame of thought set by the following context " the point around which all our existence pivots ". When the vehicle is not self-evident the tenor must be given or otherwise explained. More often, however, the absurdity is harder to " see " than the sense of the metaphor — even if the image does not draw upon reserves of commonly accepted material. To speak of Christ as " transparent " or " a window through the surface of things into God " is not usual; but the contradiction is strong enough to render a literal understanding highly unlikely. The reader is forced to look for a meaning on another level than that of immediate reference. In this particular instance, the more traditional images of God-as-light and understandig-as-seeing will put him on the right track.

If a metaphor were coined by the arbitrary substitution of one word for another, the proposition would be " merely absurd ", whereas the effect to be reached is, as Berggren points out, one of " significant self-contradiction ". The opposition between the terms must be counteracted by a relative similarity; the equilibrium between resemblance and difference constitutes the *metaphorical tension* (Black, Wheelwright). The implicit or explicit presence of a common feature between tenor and vehicle is what relates metaphor to simile, and causes one to be occasionally defined in terms of the other, especially by the adherents to the literalist theory (Buchanan, Ushenko).

To refer to the common field of meaning that links tenor and vehicle, and justifies the choice of a particular image, it is relatively easy to speak in general terms of " resemblance ", " comparison ", " analogy ". Douglas Berggren's classifications aim at describing the various mechanisms by means of which meaning is transferred from one term upon another. On the whole, such distinctions are easier to make *in abstracto* than on the basis of actual examples : in the majority of instances, the metaphors belong to the field of intersection between two or more classes. It is possible, however, to extrapolate some eloquent cases for the sake of illustration.

In the previously quoted example " orthodoxy . . . becomes a prison " the associated commonplace of the vehicle, c. q. the lack of freedom, is found to apply to the tenor and justifies the choice of the particular image. The resemblance between orthodoxy and a prison is not only *pretended*, it is *inten-*

ded (Turbayne). This relation is usually referred to as *epiphor*. In *diaphor*, an attribute of the tenor is projected onto a vehicle which is felt to be a suitable bearer of the intended meaning. Here, the similarity does not antecedently exist, but is created by the metaphor itself. Thus, when we speak of a hereafter in heaven, the locus becomes, through a verbal twist, charged with the meaning of eternal bliss and union with God. This does not mean that the choice of the image is arbitrary; the vertical dimension to which the concept "heaven" belongs has profoundly rooted, archetypal reasons for its association with the realm of the divine (5).

To the possibilities of *epiphor* and *diaphor* one could add the instance of *limbo* and *purgatory*. In *diaphor*, attributes of the tenor are predicated of a vehicle which refers to a "real" locus; in the case of *limbo*, the process is apparently the same, but the vehicle has no literal referent outside itself, in the empirical world: it has the pseudo-local status of a town drawn on a map which describes an imaginary country — it exists nowhere but on the map itself. This phenomenon, which appears in localisations of the *Divina Commedia* as well, is called *self-referential* metaphor. Mathematical descriptions of the physical world are self-referential in the sense that their "literal" meaning belongs to a system of mathematical relations, while their "metaphorical" referent is transcendent to the system: "La mathématique traite exclusivement des relations des concepts entre eux, sans considérer leurs relations avec l'expérience. La physique aussi traite de concepts mathématiques; ces concepts acquièrent cependant un contenu physique grâce à la détermination précise de leurs relations avec les objets de l'expérience" (6).

Some words, finally, have both a physical or historical referent and a meaning on a different level. The setting of a novel, for instance, may refer to more than the locus of the action. In the Johannine narratives (which fall outside the purview of our study) the process is frequent: the hill of the miraculous feeding, the well where Jesus meets the Samaritan woman, the water changed into wine — all are charged with messianic meaning in addition to their literal denotation. The referent points both to itself and to a meaning beyond itself. This mode of expression I suggest to call *symbol*. In "the pilgrim making his *ascent* to the temple", *ascent* is used literally, as when we speak of catching the "up" train to London; it is a metaphor in "the ascent of man to the divine level", and in "man's ascent to heaven" this metaphor takes the form of a localisation. The picture changes when *ascent* is applied to Christ: if the ascension event is *not* held to be a historical fact in space and time, of the same status as the crucifixion, we are dealing with mere metaphor; but if the fact is considered to have literally taken place, the word refers both to a physical event and to a religious meaning also represented by vertical ascent, and which might be paraphrased as Christ's glorification. In liturgy and hymns, literal

(5) Cf FAWCETT (T) *The Symbolic Language of Religion*. London: SCM Press, 1970.

BEVAN (E) *Symbolism and Belief*, 1938; republished Fontana 1962. Chs. II and III.

ELIADE (M) *Das Heilige und das Profane*. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957.

BACHELARD (G) *L'Air et les Songes*. Paris: Corti, 1943.

(6) EINSTEIN (A) in: *Conceptions Scientifiques, Morales et Sociales*. Paris: Flammarion, 1952 p. 47.

and metaphorical meanings are inextricably bound together: "He suffered and was buried, he descended into hell, and the third day he rose again according to the scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father". When the historical events become charged with a religious or metaphysical meaning, it becomes difficult to discern one from the other. In extreme cases, the metaphor may be mistaken for the historic truth. We shall deal with this kind of fallacy which tends to crystallise misunderstandings when speaking about "myth".

In the *structural* metaphor, a comparison of ratios is always present. Posited between tenor and vehicle is a recurring or comparable set of relations ($A : B = C : D$) which allows the substitution of a term in the first ratio for the corresponding term in the second. The example "God is the pole, the point around which all our existence pivots" can be analysed as follows: Our existence is related to God as a (circular) movement is related to its centre point (pole). The comparison gives way to an identity: God *is* the pole, the point, and our existence *is* the movement around it. Such comparisons are not always explicit, nor are they always necessary, since the connexion may be based on a set of associated commonplaces. In "the risen body of Christ becomes the source of life", the paraphrase spells: "as a river is related to its source, so life is related to the risen Christ" (*river*, incidentally, is an intrapolated third, obviously implied by *source*). The reader is left to infer what the meaning of the comparison amounts to. In this particular instance, there are, once more, a number of clues that may help him. *Origin*, *beginning* are usual figurative meanings associated with *source*, they only partly account for the image used here, for the proposition "Christ becomes the origin of life" still sounds like an empirical absurdity. The religious context furnishes an indication that "life" may take on an additional component and come to mean "eternal life" — a mode of being to which the rules of biological causality do not apply. This impression is corroborated by the meaning of "source", "source of life", and of water-imagery in general throughout the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In the Old Testament, and above all, in Johannine theology, water is often associated with spirit, life, and eternal life (7).

When the common denominator between tenor and vehicle is not the relation but a quality, value, or emotional charge transferred from one term upon the other, (depending on whether the metaphor is epiphoric or diaphoric) we speak of *textural* metaphor. Whereas the use of structural ratios is particularly useful in the construction of scientific models, the connexion by means of values and emotions associated with a word (inevitably, a more subjective process) is a technique often applied in the creation of poetic images. The basis for such metaphors is constituted by *Einfühlung*, empathic or kinesthetic projection (the *sad* moon, the *rise* of the empire, ...). Spatial metaphors are textural when, say, a place or a dimension is attributed a value which does not spring forth from its literal, topological meaning. Though it might be

(7) Cf. RICHARDSON (A.) *A Theological Wordbook of the Bible's v. water* iii. London: SCM Press, 1957, p. 280.

MARSH (J.) *Penguin Gospel Commentary: St John*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960, p. 212.

argued that in speaking of a "full life" or "full and loving relationships", life and relations are viewed as receptacles with a capacity: the connotations of perfection, satisfaction, of ultimate sense (or any other tentative equivalent) associated with fulness are not dependent upon this comparison.

A fair number of transferred "textures", emotional charges or connotations, belong to the commonplaces associated with a spatial concept (importance with place, positive evolution with forward motion...); many of these, however, depend on a deeper mode of association which one might plausibly label "archetypal" — images whose meanings are known by "intuition", whose origins draw upon vast reserves of universal or culture-bound symbolism, whose motivation is to be sought beneath the surface of consciousness. Eliade and Bachelard have conducted admirable investigations into the origins of these fields of meaning. Images of height, for example, have become particularly charged with emotive value; they are the traditional carriers of connotations of excellence, perfection, authority, and — in a religious context — divinity. They provide an excellent example of how a metaphor conditions a whole dimension of thought and constitutes a "frame" within which other images can be constructed: When *height* is associated with God, the "Highest Being", various levels between the "above" and the "below" can be imagined ("the descent of God to the human level"); God can be localised "up there in heaven", the Christians "lift their hearts to their ascended and triumphant Lord"; their souls "proceed to scale the spiritual heights, ascending from glory to glory". None of these rich associations is inherent in the topological conception of height; and the offered structural explanations (Cf. Isa. 55 : 9 and Ps. 103 : 11) do not account for the full richness of the image. Yet to interpret Biblical usage in terms of ordinary language or anthropological categories means a neglect of the original insight. Apparently, the images do not bear explanation — though adopting their texture as an accepted *a priori* may present serious problems.

The line between the structural and textural modes of transfer is hard to draw: more often than not, the mechanisms interact to build up an image in which emotive values are projected upon structural ratios. The dimensions of depth and interiority, both of which presuppose the attribution of some corporeality, provide clear illustrations of this phenomenon. The translation of an identification like "God is the deep Centre" could read: God is related to [man ? life ? the world ?] as depth is to the surface of an object, and as the centre to the periphery: He is present though invisible; essential to movement though himself unmoved; the point of reference and definition, as the centre defines the circle. *Depth*, however, is not a mere vertical metaphor: the deep and hidden regions have come to stand for a realm of ultimate truth masked by a deceptive surface; it is linked with the mysterious, the unconscious, but also with *heart* and the realm of the spiritual. In Tillichian theology, "to know depth is to know God". Nor is *centre* restricted to plain geometry. Its association with interiority provides additional nuances of inclusion, of proximity, of belonging, and ultimately of spirituality ("inner life") and divine immanence. These shades are "intuitively felt", — basically a dangerous assumption! — rather than grasped by reason. However, explanations overlooking such associations fail in their purpose because they tend to stress the metaphor's

limitations and structural irrelevancies rather than to highlight its evocative power.

Like any medium of expression indeed, the metaphor has its limits. If it achieved full identity between the tenor and its vehicle, the tension between them would be nil, and either of them would become "semantically superfluous". Resemblance-in-difference and difference-in-resemblance are complementary : the vehicle offers a conjunction of semantic features, only a few of which (though not always the same ones) are disjoined and selected as relevant : *line* may be used to denote either connexion, separation, or progression. In other terms, a number of potential meanings are excluded by the context. It is logically unsound, therefore, to brand a metaphor as inadequate because it is accurate only up to a certain point. When the relation between God and man is referred to as the umbilical cord of man's existence, the implication is the link of dependency — not the fact that the umbilical cord has to be cut. The analogy, indeed, remains subordinate to the insight and need not be extended beyond the scope of the implied comparison.

It is interesting to note that the selective process is reciprocal : the tenor borrows only the relevant meanings of the vehicle, and the vehicle in turn highlights but certain aspects of the tenor, whose meaning transcends its expression. This is known as the "filter" theory of metaphor. The image "God is the pole, ..." selects but one particular quality of the geometrical point: in the same proposition, only one quality of God, His "function" as support and substance of life, is highlighted. To speak of God as "here" or "away" focuses on his accessibility or degree of involvement in human affairs. We recognise here the fallacy of identifying God by a single image in our minds : the metaphor reflects only a partial insight into the transcendent truth it is referring to, and secondly, irrelevant associations of the image may be projected into it by users unfamiliar with the language-game being played : "In the theological version of Copernican cosmology, says Dr. Robinson, God is indeed the supreme Being, the sun of his universe around whom all revolves. But like the sun, he is still "out there" from the point of view of human life" (8). Positional superiority is substituted for the essential superiority of the supernatural. An imagery which "places" God in a heaven beyond at a distance from man is convenient to a theology of transcendence, whereas a secular world may interpret it as an expression of unconcern — quite the contrary of what was intended. Such meta-reasonings, again, must be manipulated with care : one cannot expect an image to reflect an insight which it was not coined to express: nor can one discard a metaphor without the risk of dismissing its positive contribution and the insight it reflects. Such is the mistake occasionally made in *Honest to God* when an image is interpreted in the hypothetical perspective of a near-sighted Man Come of Age.

This is not to suggest that a metaphor cannot be poorly chosen or even inaccurate. A proposition like "The Via Negativa cuts dead across the Emmaus Road" is frankly puzzling. In the light of the context it should be taken to mean that Christ is met, not by interior denial, but through deep concern for others. Cleopas and his friend met Christ on the way to Emmaus — agreed. But

(8) ROBINSON (J A T) *Exploration into God*. London : SCM Press 1967 p 73

when Christ met them, they were running away from it all, and not "in the way" on any "ultimate concern for others" (9). In addition to a formulation cryptic to any outsider, the metaphor misses the point it was meant to make.

To return for a moment to the duality of sense posited between principal and subsidiary subject: In the "stereoscopic vision" theory it is asserted that both meanings of the vehicle interact to create a new category of meaning, thus rendering the metaphor indispensable, able to translate categories beyond the scope of normal language, and untranslatable into univocal paraphrases. In a lexical approach which deals more particularly with the *signifiant*, it is difficult to assess the communicative value of a particular image, or its accuracy with regard to a *signifié* which we have no means of knowing outside the given contexts. Formally speaking, however, we may find a few indicators that the principal and subsidiary subjects operate as a *both/and* rather than an *either/or*: that metaphors do not rule out all the other properties or aspects of the subject described and of the image used. In other terms, if the vehicle attracts qualifiers applying to its original meaning, one may argue that part of that literal meaning is maintained, though in disjunction from the components upon which the metaphor is based. In "to fish new ideas out of the streams of contemporary thought", the additional image of fishing is an extension of the more usual phrase "stream of thought". It is based upon the properties of the subsidiary subject "stream". Conversely, in "Christians as the Body of Christ — the visible sphere in which life is declared, realized, and extended", *visible* applies to the Church manifest, i.e. to the principal subject, and not to *sphere*. The vehicle has retained a qualification which applies to the principal subject, and not to itself.

Although I should hesitate to assert that there are "degrees" of metaphoric expression, one must admit that the metaphorical nature of some propositions stands out more clearly in certain contexts and collocations than in others. The difference between *wide* in "wide influence" and "wide sense" is slight: whereas the associated commonplace of both is "involving much/many", the former is perhaps easier to visualise as a physical "area" of a certain size than the latter. More interesting is the instance of the image belonging to what I suggest to call a *metaphorical frame*. Once we agree to speak about, say, the reality called "heaven" as a place, we can refer to its importance or relevance in terms of size or location, even without believing in its spatial existence. Prepositions, used metaphorically, indicate relations analogical to spatial relations, but not between spatial objects — a fact overlooked in calling their use literal, albeit that it would be difficult to find a nonspatial equivalent for the relation. In "Exploration *into* God", "insight *into* truth", "a journey *into* the subconscious", the preposition "sounds" literal because used within an agreed frame of thought — in this case one which grants a certain corporeality and content to God, truth, and the subconscious. Thus, a metaphorical mode of thought may create a frame within which other terms seem to be used in their natural collocations. Tension is reduced as the principal subject causes no absurdity at the sentence level, and the metaphor is

(9) FIELDING CLARKE (O) *For Christ's Sake* Wallington: Religious Education Press, 1963 p. 31 note 1

"weakened". Knowing that *depth* stands for truth, one can start "digging deeper", "sounding the depths", or "bring the truth to the surface"; but the images of *digging*, *sounding* and even *surface* remain subordinated to the basic "depth" category. Carrying this reasoning to extremes, one could reduce all spatial metaphors to a few basic directions or dimensions. But whereas this may be a useful technique in classifying *signifiants*, one must abandon the illusion that the structure of the lexical bulk therefore reflects a univocally corresponding structure in the *signifiés* — a mistake frequently committed in the lexical approaches to Biblical theology (10).

The case for non-translatibility of metaphor is interesting. As pointed out before, a paraphrase must remain tentative lest a component of meaning be lost in the process. Generally speaking, it seems more difficult to explain a textural than a structural metaphor. Traditional images like *head*, *heart*, or *sun* can be explained away in terms of the relations they represent or imply (essence, dependency, excellence...) with little loss other than the metaphor's economy and, possibly, poetry. And even as complex a structure as a "conical universe" could be elicited by pointing out the analogy between the outstanding geometrical position of the apex (both climax and centre) and the equally excelling status of Christ with regard to the universe. Textural metaphors, on the other hand, are based on more subjective synaesthetic or kinaesthetic categories, and their univocal equivalents somehow do not seem able to carry across the full meaning sensed by the reader. Where a text speaks of "the heights of hopes and the depths of fears", a retranslation in terms of intensity or contrast, or a replacement by another pair of related opposites like "glory and despair" leaves out much of the image's textural import: the images, rooted in intuition or perception, acquire an existence of their own, and resist rationalisation. The argument for metaphor as a unique means of expression transcending the abilities of literal language finds at least some corroboration here. But it becomes clear that the use of such a relatively subjective means to refer to ineffable realities involves an increased risk in misunderstanding. On the one hand, the metaphor may be understood at its face value and "mythified"; on the other hand, a more serious threat is constituted by the metaphor torn out of its original perspective and interpreted within a different context. The importance of this argument, particularly with regard to religious language, will become clear in my final paragraphs.

By "myth" I mean the failure to recognise the difference between the two levels of reference in the vehicle, and the subsequent belief in the metaphor as *the* literal truth about the principal subject. It is thus, if we build our case upon the previously established premises, a "believed absurdity" (Turbayne). As pointed out, only those propositions in which the absurdity is not a *prima facie* offence to reason or thought within a determined frame are liable to be mythified — and even so, only by the less sophisticated. The reader of popular theology may not understand "God is in heaven" or "The Kingdom of God is within thee" with its full implications of transcendence and immanence, but a crudely literal understanding is hard to find. In "I imagine God as a figure (...)

(10) BARR (J.) *Biblical Words for Time* (Studies in Biblical Theology, series I, n. 33) London SCM Press, 1962 pp. 159-169; and *Semantics of Biblical Language* OUP 1961 Ch. VIII.

He is in a white robe (. . .) some strong big man sitting in the sky with all the angels around him" (11) we must distinguish between literal belief in the images and indirect, textural reference introduced by "imagine as. . .".

A more serious attack on metaphor is made by the argument that speaking of a reality in terms of a particular model may distort, not the way in which the reality is viewed or represented, but the very concept of that reality within the user's thought-habits. To speak of God as a man, complete with beard, robe, and throne, is a crudely anthropomorphic representation that will be rejected by a majority of Christians. But thinking of God in personal categories, while it throws a light on the way in which man experiences his relations with the divine, finally obliges God to die "the death of a thousand qualifications" to escape from the limitations imposed upon Him by the metaphor.

Religious statements presuppose at least two parametres — God and man — related in terms of spatial ratios or referred to in terms of spatial loci. "Localisation" as a metaphorical mechanism among others is usual; a particular case of transfer from the immaterial to the material, responding to a specific transference rule (12). The question "where are we to 'place' God?" does not affect the reality prior to the expression: to locate a reality means to identify it in spatial terms, to associate with it local qualities whose textural or structural imports reflect an insight into an aspect of that reality. The problem is not really that people fail to elicit the metaphors and understand them at their face value, but that the projection may distort the reality it was there to express. It is on behalf of this kind of reasoning that Dr. Robinson (13) wages war on the image of God "up there", or any image that represents Him as external or peripheral to the processes of the world or man's existential situation. Our understanding of metaphor as expounded above now entitles us to make an appraisal of this attitude.

One cannot blame Dr. Robinson for making both authors and readers beware of a mode of expression which must be rightly understood if it is to have any communicative value; but one may counter-argue that any form of communication presupposes a consensus. We must, therefore, nuance our approach according to the kind of image taken under fire.

To reject an image on the basis of its obsolescence, or its decreasing appeal in a modern situation means running the risk of throwing out the insight with the metaphor. The critique of Biblical modes of expression interpreted in terms of the words' contemporary values wrings the terms out of their original context to place them in a situation which betrays their original import. The *Weltbild* which is presented as being that of a "Man Come of Age" is remarkably static and anthropocentric in spite of its claims on scientific status. It has very little in common with the Biblical topology of the *Heils-*

(11) LOUKES (H.) *Teenage Religion*. London: SCM Press, 1961 (passim).

(12) LEECH (G.) *Towards a Semantic Description of English*. London: Longmans Linguistic Library, 1969 p. 90.

(13) ROBINSON (J. A. T.) *Honest to God*. London: SCM Press, 1963 Chapter I, passim. *Exploration into God*, op. cit. p. 38.

geschichte and the linguistic process should not be viewed as a common denominator able to bridge the gap (14).

In dealing with "myth", one should keep in mind that language as a system is self-referential, and avoid projecting upon the tenor the syntactic relationships in which the vehicle occurs. There is no necessary analogy of being between God and God-language outside a theology of revelation.

The criticism of metaphor may apply, however, to instances such as the reduction of a polar situation to a binary one. This, indeed, is a projection entailing a distortion when thought is forced to move from one "dimension" to another. In this respect, the "model/qualifier" theory sounds like a tempting solution. But only an investigation into the readers' understanding of the meaning intended by the author can reveal whether the process is practically valuable. As to the relation between the word of man and the reality of God, we are bound to remain in the dark; for to us, as to Gibran's prophet, "Thought is a bird of space, that in a cage of words may indeed unfold its wings but cannot fly".

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(14) SZEKERES (A.) *Le Christ Cosmique de Teilhard de Chardin*. Paris : Seuil, 1969, pp 412-434.