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> Now strange words simply puzzle us;
> ordinary words convey only what we know already;
> *it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh.*
> (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*)

Metaphor Saves[1]

Abstract

What is said about metaphor in the present paper will mainly concern the Christian Bible as directly or indirectly translated from the original languages (mostly Ancient Hebrew and New Testament Greek). However, unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are based on *New International Version* of the Bible. Metaphor is conceived as a cognitive-conceptual device rather than a merely rhetorical ornament, which is consistent with basic tenets of cognitive linguistics. Among conceptual metaphors the metaphor MENTAL REALITY IS PHYSICAL REALITY stands out as one of the most productive metaphors as it generalizes the cognitive process of creating and understanding *abstract* concepts in terms of *concrete, physical* entities. The subject of religious thinking, contemplation and discourse cannot be experienced through senses, because such things are "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Thus, metaphor is a kind of hyper-sense allowing us to perceive what our senses cannot perceive in all domains of our knowledge. According to the New Testament Christ himself explained to his disciples why he used parables (i.e. metaphors) in his teachings (Matthew 13:10-13). Conceptual metaphors appearing in the Bible are like a kind of a road, or a kind of a bridge, or a kind of a ladder—all leading man to God. The corruption of language connected with the original sin and manifested in using language as an instrument of deception and lying rather as an instrument of communication with God, was overcome by Jesus Christ as the Word (*Logos*) offered by God to annihilate the consequences of the original sin. As Christ saved Man from sin and death, metaphor frees language from its corruption, which is also a consequence of the original sin. Understood as the hyper-sense metaphor allows man to re-establish and maintain contact with God. Metaphor will not be needed when we see things as they *really* are. We shall also see God as He really is.

Keywords: Bible, conceptual metaphors, senses, corruption of language.

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In consonance with basic tenets of cognitive linguistics it is necessary to specify the domains in which whatever is said and/or written is profiled. In the case of my present concerns the principle domain is the Christian Bible. Thus, whatever I say about metaphors will directly refer to this particular source as translated from the original languages (mostly Ancient Hebrew and New Testament Greek). More specifically, all biblical quotations will be based on *New International Version* of the Bible.[2]

Among conceptual metaphors the metaphor MENTAL REALITY IS PHYSICAL REALITY stands out as one of the most productive metaphors as it generalizes the cognitive process of creating and understanding abstract concepts in terms of concrete, physical entities. A detailed survey and analysis of more specific metaphors coherent with this general metaphor was presented by Johnson and Lakoff in their often quoted, though also often criticized book *Metaphors we live by published* in 1980. However, this cognitive function of metaphor had been recognized much earlier by a number of other authors that Johnson and Lakoff did not refer to. Whenever we say something about matters and things that cannot be directly perceived through our senses we are forced to use metaphors, as was aptly observed by C. S. Lewis:

> The truth is that if we are going to talk about things which are not perceived by the senses, we are forced to use language metaphorically. Books on psychology or economics or politics are as continuously metaphorical as books of poetry or devotion. There is ***no other way of talking***, as every philologist is aware. (Lewis 1947:77).

For example, if we wish to express the idea that somebody quickly understands something we may say "he catches everything in no time," and when we fail to understand what somebody is saying we are likely to express it as "I don"t follow you." We may not realize that these are metaphorical expressions since they do not at all mean that someone really caught a certain three dimensional object, or that somebody is walking behind somebody else without lagging behind. Mark Johnson and George Lakoff—with literally hundreds of examples—demonstrate the extent to which metaphors are present not only in our language but above all in our thinking and in conceiving reality. Moreover, metaphors force us to perceive reality in a particular way and *to act* accordingly. In other words, we live by metaphors. For example, there are many metaphors through which we understand the concept "love." This plurality is grounded in the fact that people have different notions of what love is, which is reflected in the ways they behave and act. Thus, we may conceive love as a physical force, as a disease, as madness, as magic, and as war. Therefore, talking about love we use such metaphorical expressions "something attracted him to her" "I feel magnetic attraction to her" "he is crazy about her" "he has gone mad about her" "he is madly in love with her" "she threw a charm on him" "she completely bewitched him" "she is his recent conquest" "he won her hand" „he won her after a long fight." Which of these expressions we accept as appropriate reflects how we conceive the concept "love" (See Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

Numerous other examples of this sort from many abstract domains can be quoted. This is so because metaphor is not only a matter of language, but, above all, it is a means of understanding and

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2   The ***New International Version*** (***NIV***) is an English translation of the Bible first published in 1978 by Biblica (formerly the International Bible Society). The *NIV* was published to meet the need for a modern translation done by Bible scholars using the earliest, highest quality manuscripts available. Of equal importance was that the Bible be expressed in broadly understood modern English.[…] The *NIV* is published by Zondervan in the United States and Hodder & Stoughton in the UK. The NIV was updated in 1984 and 2011, and has become one of the most popular and best selling modern translations. (*Wikipedia*).

conceiving those elements of reality which cannot be directly perceived by means of senses (vision, touch, hearing, taste, smell) and by motor-experience (interaction of our bodies with physical reality). According to Johnson and Lakoff (1980) "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Johnson and Lakoff 1980: 5). This other "thing" or phenomenon is usually more accessible to our motor-sensory experience than the thing which we attempt to understand by means of metaphor. For example, physical force, effects of magic and of madness are more tangible than the abstract concept "love."

Thus, metaphor is a kind of hyper-sense allowing us to perceive what our senses cannot perceive in all domains of our knowledge:

> It is as though the ability to comprehend experience through metaphor were a sense, like seeing or touching or hearing, with metaphors providing the only ways to perceive and experience much of the world. Metaphor is as much a part of our functioning as our sense of touch, and as precious. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 239)

Scientists are well aware of the role that metaphors play in their thinking, whenever they talk about limits of our senses. This is what Hoimar von Diturth writes in his *Wir sind nicht nur von dieser Welt:*

> The area of reality grasped by our colloquial language is much narrower than we think. As a result of this, on top of other things, as soon as we leave the everyday sensory experience, we are forced either to invent an artrificial language or to resort to language images originating in our everyday world in order to describe a reality which we find beyond the limits of this world. (von Dithfurt [1981] 1985: 203)[3]

In view of this it is not surprising that the domain of religion also inevitably requires metaphors. In his commentary on Aristotle"s *Poetics* Cardinal John Henry Newman expressed it very succinctly saying:

> **With Christians, a poetical view of things is a duty** — we are bid to color all things with hues of faith, to see a Divine meaning in every event, and a superhuman tendency." […] Revealed religion should be especially poetical — and it is so in fact. (Newman 1907:6).

The subject of religious thinking, contemplation and discourse cannot be experienced through senses, because such things are "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" (1 Corinthians 2: 9). Therefore, the necessity to use metaphors in order to be able to reach beyond sensory perception and get some insights into things that conceptually transcend material reality was very early recognized by Christian theologians. Notably, Thomas Aquinas begins his *Summa Theologica* with the question "Utrum sacra Scriptura debeat uti metaphoris" [Should the Holy Scripture make use of metaphors] (I, 1: 9) and immediately answers:

> Conveniens est sacrae Scripturae divina et spiritualia sub similitudine corporalium tradere. Deus enim omnibus providet secundùm quod competit eorum naturae. Est autem naturale homini ut per sensibilia ad intelligibilia veniat; quia omnis nostra cognitio à sensu initum habet. Unde convenienter in sacra Scriptura traduntur nobis spiritualia sub **metaphoris** corporalium. (I, 1.9)

Unfortunately, in one of English versions of this text the word *metaphoris* has been replaced with *likeness*: -- (delete)

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3   Translation from the Polish edition (1985) is my own.

> It is befitting Holy Scripture to put forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparisons with material things. For God provides for everything according to the capacity of its nature. Now it is natural to man to attain to intellectual truths through sensible things, because all our knowledge originates from sense. Hence in Holy Scripture spiritual truths are fittingly taught under the **likeness** of material things. (St. Thomas Aquinas *The Summa Theologica*. Benziger Bros. edition, 1947. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province).

However, there is no doubt that continuing the ancient tradition dating back to Aristotle, and long before Johnson and Lakoff, Thomas Aquinas argued in favour of the fundamental cognitive function of metaphor. But the first and the best justification comes from Christ himself, who explained to his disciples why he used parables in his teachings. His words are the quintessence of all that has afterwards been written about the cognitive function of metaphors:

> The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. (Matthew 13:10-13).

These words uttered by Christ provide a very compelling justification for the presence of metaphors in the discourse about the divine reality addressed to the people with dull senses and hardened hearts. Moreover, long before Johnson and Lakoff, Christ provided a detailed *explication* of one of His metaphors, viz. the metaphor of the sower.

The parable of the sower

> Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. [8]Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear." (Matthew 13:3-9).

Christ enumerated the following "ontological correspondences" (Lakoff 1987: 387) obtaining in the SOWER metaphor (Matthew 13:18: 23):

The explication

> Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

According to Frankowski (1983), the range of metaphors appearing in the Bible is very broad and varied. The metaphors represent great wealth and freedom characterizing poetic language. The Bible contains a number of metaphors which contribute to our understanding of the concept "God." Among them are:

GOD IS A JUDGE—*It is the Lord who judges me* (1 Corinthians 4:4); *Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day* (2 Timothy 4: 8); *Don"t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!* (James 5: 9); *God will judge those outside.* (1 Corinthians 5: 13); *"The Lord will judge his people."* (Hebrews 10: 30); *You have come to God, the Judge of all* (Hebrews 12: 23).

GOD IS A FATHER—*And do not call anyone on earth „father," for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.* (Matthew 23: 9); […] *you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.* (Matthew 5: 45); *But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* (Matthew 6: 6); *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,* (Matthew 6: 9).

GOD IS A SHEPHERD—*The Lord is my shepherd* (Psalm 23); *he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.* (Matthew 25: 32); *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* (John 10: 11); *I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.* (John 10: 16).

GOD IS A TEACHER—*Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me.* (John 7: 16); *"But you are not to be called „Rabbi," for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.* (Matthew 23: 8).

Some biblical metaphors are what Frankowski calls "technical," and they include the so-called **redeeming** metaphors, which describe what Christ has done for human beings. Thus, the word "purification" is said to represent a ritual metaphor, "redemption" is allegedly a case of commercial metaphor and the word "justification" of a legal metaphor (Frankowski 1983: 172).

What has been said so far suggests that conceptual metaphors appearing in the Bible are a kind of a road (or perhaps a bridge or a ladder) leading man to God. However, there is no doubt that conceptual metaphors, necessary and helpful as they are in establishing links between people and God, are expressed through language. More specifically, the cognitive mechanisms inherent in conceptual metaphors can only be accessed through language, or to be more precise, through some specific ethnic languages such as Hebrew, Greek, Latin, English, Polish, Chinese, etc. This necessary involvement of some language as a specific product of some specific culture enormously complicates the issue and may hinder rather than facilitate communication between people and God. Christians, not withstanding some important differences between particular Christian denominations, believe that the Bible is the "Word of God" revealed to Man, through which God communicates with people. Being originally written in Ancient Hebrew it is completely inaccessible to a preponderant majority of people, except in translated versions in hundreds of languages deeply grounded in respective cultural contexts, which to a large extent mould their understanding. In this way every language as a product of a specific culture constitutes a communication barrier rather than an instrument of communication between God and people. Still, from the theological

point of view, language can be viewed as a gift which Man received from God to establish and maintain contact with Him in a conscious process of cognition. However, the curse of the original (ancestral) sin, as described in the Book of Genesis, corrupted the human nature and *eo ipso* language. One usually associates the original sin with the story concerning the events in the Garden of Eden described in Genesis 3: 1–24. One does not associate the original sin with the corruption of language described in another biblical story, the one about Babel (Genesis 11: 5: 8). The myth about Babel must also be associated with the original sin. Both the expulsion from Eden and the confusion of tongues are a punishment for Man's disobedience manifested in eating from the forbidden tree and in attempting to build a heaven's high tower. The justification of both these punishments is remarkably similar:

> And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So **the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.** (Genesis 3: 22–23)

> But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other. **So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.** That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. (Genesis 11: 5–9)

The myth of Babel is an extension of the myth of Eden. It is also the tale of the fall told by means of a different image. When Man received the gift of language from God, language was to serve the purpose of bringing Man closer to God. Because of the corruption rooted in the original sin of yielding to the diabolical temptation, Man began to use language to *distance* himself from God. Erasmus and his followers kept asking "why are the Gospels so understandable to everybody except those whose minds have been *corrupted* by theological speculation?" (quoted after Kołakowski 1982: 170). Jesus knew why when he prayed:

> I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children [νηπίοις]. (Matthew 11:25).

Note that the original Greek word νηπίοις /nepiois/ denoted a simple-minded, immature person and that the word "maluczcy" used in most Polish versions more accurately expresses the intension of the Greek word. The same idea and the sense of the story of Babel has thus been grasped by a contemporary versemonger:

BABEL

wtedy nic nie trzeba było mówić
bo wszystko powiedział On

ale ja miałem własne zdanie
więc wprowadziłem w ruch język

ja wiedziałem lepiej
więc wynalazłem nowe słowa

flirtowałem z wężem
więc odkryłem przekleństwa

poprawiałem rajską krainę
więc wypociłem język sztuki

nawymyślałem doktryn ideologii manifestów
upstrzyłem je barwnymi wieloizmami

teraz trzeba zatrudniać legion tłumaczy i lingwistów
żeby wytłumaczyli się za mnie przed Nim

żeby On zrozumiał

BABEL

At that time nothing had to be said
since He had said everything

But I had my own view
so I set my tongue in motion

I knew better
so I invented new words

I flirted with the serpent
so I discovered swear words

I improved the land of paradise
so I exuded the language of art

I contrived doctrines, ideologies and manifestos
I labeled them with dapple polyisms

> Now a legion of linguists and translators
>
> must be employed to beg Him pardon on my behalf
>
> So that he could understand

The gist of the original sin in the domain of language is the fact that language has become an instrument of deception or even lying. Since then lying has been one of the most, if not the most outstanding function of language. Here, too, the Satan appears to be responsible. It is significant that the first lie that is referred to in the Bible comes from the serpent-tempter:

> "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman" (Genesis 3: 4).

Since then language has been corrupted by its deceptive function, which may serve as a barrier separating man from God. The sin of lying like a buckle braces together the Bible conceived as the story of redemption: the last words of Revelation, immediately followed by the Epilogue, concern the ultimate encounter with lying:

> Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and **practices falsehood.** (Revelation 22:15)

or in King James Bible:

> For without *are* dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, **and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.**

The corruption of language was overcome by Jesus Christ as the Word (*Logos*) offered by God to annihilate the consequences of the original sin. As Christ saved Man from sin and death, metaphor frees language from its corruption which is also a consequence of the original sin. Understood as the hyper-sense metaphor allows man to re-establish and maintain contact with God. This is why the Bible as "a book about God and supernaturality" (Frankowski 1983: 172) is written in the language of metaphors through which human beings can return to the biblical Eden, and can be reunited with their celestial Father. Moreover, Jesus Christ Himself said to his Apostle Thomas: "I am the way and the truth and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me**" (John 14: 6). Thus, as our allegedly only way to God Jesus appears to be the Metaphor of Metaphors. This is indeed how God speaks to Man, first through the Old Testament prophets, who used language full of metaphors (See Frankowski 1983), and finally through Jesus Christ:

> In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. (Hebrews 1–2)

Metaphors are also relevant when it comes to the understanding of miracles, in which the Bible (especially) the New Testament, abounds. Every miracle consists in materializing a particular metaphor in the act of faith. Thus, in every miracle some metaphor is made real (see Krzeszowski 2002) in the act of faith. True miracles, unlike magical tricks, always have this metaphorical dimension, in which God's grace operates. The healing of the blind (Mark 8: 23) in the material (physical) dimension means regaining sight, *i.e.* opening one"s eyes as the sense of visual perception, but in the metaphorical dimension it means

opening a person to God's grace. The change of water into wine (John 2: 11 ff) in the material sense means the change of an inferior liquid into a better liquid, while in the spiritual dimension, it means a transformation (conversion) towards being good, whereby a sinful person becomes holy under the influence of God's grace. The miracle of the tongues resulting in the "speaking in tongues" is a harbinger of the eventual total annihilation of the consequences of Babel. The miracle consisted in the fact that the Apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, began to use languages of which they normally did not have any command. Moreover, not only the Apostles but also their listeners, in their own languages, understood what the apostles said. (Acts 2:1-13). In this way the "confusion of tongues," which took place at Babel, was at least there and then terminated. Yet, the majority of people remain linguistically confused and perhaps they yearn for redemption:

> Yet the myth of Babel is deeply rooted in our linguistic consciousness; we want to recover the lost, original God-given speech in which things are called *their* names, their celestial proper names. (Kołakowski 1982: 184)

In other words we yearn for the return to the linguistic Eden.

In brief, metaphor is not only a linguistic device but a cognitive device that grows beyond and above language into the domain of entities directly inaccessible through the five senses but accessible through metaphor. Thanks to metaphor Man can rise to higher levels of reality, because God in His grace allows Man to do so, by descending to Man from higher levels of reality to the concrete, material level of human existence, making Himself directly accessible through Jesus Christ. The situation is well depicted in Michaelangelo's fresco "The Creation of Adam," in which God-Father stretches His hand to Adam from the heights of heaven. Adam, in turn, raises his own hand to God. The lowering of God's hand and the raising of Adam's hand is an image of the function, which metaphor performs in linking Man and God. God lowers himself to the level of Adam, Adam strives to raise himself to the level of God, which is metaphorically represented by Adam's raised hand, slightly higher than God's hand. This scene anticipates what was to happen later, when God, in the materialized body of Jesus Christ, God-Word-Man, who descended from heaven to lower himself to the level of human beings. Metaphor will not be needed when we see things as they *really* are. We shall also see God as He really is:

> Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2).

Presumably, at that time Christ, the Archimetaphor, after having completed his saving mission of redemption, will remain—as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity—the only Son of God. Finally: "[…] then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all." (1 Coritnthians 15: 28) . Man will return to Eden as the City of God, in which human beings will live for ever in the state freed from any sin, including the original sin with its fatal consequences. Language (the word) will regain its pure, uncorrupted state, not to divide people but to link the creation with its Creator. Before all this happens people have to become like God, which means that in order to see God face to face people have to become holy because God is holy:

> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13: 12–13)

This is so because ὁ Θεος αγαπη εστιν /ho theos agape estin/ – – God is love.

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