

A METAPHOR IS A FAMILIAR FINGER POINTING AT
SOMETHING UNFAMILIAR OR
SOMETHING FAMILIAR FROM AN UNFAMILIAR ANGLE

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As you can see, this metaphor-definition I just dreamed up is a metaphor about metaphor. Skip the technical language: let's just call the finger "the near" (the known, which works as a flashlight--oops, another metaphor!--to illumine an unknown, or a known from an unknown angle, or [in the case of a lecturer using a lightbeam to direct the audience's attention] an un/known). What's being pointed at, then, is "the far." (Oops, another metaphor: near/far, when used with reference to other than physical distance.)...EXERCISE: For one minute, write fast on any subject, then check it over for metaphors surface & deep (oops, another metaphor: a deep metaphor is one you have to dig for, maybe even use the etymology in the dictionary on, because it doesn't stand right up on the surface of the paper & declare itself--oops, another metaphor! ("Dig for": oops, another metaphor!)

This Thinksheet is for a handout at a lecture I'm about to give on metaphor. It's not the lecture, it's just some rough notes folks can take home for use in pondering on the lecture. For thinking. Praying.

1 The **vitality** of speaking/writing is proportionate to its metaphoric content. Why do you fall asleep while reading "1040 Instructions" to prepare your income tax? Because the metaphors are as scarce as fleas on a well-groomed dog. (Another metaphor? Yes, but metaphors with "as" or "like" we call similes. Ms. Hagar would have started a simile had she said "...It's like...." But of course it'd've made no difference to her gluttonous husband.)



2 Why is high-metaphoric writing--such as the READER'S DIGEST "Picturesque Speech and Pattern," or even a Geo. Will column--easy to read? Because it literally fits our brains, which develop as neurons make near/far connections, synapses, dendrites, that sort of thing. Abstractions don't fit our brains, so we have to scowl at them. The scowling shrinks our brains & makes neurons "meta-phor" (Greek for "carry over") one another. (Does scowling really do that? Yes, metaphorically speaking.)

Why did God make our brains thus? He had two reasons in mind: (1) Otherwise we couldn't even think of him. And if we couldn't think of him, we couldn't pray "Day by day, O Lord, three things I pray: to see thee more clearly, to love thee more dearly, to follow thee more nearly day by day" (two metaphors, or three?). (2) It's more fun this way. Metaphors are fun. Enjoy, & thank God.

3 Often I think of poet Lois Palches saying to me, "A poem is the shortest distance between two hearts." Yes, poetry defined by troping a geometry truism, ie by a metaphor. Maybe this is the best definition of poetry: speech/writing with, deliberately, the highest metaphoric content. Just look at the clarity, the beauty, the fun, even the thrill of any poem of Emily Dickinson or Robt. Frost! (Do you think that "thrill" is, to use a metaphor, stretching it? You haven't been reading enough poetry. I eschew the alternative, which is that God gave you a dull soul. I eschew it because it's more dangerous to blame God than you.)

4 When many months ago I was asked to give a lecture, I gave the title "Edible Jellybean Cars: Metaphors as **Soul Food**." The subtitle is the point both of this lecture & of this Thinksheet. As for those cars, they're the punch line of some joke I've forgotten....Prose illumines the mind, poetry (metaphor) nourishes the spirit. Of course prose & poetry are not mutually exclusive: many of the scriptures we often read/hear/remember cannot be put in either pigeonhole (oops, another metaphor).

5 **Hymns** are highly metaphoric. They are poems (most of them, judged by the canons of poetry as literature, bad poems--no fancy cuisine, just--to use an old, now outdated expression for basic food--"meat'n'potatoes"). Strictly, a hymn is a prayer (since the Greek "hymnein" means to sing a song to a deity). And some hymn-prayers are also meditations on a single metaphor: "Jesus, Savior, pilot me / Over life's tempestuous sea." (Sometimes in a group I ask, "What's the first thing that comes to mind right now when I say the name 'Jesus'?" Last Sunday to me came that prayer-metaphor-hymn that I learned long before I'd experienced, physically or metaphorically, tempestuous seas. But scores of times when I've been hit by a tempestuous sea, mine or another's or the world's, that old song sings food into my soul. The hymns, said Luther, are the people's devotion & their theology.

6 **Metaphor-awareness** can come younger in life than the developmentalists used to think. In a children's sermon Sunday before last, I led the children into the puzzle that God has no beard even though he doesn't shave. The answer I wanted was, "He has no face!" (I was leading up to my punchline, which later the children said with me: "Jesus is the [human] face of God.") But the whole thing was thown out of kilter when a little girl said tentatively, "God is a woman?" Of course I immediately affirmed the little girl & her answer: "Of course God is a woman! How could the world have gotten born, how could we have gotten born, if God is not a woman, our mother. He is of course also our father. We are in a two-parent family, two parents in one person, our heavenly Father-Mother God."....As I said, metaphors are fun. We need to play with them, teach the children to play with them & pray with them & theologize with them.

7 God our Mother is a surface metaphor (ie, we who aren't Goddess-devotees feel, are instantly aware of, the affirmation as metaphoric), but God our **Father** is a depth metaphor (ie, we're so accustomed to it that the relation of the two words seems to be one of identity [God=Father=God] rather than one of analogy), of univocality. Can't we just decide to accord "Mother" the same devotional-liturgical-theological status as "Father"? Tillich, Eliade, Ricoeur, & a host of eminent semioticians would respond, No. No, because signs don't become symbols, symbols don't become sacraments, because somebody or manybodies will it so. Unconscious forces, submental movements stronger than the human will, effectuate the gestation & birth of symbols & sacraments. Not that the will & persuasion have nothing to do with the process--but their part is not decisive, determinative, in the evolution. And of course symbols & sacraments can die; & then the religion feeding on these deep metaphors dies, as dies also the culture feeding on the religion, which is its taproot. The radical-feminist hatred of God the Father (1) is alienating some Jewish & Christian women from the Bible & thus threatening these religions, & (2) is one of the energies empowering the emergence of a gynecentric religion (represented by about 1/3rd of the "Women's Studies" books on sale in the Andover Newton Theological School bookstore, I noticed day before yesterday).

7 What can be done about the Bible's **androcentricity** (the fancy word radical feminists like to use for the male lead in biblical life-&-literature)? Two ways to go: (1) Supplement the masculine with the endogenous feminine (ie, feminine metaphors for God in the Bible) & the exogenous feminine (introducing extrabiblical feminine metaphors). This is my approach, as you saw in the children's sermon (above). (2) Suppress the masculine by bowdlerizing the literature (especially the Bible & hymns) &, in speech & writing, tabooing both masculine references to God & the English masculine-generic ("man," "-man," "man-," "he-his-him"). I agree with, & practice, only this last, the abandonment of most uses of the masculine-generic. The other suppressions: (1) weaken biblical religion & (2) indirectly support the emergence of Goddess religion competitive with biblical religion.

8 **CASE IN POINT**, the "inclusive-language" Bible. Eg, AN INCLUSIVE-LANGUAGE LECTONARY: READING FOR YEAR C (Cooperative Publishers' Ass'n./85/88). "A metaphor is a figure of speech used to extend meaning [underlining mine] through comparison of dissimilars" (255). "Two dissimilars, 'Father' and 'God,' are juxtaposed, and so the meaning of 'God' is extended." But read literally,

"the metaphor becomes a proposition." But on the other hand, "God the Father and Mother" is a metaphor providing "a new way of seeing."...All true, I've no complaint against any of this. What then's my beef? Twofold: (1) The i.-I. Bible's utopian in implying that metaphors shouldn't become propositions. If they didn't, philosophy, theology, & even science would be impossible. (2) It's reductionist, aiming to emasculate God & even Jesus. (It's pathetic-risible to see the wooden efforts to avoid referring to Jesus as "he-his-him.") Last week an atheist superintendent of (public) schools had all the Bibles removed from his schools "because it's pornographic literature." That's pathetic-risible-dangerous but probably not naive. But the inclusive-language attack on the Bible is pathetic-risible-dangerous-naive: naive because of its misunderstanding of the language-life relationship & because it imagines it's helping, not damaging, the church & because it fails to understand psycholinguists (see, above, sign-symbol-sacrament).

9 On metaphor, the earliest works in English were written by men whose central literary concern was the Bible. Eg, Benj. Keach's TROPOLOGIA [Greek for "word-turnings," itself a metaphor for metaphoring]: A KEY TO OPEN SCRIPTURE METAPHORS (London/1682). A parallel: The earliest works on psychology of the person came from writers dealing (4th-5th cs.) with the Trinity. Our Christian intellectual tradition would instruct us to "sophisticate our folk to metaphor in general & biblical poetics in particular," instead of messing around with trying to suppress words a contemporary consciousness has taken a dislike to & hatred for (#2507.II, in letter to Roger Shinn).

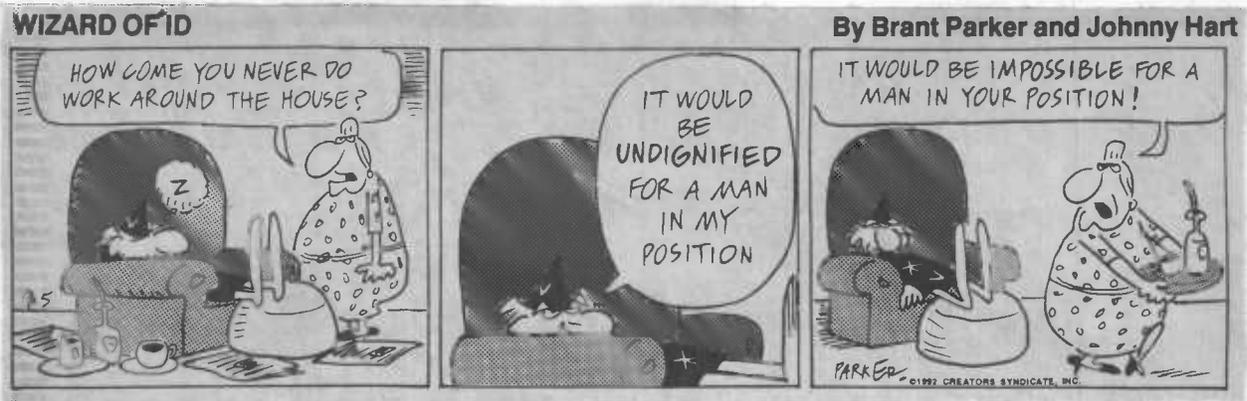
10 How does metaphor function vis-a-vis **religious experience**? In #2577 I answered with a metaphor, viz Jacob's ladder, "or Metaphors as Symbolic Ladders to the Larger Life." Here I must characterize my thinking as more catholic (analogic, metaphoric) than Protestant (dialectical, propositional). That's too stark, but I'm ready to defend its basic premise....Here are two Catholics to illustrate my characterization of Catholic thinking:

David Tracy, primarily in THE ANALOGICAL IMAGINATION, reminds me of another too facile but nonetheless fertile distinction: Protestants, God's transcendence; Catholics, God's immanence. The holy God's creation is a sacrament, the sacrament of sacraments; for God is present in the world & its creatures & relationships & social structures. Aquinas' "analogia entis" (analogy of being) needed Duns Scotus' & Wm. of Occam's qualifications, but it's basic to religious psychology & theology.

Andrew M. Greeley, sociologist-theologian-novelist, works on the triple base of sensory experience, mythic consciousness, & statistics. His JAAR Winter/91 article gets at the essence of his thinking. 649: Theology is the supra-structure of which the religious sensitivity is the infra-structure....643: "Religion is imaginative before it is propositional." Its root is hope-renewing experience which, tradition-illuminated, uses "images and symbols which become templates for action" when taking the form of stories shared in community and celebrated in rituals. 649: "Religion is experiential before it is intellectual." In cultural transmission (= "religious socialization"), narrative precedes non-fiction. In America's post-traditional religious world we're in a crisis of personal & social identity, for in most people the symbols that give form to identities are no longer present.

11 Speaking of metaphors as fun, I estimate that 20% of American **comicstrips** are just that. When a metaphor is reified (made "real"), the far becomes the near, as here in Ms. Wiz's third-box comment. The fun is in the shock of having his "position" in life taken to mean the momentary position (= posture) of his body. The deep (in this case, forgotten) metaphor surfaces, & we are jocularly reminded (or informed) of the etymology of "position."...Why do the so-called comics grab me? (1) They are a study in language (eg, Doonesbury). (2) From having had a course in cartooning, I love to study the drawings, which are of various levels of competence (Calvin & Hobbes being high). If you think "the funnies" are only kid stuff, have another look.

12 **Image**, in the broad sense, is another word for metaphor. RHD2 calls



metaphor a "transfer" (literal in Lat. & Gk. for a "carrying-over"). (In the narrow sense, an image is only visual.) For this broad sense, see what Jaroslav Pelikan, in his great book *JESUS THROUGH THE CENTURIES: HIS PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF CULTURE* (H&R/85/87), says (p.vii): "The nature & purpose of this book" is to provide "a series of images portraying his place in the history of culture." The "images" include Light of the Gentiles, Bridegroom of the Soul, & Mirror of the Eternal....In its article "Metaphor," RHD2 gives only this example: "A mighty fortress is our God." Luther sustains the fortress image throughout the hymn without allegorizing: the metaphor is subtle, trusting you to sustain the fortress ("Burg") throughout.

13 The most powerful metaphors are drawn from the most **ordinary** experiences. As soon as we're born we're held: "underneath are the everlasting Arms" (capitalizing God's metaphoric body-parts). When we take our first steps, we look forward to falling into loving arms: when we die, if it's God we love & anticipate, we (Aquinas) "walk into the Arms of God." Many times a day we go through doors (so "I am the door," Jn.10.7,9), & sometimes gates (the Reform prayerbook, *GATES OF PRAYER*, which has "In the evening, when our gates are closed, something comes to us over our gates..."). We hear music, & Leonard Bernstein tells us it's "a metaphorical language of creative transformation."

14 Jesus extended metaphors into **parables**, which are metaphor-stories each with a single point. (A metaphoric story with many points is called an "allegory," & the only one in the Gospels is the parable of the sower & the seed [Mt.13, M.4].) Doubtless he parabolized sayings: some parables are story-extensions of sayings. We have enough of both his sayings & his stories (parables) to sense how the two genres are related in his teaching-preaching. Sayings on riches are reinforced, rendered impressive, by the plight of Dives in Hades (the next-world consequences of this-world behavior; L.16.19-31). Metaphor is associative thinking; parable associates the near (the story) with the far (the life-situation Jesus applies it to, or leaves the audience to make the application)...Children's sermons are problematic, for the children must be laughed with (as they feel it) instead of at. But I must confess I enjoy them when well done, & my pastor is a master at it. Here's some associative thinking in a recent dialog children's sermon of his (all of them are dialogs with the children). Q: "What's the first thing God did after creating the world?" A: "He wrote the Bible." Q: "What's this [holding up a typical visual representation of the Decalog, the double stone with two arcs at the top]?" A: "A graveyard." Jesus was a master of associative thinking because he knew the mind of God's "children." The modern preacher is in danger of assuming, in the hearers, more metaphoric power than they have.

15 A good metaphor defining metaphor is **link**. In GP350, poet-editor Chaim Stern enriches the Hebrew by adding this metaphor: "May your children come to understand that this Sabbath rest links them to you, that by it they may hallow Your name." The Sabbath is the near linking the devout spirit to two fars, viz past (the seventh day of creation) & future (the rest beyond this present life).

15 "Whatever your lot in life, build something on it." Many **wise-sayings** are memorable because of their metaphor-shock.