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Multimodal Semiotics of Spiritual Experiences: Representing Beliefs, Metaphors, and Actions

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A Multimodal Analysis of Individuals' Beliefs and Metaphors in Words, Gestures and Drawings

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People cross-culturally claim to have various types of spiritual or religious experiences: visions of God or the Virgin Mary, of angels and saints, voices and presences that somehow guide and inform, sensations of being at one with the world. Other people have less sensational experiences, like the sense of 'knowing' that there is an afterlife, of 'feeling' that they are constantly at a cross-road where they must choose 'good' over 'evil'. And then there are others still, who deny the possibility of a Superior Transcendental Being, and nonetheless are in a society where gods and demons, heavens and hells surround them indirectly through those who—expressly or not— are 'believers'.

If religion was once relegated as a problem for theologians, now, with science more than ever bringing us closer to the outskirts of the universe and deeper in the cells of humans, the very fact that people should even believe in such 'other-worldly' concepts may seem a contradiction or evidence of common 'ignorance'. Nonetheless religion plays such a crucial role even in the lives of many scientists. For believers there is no conflict, and people cross-culturally, as we will see, make certain contradictions 'fit' in their belief system and are cognitively capable of making sense of visions, auditory hallucinations, or of other 'worlds'. Religion, and culture in general, is not a ready-made social product; it is a process in which the individual actively participates. As Forman (1999: 39) has noticed, Constructivists have argued that mystical experiences are a sort of 'reconditioning of consciousness',

that the concepts proposed by religious systems condition *a priori* a believer's experience, but the description of phenomenological experiences in religion, and most likely elsewhere in culture, is contingent and not necessary. Although, for example, a religious system may propose a metaphor such as GOD IS A FATHER, I will provide clues which indicate that this becomes just one conceptual slot or role whose values are filled in by the interpreters (for example 'vengeful' vs. 'loving'), more according to people's dynamic interaction with their world than just passively via culture.

This chapter does not want to tackle problems regarding religion per se. Although I will describe some conceptual phenomena dealing with spiritual and religious experiences in believers, the focus is on abstract thought and how it is conceptualized, manifested, and communicated by humans and the relationship between language and abstract thought, like religious ideas and spiritual experiences. Abstract concepts differ from other concepts 'out there in the world' for the very fact that what is abstract is something that cannot be immediately perceived in a physical sense. What happens when people talk about something they have never experienced through bodily perceptions, like abstract ideas of GOD, HEAVEN, GOOD and EVIL? How are these concepts construed in the minds of the individuals and their collectivity?

After justifying my object of inquiry, I will provide the motivations behind the choice of anthropomorphized metaphors for God in Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, which represent Divine authority for these believers. I will then present data from a series of interviews with two Christians, a street-preacher and a mission house-mother,[1] and analyze how my informants interpret these metaphors and represent others multimodally in their speech, gestures and artwork. Before concluding, I will investigate incongruities and incompatibilities of some metaphors with my informants' conceptual systems, which are not caused by religious culture (both are Christians), but because of the individual's personal knowledge of how the world works.

The metaphors used by my informants indicate that the language used in religious discourse is experientially based on their encyclopedic knowledge of their own personal worlds and stimulated by cultural constructs only up to

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[1] I appreciate one of my anonymous reviewers' pointing out that these sources of data are very different to what is more generally found in the metaphor studies literature in that they are not traditional, common Christians: 'The examples we see there almost always come from sources that are high in social and cultural capital: published prose and poetry, the spoken discourse of university students, and the introspection of researchers. Even those studies that do go against this trend (for example, Núñez and Sweetser's work on Aymara) deal in unmarked, mainstream usages across an entire language. The interviewees in this study are both operating in less secure sociological spaces, and their discourse communities and semiotic frameworks intersect with but are not fully ratified by institutional structures.'

a certain point. Some of these metaphors are based on universal properties of the human conceptual system, others are more culturally based, but all of them heavily depend on the way these people interact with their own worlds. For this very reason some believers' ways of reasoning, almost impossible for others even of the same religious system, have an internal logic serving to manage what may appear to some as real-world contradictions.

To be sure my object of study is spiritual experiences and concepts, but the focus is more on the semiotic, the cognitive, and the social, with language and multimodal communication being the manifestation of these concepts. The framework I use is what I have dubbed 'Multimodal Cognitive Semiotics' (Evola 2009), which intends to emphasize certain aspects of the semiotic process which often go unaddressed, in particular the role of social context in the hermeneutic process, drawing from more recent tendencies within the Cognitive Linguistics community which appreciate communication as part of a broader socio-cultural system and not as something to be studied in isolation. In truth Multimodal Cognitive Semiotics is nothing new per se, but it intends to approach language and communication more broadly according to both production- and interpretation-oriented processes which are inherent to the symbolic mode of relationship, by combining traditional semiotics with contemporary methods from Cognitive Linguistics and other human and social sciences (*inter alia* Bourdieu 1990; Brandt & Brandt 2005; Clark 1996; De Certeau 1984; Fauconnier & Turner 2002; Goodman 1978; Goodwin & Duranti 1992; Hanks 1995; Kendon 2004; Kockelman 2005; Lakoff & Johnson 1999; McNeill 1992; Peirce 1955; Tomasello 2001). Moreover this framework takes into account the affordances and limitations of the various modes used in linguistic and non-linguistic representation. In this perspective meaning emerges from an individual's practice (Bourdieu 1990) within the immediate or the more ambient context, where that particular meaning is interpretable *because of* the context, which includes the individuals' personal experiences and encyclopedic knowledge of the world. Thus, meaning is not something that resides in the world, but phenomenologically meaning is construed by a sign-agent's interaction with the world as he or she knows it. Moreover, a semiotic sign may include various layers of meaning, which become relevantly salient during the interpretational process, which of course depend on context as well. To apply a metaphor of my own, semiotics and hermeneutics are two sides of the same door of meaning, and context is the key.

1   Why might descriptions of spiritual experiences be of interest to linguistics?

But why even use spiritual experiences as an object of cognitive and linguistic inquiry? The reply is two-fold.

Spiritual experiences are *similar* to all other human experiences: Each and every experience is lived through the body, whether it is reading words on a page or having a divine vision. These experiences are based on concepts and categories, which bridge the mind and the world, and are constructed by our interaction with and encyclopedic knowledge of the world (Rosch 1999). Many scholars from Merleau-Ponty (1945) on would agree that perception of any type is not passive reception of data, but an action-oriented restructuring of the world. As subjects we have a continuing identity of ourselves, and memory plays an important role by reconstructing past events on our present context and not simply by retrieving data stored like a computer might do. This continuous reconstructing of past experiences gives way to coherence and plausibility in our narratives, relating them to future plans and goals, creating a 'narrative self' (cf. Flanagan 2002; Turner 1996). In this sense cognitive sciences see the self, or the person, as an ecological system, a multileveled psychosomatic unity (Murphy 1999), and the framework I use here maintains that because both human persons and their environment are constantly changing, conceptual integration (Fauconnier & Turner 2002) must be a continual and dynamic process. Each experience, whether it is meeting a friendly face for the first time or having an epiphany of what you should be doing in a given situation, is never experienced if not relationally and contextually, because as humans we embody all our experiences, including the most abstract.

However, spiritual experiences are *different* from other experiences: Within spiritual experiences, what 'appears' paradoxically is often different from what really 'is', yet people have a sense of great conviction, to use the term following William James (1902), most likely because of the way the narrative self works. Intuitively spiritual, mystical or religious experiences do seem to have a different quality from other 'secular' experiences. The effects of visions, revelations and divine encounters often have great impact on the persons experiencing them, both psychologically and socially (Evola 2005). Usually there is a sense of self (awareness), cognition (revelation, knowledge) and emotions. People change their lifestyles because they undergo a revelation, and the effects often endure time (something that otherwise only happens because of some physical or directly social causation, like a trauma). Subjects often describe these experiences as objectively real; likewise, more 'intense' experiences are considered 'ineffable': People in

fact use metaphors to communicate and represent these experiences, albeit with a sense of insufficiency.

My definition here of a spiritual experience is any phenomenon which can be interpretable in relation to the transcendent, for example feeling the presence of God in one's everyday life or having visions. I present relative data of believers who claim to have had various types of spiritual experiences, and there is no reason to believe that their accounts regarding their system of beliefs are not sincere. As the anthropologist de Certeau (1984: 178; emphasis his) wrote, 'As a first approximation, I define "belief" not as the object of believing (a dogma, a program, etc.) but as the subject's investment in a proposition, the *act* of saying it and considering it as true.'

2   Metaphors We Pray By

DesCamp and Sweetser (2005) analyze a total of 44 metaphors from the Hebrew scriptures and 50 from the Christian scriptures, for example GOD IS A FATHER, GOD IS A SHEPHERD, A ROCK, and so forth. Their analysis points towards relational metaphors between God and humans, for example Father-child, Lord-servant, and so on, which show 'a two-way, loving relationship, with asymmetric power but symmetric love' (p. 233).

Elsewhere I have claimed that one very pervasive conceptual metaphor of the Bible is the blend GOD IS A LOVER (Evola 2004). This metaphor permeates the *Šîr Haššîrîm*, or the *Song of Songs*, as well as Psalm 45. In this metaphor, God and devotee are seen as LOVER and BELOVED, and there is complete symmetry, even if illusionary or temporal for the devotee, to the point that the devotee, because of his or her experience of mystical union, can profess 'I am God.' What is interesting about the *Song of Songs* is that God is never mentioned once, which is probably why this metaphor was not taken into consideration in the aforementioned essay; yet, at least as far back as Rabbi Akiba in the 2nd century, this book was already traditionally seen as an allegory of the love of God, and many saintly figures have used this conceptual metaphor to talk about the Divine Love and Mystical Union (for instance the Spanish mystics Teresa de Ávila and Juan de la Cruz). The same conceptual metaphor manifests itself in other theistic religious systems such as Judaism, Islam and Hinduism and is arguably a typological literary universal (cf. Hogan 2005).

This does not mean that this particular metaphor is acceptable or conceptually present for all devotees. In the following pages I will present some evidence for the fact that each individual believer has a 'preferred' way of representing God, motivated by their own life experiences and the degree of authority attributed to their sources (cf. Evola 2005). But it does seem rather surprising that eroticism should be used to talk about God at all. This is not

platonic love: it is the typical language used in the poetry of passion, where the beloved lusts for the kisses and caresses of the lover, fearing separation, giving up one's own family and social dignity to be forever with the lover. In fact there is a whole genre of mystical literature, cross-culturally, which is based on erotic metaphors, and many consider these writings as examples of great expression, not only of poetry, but also of devotion.

One could argue that one contradiction is the fact that a religious system, whose laws concerning sexuality are so rigorous and whose punishments are so harsh, would even admit more or less explicit descriptions of those same acts to talk about the Sublime. In fact, believers should not even talk about God and the Divine in terms of a human source domain. After all they could employ other non-anthropomorphic domains, like clothing or mechanical objects, especially when for so many religious systems[2] it is a sin to represent God, and even more so as a human. The reasons lie in human cognition.

Divine agency is very often seen in terms of the most complex object that humans knows of, and that is themselves. The cognitive system of humans automatically infers many operations to avoid an overload on itself, and it recruits information from all its resources. '[A] lot happens beneath that Cartesian stage, in a mental basement that we can describe only with the tools of cognitive sciences' (Boyer 2001: 18). People know a lot about themselves, much more than other things in the world, and human beings become the easiest source for information to produce inferences. One might say that God was created in man's image, and it is an anthropological universal that supernatural beings are considered to have a mind (*ibid.*: 143-144), and this places man much closer to the Divine than to the animal on the Great Chain of Beings.

A human-like God is nonetheless, in Justin Barrett's words, 'theologically correct' (1999). Devotees of Eastern or Western religious systems would say that God has a lot of human-like qualities. For Christians the Divine became human by taking on the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth, or for Hindus by becoming an avatar like Krishna. Yet one must agree that these 'humanized gods' are not quite *like* other humans (in fact one of the ways the God is often described is through the *via negativa*, or the path of negation). The God presented in the Bible or the Qur'an has a mighty hand, and His eyes see everything, but these are metaphors of His omnipotence and His omniscience. In a way devotees must juggle with two different mental spaces (Fauconnier & Turner 2002): one is a human-God, to which they can relate;

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[2] Some variants of Abrahamic religious systems (e.g. Islam, Judaism) strictly forbid making images of God, and some (e.g. Amish and Mennonites) even prohibit images of any living creature, based the teachings of *Exodus* 20: 4.

the other, which builds on the first, is a supernatural-God, far more different from what they can ever imagine. Muslims are warned that God is beyond anything one might devise by the way of concept or definition: a concept which is half way between the *via remotionis* and literalists' anthropomorphism (Bausani 1980: 16-17), and this could be considered true also by other religious systems. Although God has revealed Himself in and through the Holy Word in human language, the devotee constantly shifts between knowing and not being able to know. Devotees, thus, are 'capable of God',[3] being able to understand this Transcendental Idea, despite His infinite qualities, but only in terms of humanity and considering Him as one of themselves, albeit the Ultimate Perfection of Humanity.

Since the case studies I present here are of Christians, I focus my attention on Christian and Biblical language, which nonetheless is analogous in many regards to the language used by other theistic religious systems. People choose to represent God based on tradition (or authority), but also on the individuals' knowledge and experience of themselves and their world. A group of people, like the Inuit, who had never seen sheep in their everyday arctic world could never have understood the metaphor GOD IS A SHEPHERD, which is why the first missionaries translating the Bible substituted it with GOD IS A REINDEER HERDER, and what gets sacrificed is not the Lamb of God, but the White Seal Pup of God (Douglas-Fairhurst 2002: 283).

3   GOOD IS UP/BAD IS DOWN

The most pervasive metaphor in moral, religious and spiritual thought and representation in my data is GOOD IS UP/BAD IS DOWN, which is an extension of the MORE IS UP/LESS IS DOWN image schema. Humans have all experienced this fundamental image schema since infancy: whenever there is more water in a glass the level goes up, or when one stacks things in a pile, the more things get stacked up, the higher the pile gets. In most Western cultures there is also the idea that MORE IS BETTER, thus GOOD IS UP. Ancient Romans, for example, would give thumbs up or down to approve or disapprove. Indeed the GOD IS GOOD metaphor (and therefore UP) is probably the most profuse and consistent one in my data cross-modally. 'Our Father' is up in the heavens, and people who have had out of body experiences say they see things while in this peaceful state from 'hovering above' the real world. Most people deictically point 'up' in reference to God, and 'down' for the devil, and in Paul's Letter to the Corinthians he admonishes, 'let him who

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[3] Bonaventure (*Comm. Quat. Libr. Sent.* I, 3, II) cites Augustine of Hippo, '*Eo mens est imago Dei, quo capax Dei est et particeps esse potest.* – The more the mind is an image of God, the more it is capable of ('able to fit') God and able to participate in Him' (*De Trin.* XIV, 11).

Figures 1a & 1b: "Draw yourself" (left) and "Draw God" (right): Although the person drawing wanted to replicate the same drawing (a dot in the center of the page), "God" was placed in a higher space compared to "self", unintentionally representing the GO(O)D IS UP metaphor.

thinks he stands take heed lest he fall' (*1 Cor* 10: 12). Medieval European architects played with this conceptual metaphor, in that the architecture of Gothic churches included slender, pointy rooftops. The church, first as a building and then metonymically extended to those who pray in it, is the *locus* where the faithful go to 'lift' their souls to 'reach the heavens'.

In my research, this metaphor of GOOD IS UP in one way or another was consistently used in speech, gesture and the drawings. For example, even when drawing Paradise (which would already be an 'up' space), people would draw God in the upper part of their pictures, and almost always to the right, following another conceptual metaphor GOOD IS RIGHT/BAD IS LEFT as described in Casasanto (in press).

This metaphor is present also in non-linguistic representation. For example, consider the drawing of one informant when I asked him to draw a picture of himself (Fig. 1a), and compare this to his drawing of God (Fig. 1b), which is analogous, but drawn in a slightly higher position, although his aim as he told me was to replicate the exact same drawing.

This is sound evidence that as with any type of experience, common or less common, people's perception is always embodied. Indeed, people maintain their *habitus* (in a Bourdieuian sense), through which society and culture is impressed on the individual, not only in mental habits, but even more corporeal ones, including gesture as I will describe below.

4 The MORAL ACCOUNTING metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) contends that much of our moral reasoning is rooted in metaphors, among which the MORAL ACCOUNTING metaphor. Our knowledge of ACCOUNTING is laminated onto the metaphor WELL-BEING IS WEALTH (so, for example, one might say that a millionaire who loses his family is a 'poor guy'). This is concep-

Figure 2: Edward's vision of paradise

tually at the basis of the Catholic notion of indulgences and of many sentations of paradise: You pray somewhere or do something so to get into heaven more readily.

 In one of my case studies, I asked my informant, Edward, to draw his vision of Paradise (Fig. 2). Edward is a self-proclaimed 'street preacher' who calls himself an 'apostle of Christ'. In summary, he was mapping onto his vision of the afterlife all the commodities he did not have in this world by conceptualizing WELL-BEING as WEALTH. In his drawing, his 'piece of paradise' included a house on a piece of land, with a river and waterfalls near it. What is particularly interesting is that in his drawing the house was for him and his wife (even though in this world he does not even have a girlfriend), and his house has a chimney and a garage nearby where to keep his 'many cars'. His view of paradise is made of the projection of a wealthy and stable life on earth, but transposed in paradise.

In April, 2008, police raided the compound of a Mormon sect in Texas, seizing more than 400 children. A news article[4] reported that the mothers opened up to the media after a week, trying to convince authorities to have their children back. A Mormon studies expert testifying in favor of the Mormons said in an interview, 'To really enjoy heaven, you have to be married and you have to have your kids with you. Everything experienced on Earth will be in its more perfected form in heaven.' This is the same metaphoric concept, which for the Mormon mothers is more than just metaphoric. Getting their children back was not simply for maternity's sake, but for eternity's sake.

Following this reasoning, just like on earth you have to earn your way to have a home, the same can be said about paradise. By doing morally positive actions in this world or, like Edward says, 'doing the right thing', he would be repaid, and his earthly suffering is a sort of investment for the afterlife.

This metaphor is generally pervasive in religious reasoning, for example when Christians say that 'Jesus Christ died on the Cross to pay our *debt* of sin.' For Eastern belief systems, keeping account of the individual's moral actions is the way that Karma is maintained, and this concept is present in many other religious systems: there is an investment and a payback, if you do something good, something good will happen back.

Within certain Christian Charismatic and Pentacostal traditions, a teaching dubbed 'Prosperity theology' is preached, adhering to the idea that an authentic religious belief and behavior in a person will result in their material prosperity. Through prayer and by giving a tithe to the church, God will

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[4] McLaughlin, E.C. 2008. "Experts: Sect opens up to retrieve children, hasten heaven" *CNN*. (April 28) http://www.cnn.com/2008/CRIME/04/28/flds.openness/index.html

repay ten-, if not hundred-fold. The promise is that God will make a way for the poor to be happy, which often equates to financial stability. One You-Tube video[5] shows Prosperity preacher Rev. Creflo Dollar of Atlanta, Georgia, who follows the charismatic way of preaching typical of the Bible Belt, addressing his congregants, 'I cames here to get this message <u>to</u> you / I came here to bring you somethin' / that's gonna deliver you outta this <financial bondage> / I came here to get you somethin' / that's gonna step you outta where you are right now, / and you'll <u>never</u> be the same again!'[6]

Returning back to Edward, what exactly is 'doing the right thing' for him? In Figure 3 is what he says about it in his own words and with a gesture analysis (see transcription legend, *infra* §8). For Edward, people have

Figure 3: Edward and Judgment Value Polarity in Co-Speech Gestures

Edward: The right thing (00:26:50 – 00:27:02)

1. Well / to put a short / ah: short story together it's just
2. where people choose [and do THIS /]^a
3. in ah words [peop- other people tryin' to do / ↑ THE [RIGHT] THING /]^b
4. so >e::verybody's< [over here doin' %grunt-"THIS" / the <u>devil</u> thing]^c

^a,c **'This/The devil thing'** (NEGATIVE)	^b **'The right thing'** (POSITIVE)
Downward	Upward ('do the [RIGHT] thing')
Outward palms (exclusion)	Inward palms (inclusion)
Centrifugal	Centripetal

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[5] From http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMSRjgzBrxc.

[6] Beyond the fascinating conceptual blend of 'financial bondage' (the Bible only refers to 'spiritual bondage'), I wish to underline the sociological implications behind the usage of the MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY metaphor. As Jonathan Watson has noticed this metaphor encourages congregants who got dicey mortgages to believe 'Well, it was thanks to God that the bank ignored my credit score, and God blessed me with my first house.' The results, he says, are 'disastrous, because [these preachers] pretty much turned parishioners into prey for greedy brokers.' In Van Biema, D. 2008. "Foreclosures: Did God Want You to Get That Mortgage?" *Time* (October 03) http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1847053,00.html

to choose to do 'the right thing' or 'the devil thing'. His co-speech gestures reveal much more than what he says. In this extract, it is interesting to notice how he embodies the metaphor GOOD IS UP/BAD IS DOWN, especially on the word 'right' when his right hand jerks upward. The 'the devil thing' is not the right thing, so it is excluded and put to the side, whereas he includes himself in 'right thing'.

The gesture Edward makes when talking about 'the right thing' is in a metonymic relationship with other instances of the same gesture throughout our interview. At times it may seem a little idiosyncratic, but it is not if considered part of a system which includes his language practice and his beliefs. His gesture is as if he is holding something, and in fact the first time he performs this gesture was in reference to the Bible almost three minutes into the interview. In Table 1 is a list of Edward's metaphoric/metonymic extensions of his 'Bible gesture'. Semiotically speaking, the sign is the same, but what it represents differs, thus giving rise to a 'polysemic gesture'.

Table 1: Metonymic and metaphoric extensions of Edward's 'Bible gesture'

- The Bible (indefinite object)
- A Bible, i.e. a particular edition (definite object)
- The books of the Bible (partonomy)
- Reading the Bible (embodied action)
- 'This is the way the world works'
- A spiritual guide, the 'something more' he was looking for in his life
- The 'right thing' to be taught and learned
- Prayer/praying
- Christ

The first time he performs this 'Bible gesture', less than three minutes into the interview, he uses it four times in 33 seconds all with different 'meanings'. Moreover, when he talks about prayer, he is using the MORAL ACCOUNTING schema.

Edward: Performing the first Bible gestures (00:02:57 – 00:03:30)
1. I was [reading the Bible] I need somethin' more so I figured [this is it] /
          Embodiment of action   **Deixis**

2. 'n then / ya know / the <u>Bible</u> thing was: where*/
3. ya know i' was a* ya know
4. you have to get the [right <u>books</u> so they got like] /
                      Partonomy

5. ya know so many different <u>books</u> you gotta find the right <u>book</u>
6. so it was like struggle 'n then /
7.   *Now do you think prayer is important?*

8.   ↑ Yeah /
9.   *Ok, why?*
10.   Cuz it always <u>does</u> something for you /
11.   So what I found out is / if you don't <u>pra:y</u>
12.   somebody's not gonna be looking <u>out</u> for you /
13.   so [if you pray /] the:n they're gonna hear the prayer
        Prayer
14.   and they're gonna be lookin' around 'n doin' something for you

This network of associations—Bible, prayer, Jesus, 'the right thing', 'the way the world works', 'the something more'—may seem obvious, but this is only because they are so entrenched in the conceptual systems of many Westerners. However they are contingent, and not necessary. They are fruit of Edward's experiences and interaction with *his* own world. Indeed non-Christians would deny these associations, and perhaps even some other Christians might wish to argue with them. What is interesting, though, is that Edward did not manifest these associations either consciously or intentionally, rather his gestures provided a backdoor to Edward's conceptual system by embodying his system of phenomena and beliefs.

5   One God, Two Fathers: STRICT FATHER vs. NURTURING PARENT

I will now concentrate on one fundamental metaphor in Christianity, which is GOD IS A FATHER, and how this metaphor plays out in two of my interviewees.

We have already met Edward, so let me present an older lady who goes by the name of 'Mama'. Mama is an African-American lady 'over 60' who runs a mission for the homeless. Her mother was not present from early on, and she talks about her father, a very large man, who liked to drink and who had many wives and other families. Even so, her father was very nurturing, and she loved him very much. When he died, she was alone and homeless, and she started stealing, doing drugs, and being sexually promiscuous. Nonetheless, she always felt the presence of God in her life, guiding and protecting her.

For Mama, God is like a father, and in many ways like her real father. As a matter of fact, every time but once during our interview when Mama discussed God using fatherly terms, she then mentioned her own father shortly after, sometimes without rhyme or reason. This could simply indicate that when she thinks and talks in terms of this metaphor, her source domain is saliently present. For example in the following extract Mama talks about how as a youth, she and her friends had been doing drugs and were driving

along a bridge. All of a sudden she yelled to stop the car, and luckily she did otherwise they were going to die, but she did not know what made her scream 'stop.'

Mama: Mentioning her father (00:14:18 – 00:14:29)
1. and then I realized that it was somebody bigger than me. /
2. ↓ Cause I thought that I was <u>biggest,</u> ya know? /
3. my father was <u>big,</u> ya know? /
4. 'n the::n […]

In this other excerpt, Mama confesses how she was ready to stop doing drugs, so she abandoned herself to God. Notice she mentions three things that were everything for her: at one point it was her father, then it was being a drug addict (like her father), and finally now, God the Father is her everything.

Mama: The only thing I got (00:16:10 – 00:16:40)
1. ↓I prayed to <God I know I'm doin' wro::ng> #
2. 'n I know ɡyou don't want me to u:se dru:gs #
3. ↑and I actually I really don't want to use 'em either #
4. but Father $^{(2.5)}$ I'm tired / it's the only thing I got #
5. but I didn't know <u>He:</u> was the only thing I really had #
6. 'n the:n so: /
7. I loved my father <u>so much</u> ↓ He took my father from me ‡
8. and that led me $^{(1.5)}$ by myself

Lakoff (1996) describes the STRICT FATHER Model and the NURTURING PARENT Model in political reasoning, a dichotomy useful for religious reasoning as well (see Table 2).

Table 2: Parent Models (Lakoff 1996)

STRICT FATHER vs. NURTURING PARENT

STRICT FATHER	NURTURING PARENT
• Hierarchical relationship	• Two way communication
• Power/ Authority	• Empathy/ Responsibility
• Reward/ Punishment	• Personal earning or loss

In Mama's religious conceptual system, her earthly father maps onto her heavenly Father. One was physically big, and the Other is big, powerful.

Throughout our interview it is clear that she is able to go beyond her father's faults, remembering how he guided and protected her and was indeed a nurturing parent; via conceptual integration, her view of God the Father is analogous.

Edward's conceptual system, on the other hand, presents an example of the STRICT FATHER Model. His biological father was a drug-addict, and he does not talk very highly of him during our interview, yet it is clear that Edward feels his loss.

In the following extract, which reveals his source domain FATHER, I asked Edward if he had ever seen God, and at the end he gives a vivid description of his vision. His gestures would be analogous to another of his drawings of God. It is interesting that, although he was initially talking about Christ's Father, he became emotional, and it seems as though he was talking more about the source domain of EARTHLY FATHER than the target domain of HEAVENLY FATHER.

Edward: Father and Son (00:15:14 – 00:16:20)

1. Yeah I have but /
2. That guy's* he's <u>kinda tight</u> so %laugh:
3. He's like / kind of a <u>meanie</u> or %laugh-"whatever" %laugh
4. *Who's this?*
5. The Lord Jehu or / Christ's father [1.5]
6. So he* he's / yeah he does {that} so /
7.   *Now what's the difference*
8. *between the Father and the Son?*
9. %sniff [1.5] %exhale / He's almighty /
10. He create* / ya know / he could take something and
11. make this into an animal %laugh:
12. He's a <u>cr'ator</u> /
13. He's a great man ([3.5]-%cry) but when it come to /
14. being like a man he doesn't %laugh-"do it very well I'm thinking" /
15. ↓ cuz I know he made me suffer a lot
16. ↑ And then they'll use this long suffering >{this} suffering
17. th: suffer long suffer he's like<
18. He could be a better ↑ man /
19. So: the difference is Christ is pro'ly /
20. The difference is the same but / he's a li'l more compassionate
21. ↓ <than his father> [1.5]
22. So he's a good man bu:t he needs to show more compassio- ya know
23. He needs to do a li'l more so /
24. *Now you're saying man, is he a man like you and me?*
25.   ([1.0]-%laugh) ↑ <u>Yeah,</u>
26. I seen a vision of him /

27. ↓ like I seen a little scene like the powers
28. he's like ah <he's a man> /
29. ^(2.0) so he's like ^(1.0) all grown tan man /
30. ^(2.0) and then he's: just like just like that so he's like
31. if you seen a guy that was <u>tan</u> like hair /
32. he's just like that

What is revealing is that he mapped the relationship of God the Father and God the Son onto his own relationship with his biological father. Similar concepts have a special cognitive role in devotees, because they become highly relevant in their everyday lives and not only in their conceptual system, but more profoundly, in their system of beliefs.

6   Incompatible metaphors and source domain lamination

During my interviews, after I identified the main metaphor used to talk about God, I introduced other metaphors in the discourse and tried to see which caught on and why. I will provide examples which indicate that when another conceptual metaphor was introduced, it was either rejected because the source domain could not coexist with the interviewees concept of the target domain (i.e. the encyclopedic knowledge and real-life experiences pertaining to that concept could not prompt plausible mappings), or the source domain was laminated onto the interviewee's habitual source domain, highly motivating the mappings when speaking in terms of the target.

Because Mama during our interview was quite good at citing and referencing the Bible, I asked her to talk about the *Song of Songs*, attributed to King Solomon, and to explain the imagery of the lover and the beloved. When I asked Mama if she could see God as being a lover, or even as a husband, she accused me of blasphemy: there was an incompatibility of domains in her conceptual system based on her life experiences.

Mama: God is not a lover (01:04:33 – 01:05:31)
1. *In the book of Solomon, could it be?*
2.   >yeah: 's a book of Solomon<
3. *ok, where it talks about two lovers,* ^(2.5) *the bride, and the groom* /
4. ^(1.5) ↑ <u>God</u> is the groo:m
5.   *ok, so you can see how some people see*
6. *God as being like a lover, like being a boyfriend, or being a husband, or being a groom*
7. he's th:e husband >of the <u>church</u>< /
8.   *ok*
9.   yeah, 'at's the way you look at that
10. you don't look at that in a /

11. <he's my <u>lover</u> / he comes to me at night and we have <u>s:ex</u>> /
12. no that's >very, very ↑ u:nchristian talk<
13. I don't even <u>talk</u> like that

I want to remind that Mama's culture suggests the GOD IS A LOVER metaphor, and although she possibly was aware of *Song of Songs* (5: 2), she ultimately interpreted the metaphor based on *her own* experiential knowledge of the source domain (her idea of LOVER cannot be applied to God). It reads:

    I slept but my heart was awake.
    Listen! My lover is knocking:
   'Open to me, my sister, my darling,
    … my hair [is damp] of the night.'

Other metaphors besides GOD IS LORD, CREATOR and FATHER analogously seemed implausible according to her conceptual system.

As for Edward, he basically refused any alternative metaphors for God other than GOD IS A FATHER. When asked if God is a 'mother' he only accepts this view in that God is a creator, and says 'but as far as anything like that…nah.' When asked if God is a 'lover', he replied without thinking 'he's not!' On a different note, but in complete accord with his epistemic stance, the following extract documents how he replied when I asked him to tell me if God can be thought of as a 'doctor':

Edward: God is a doctor (00:21:23 – 00:22:00)
1. (~1.0) Doctor::: (1.5) ye:ah he does do that
2. >So he'll pinch your fee::t or he'll hurt your tee:th
3. So he'll give you um like a- <a ↓ cu:re>
4. ↑ So he's like a doctor >like you're sayin'<
5. So what he'll do is ><u>hurtcha</u><
6. Cuz he's havin' his little vengeance on ya cuz you <u>sinned</u>
7. So I {knew} right from wrong / like ya know /
8. Don't mess with my stuff and then I mess with it and then he's gonna
9. %yell-"ow:" %laugh: %laugh-"he's gonna hurtcha" /
10. So he'll fix your tee:th /
11. Er ya know you're like you have a: >a:arth- somewhe- he'll go /
12. hurt it 'n then< /
13. So yeah he's like that ↓ like you're sayin'
14. <Like a f:ather> kinda thing /

Edward tries to elaborate the metaphor of GOD IS A DOCTOR, but because his fundamental metaphor is so salient for him, he laminates the two source domains and at the end even reverts back (almost hesitantly) to GOD IS A FATHER, a tough, uncompassionate father, unlike his own, a real 'meanie'.

7 Some considerations on entrenched and incompatible metaphors and domains

To conclude, a culture may suggest a conceptual metaphor, but ultimately the meaning construed will be founded on individuals' experiential and encyclopedic knowledge of their personal worlds. People's views about themselves and the world around them are deeply entrenched in their conceptual systems, which are created by their experiences and their bodily interactions with the world, whether it is having to do with gravity in the case of UP and DOWN, or what their individual and social concepts (like FATHER) are. When people talk about religious and spiritual concepts, they are revealing a great deal about the way they are, their world, and the way they interact with it.

The more entrenched a frame of mind is, the less plastic it is, and this is confirmed by the neurosciences which claim that it is difficult to break down and reconstruct certain synaptic structures of the brain. Our basic way of seeing things are often incompatible or at best seep through in the lamination when a new frame or a new conceptual metaphor is introduced, whether it be in the form of speech, gesture or drawings. The clues for this here presented is consistent with other data I collected from another dozen of informants who define themselves as Jewish, Muslim, Monotheistic, Pagan, New Age, Reiki, and so forth, and not only Christians.

One conceptual metaphor does not give way to another one immediately, and according to psychoanalytic studies, it is possible to substitute conceptual metaphors and frames of mind, but only with a great deal of effort. Studies in psychoanalysis indicate that when a subject affected by depression states "I don't know which way to go, I don't see a way out", the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A MAZE can be therapeutically (but laboriously) modified with a similar metaphor, that is LIFE IS A JOURNEY, having drastic implications for the patient's view of life and the world (Casonato 2003). The primary source domain of our habitual conceptual metaphor, I would say, will always motivate any other laminated domain mappings or blends especially for such meaningful concepts like personhood or belief systems.

Moreover, speech alone does not provide all the information. Conceptual metaphor certainly tells a great deal about the way we think the world works, but a lot more needs to go into the conceptual integration networks. Gesture studies has proven to be another powerful instrument, which should demonstrate how useful it can be for discourse analysis, psychoanalysis and various types of counseling, just to mention a few. Speech, gesture and drawings, each semiotic mode has its characteristic affordances and limitations, but when used together as with Multimodal Cognitive Semiotics, they can paint a more complete picture of what we are looking for, whether it be a person's concept of God or of one's self.

8   Transcription Legend

*	speaker self-interrupt, self-correction or restart	↑	rising pitch
		↓	falling pitch
:	prolonged or stuttering	>text<	enclosed speech delivered more rapidly than usual
#	breath pause		
‡	palato-alveolar click release	<text>	enclosed speech delivered more slowly than usual
%	non-speech sound; *e.g.* %laugh, %sneeze	{text}	uncertain speech
-	abrupt halt in utterance	<u>text</u>	emphasis
/	unfilled speech pause, <1.0 seconds	**[**	beginning of gesture phrase
		]	end of gesture phrase
(1.5)	unfilled speech pause in seconds	**CAPS**	main stroke of gesture phrase
		bold	comment on gesture

N.B. Diacritics are in gray in transcript to heighten readability of discourse text.

Author note

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