

From SALT to SALT: Cognitive Metaphor and Religious Language.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the Lakoff-Johnson-Turner theory of cognitive metaphor can be applied to religious language. After a brief description of the relationship between religion and metaphor, it focuses on the analysis of the saying « you are the salt of the earth » (Mt. 5:13). The reflection reveals that the sentence is a redefinition through the patriarchal Jewish « conceptual system » of an old Semitic mother-centered metaphor. A conclusion that emerges is that a metaphor's meaning may change drastically through the systematic reinterpretation of its signs into a new coherent cultural conceptualization while its « experiential basis » remains universal.

KEY WORDS: cognitive metaphor, religious language, conceptual system, experiential basis.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo trata del modo de aplicar la teoría de Lakoff, Johnson y Turner al lenguaje religioso. Después de una breve descripción de las relaciones entre religión y metáfora, se dirige la atención al dicho « sois la sal de la tierra » (Mateo 5:13). El análisis revela que la oración es una redefinición a través del sistema conceptual » patriarcal Judío de una antigua metáfora semítica basada en la Diosa Madre. Una de las conclusiones es que el significado de una metáfora puede cambiar drásticamente cuando sus diferentes signos son reinterpretados en una nueva conceptualización cultural coherente, mientras que su « base experiencial » sigue siendo universal.

PALABRAS CLAVE: metáfora cognitiva, lenguaje religioso, sistema conceptual, base experiencial

INTRODUCTION

As a conclusion to his article « Metaphor and Religion », Theologian David Tracy remarked that « the study of metaphor may well provide a central clue to a better understanding of that elusive and perplexing phenomenon our culture calls religion » (D.Tracy, 1979:104). Even though this statement is not new, it remains challenging. The idea presupposes an unprejudiced observation of the relationship between religion and metaphor, as well as the selection of relevant methods to analyze the metaphors. This paper will not attempt to investigate the « religious phenomenon » at large by studying the typical metaphorical structures and their religious or theological use in a set of given scriptures, as this has already been done from divergent critical point of views (P.Berger,1981; M.Eliade,1963). After a quick evaluation of the general relationship between religion and metaphor, the discussion will focus strictly on the analysis of the metaphoric content and implications of the expression traditionally ascribed to Jesus: « You are the salt of the earth » (Mt, 5:13)¹.

Most of what might be part of the genuine discourse of the historical Jesus is highly metaphorical as indicated by the very frequent repetition of words such as « is like », « are like », « as if » in all the Gospels canonized in the New Testament collection or in the Gnostics and the Christian sources of Nag Hammadi². The parable genre itself has been defined by modern scriptural scholars and literary critics as an interactive conjunction between narrative form and metaphorical processes. Considering this ubiquitous quality of the scriptures, it seems that the cognitive theory of metaphor, as it has been developed by G.Lakoff (Lakoff, 1992; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Turner, 1989), M. Johnson (Johnson, 1987) and M. Turner(Lakoff & Turner, 1989), may offer valuable methods of analysis. It will be the aim of the following reflections to discover how this cognitive theory may bring into light some of the concepts lurking behind the famous metaphor **disciples as salt of the earth** and might even disclose some surprising deductions which would confirm David Tracy's idea. As indicated by professor R. Maier, it seems that « neither Lakoff nor his followers have examined religious metaphors » extensively, for the time being (R. Maier, 1996 :8). In order to apply this cognitive theory to biblical texts, it could be suggested that, because of the cultural specificity and complexity of religious communication, some historical contextualization and pragmatic features may need to be integrated, as productive tools, to the cognitive and semantic aspects of Lakoff, Johnson and Turner's theory; this process will place the jesuanic metaphor within its historical « conceptual system » (G. Lakoff & M. Johnson, 1980, p 193).

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The relationship between religion and metaphor can be summarized in broad terms. Modern theologians agree that any religion is grounded in a network of metaphors stemming in clusters of images from a few basic, central, epiphanic or normative root metaphors. As explained by D.Tracy, those root metaphors are organizing principles; they are «sustained metaphors», they « both organize subsidiary metaphors and diffuse new ones»(Tracy, 1979:89). For example, **Atman is Brahman** could be seen as the major epiphanic root metaphor of Hinduism; **God is love**, in turn, may be regarded as the basic normative root

metaphor of contemporary Christianity. Those root metaphors feed and shape the mythic images which constitute the overall mythology of the religion. In this way, to continue with one of the previous examples, since all reality is Brahman, there can not exist duality. Consequently, the single mythic image of dark Kali presents a Goddess who gives birth to all being while her long lolling tongue licks up the living blood of her creatures; she is equally their birth and their death. Her related symbols reflect the same unity: this life giver wears necklaces of skulls and a skirt of severed human legs and arms; she is the « cosmic dancer », and dances over the prostrate bodies which she had brought forth (H. Smith 1958, p71; J. Campbell, 1962, p164-165). It becomes obvious that a closely connected mythic image within the same cluster of metaphors will be that of the wheel of rebirths.

The clusters of metaphors and their imagery as well as their deepest roots are themselves metaphorical of the psychological posture of a particular people in answer to the general enigma of the human condition and place in the universe. The whole sociological system is itself coordinate to such posture or reaction and adapted to the local geography, climate, economy and specific ways of life. The entire complex shows two levels: a universal metaphysical and cosmological question about of what it may mean to be a self-conscious human being flung amidst the diversity of the world, and a local level with its resultant impulse to structure accordingly both society and the psychological make up of its individual members. It follows that all the structures of a particular people may be read as symbolic manifestations of the root metaphors born of the general psychological posture of that group and adapted to the imperatives of the environment. Expressions such as scriptures, icons, rituals or sacramental redescrptions can then be seen as metonymies of the root metaphors and as reinforcements of the correlate social order; they also sanctify that social order by investing the relationship between the individuals, their society and their universe with a spiritual sense approved by authority and tradition and coherent with the metaphysical and cosmological views of the mythological system.

This relationship between religion and metaphor, showing religion itself as a metaphor, rules out any substitution theory as method of analysis of religious metaphors and demands the tools of interactive and cognitive approaches. It seems unavoidable to criticise a theoretical stance as Donald Davidson's who affirmed that a metaphor is nothing more than «something brought off by the imaginative employment of words and sentences and depends entirely on the ordinary meanings of those words and hence on the ordinary meanings of the sentences they comprise» (D. Davidson, 1979: 31). Such theories, applied to religious language, can only lead to the erroneous, unenlightened and prosaic reification of the metaphoric images. This has for long been the accepted method of interpretation of many, unfortunately influential, commentators of the three creeds of the Book (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). Such readings have spawned, for example, the popular interpretation of the Virgin Birth as some miraculous biological aberration or of the Promised land as an actual geographical area of the Near East to be conquered by military action. Those undecoded metaphorical readings have taken mythic images for hard facts; they have converted them into cultural views which take for granted the corruption of sex, the body and matter, or which put positive emphasis on a privilege of race and its consequent group narcissism. Such attitudes caused partly by inadequate methods of analysis create a dogmatic situation which demands rereading. It can be hoped that not only may « the study of metaphor provide... a clue to a better understanding of... religion »(D.Tracy,1979:104), it might somehow unravel and demystify oppressive understandings which have become

increasingly shocking. It will be the aim of the following pages to discover how the cognitive theory of metaphor might untangle the assumptions covertly imprinted behind the utterance: « You are the salt of the earth ».

Tradition had ascribed the gospels to disciples or to their followers. However, the discoveries at Nag Harnmadi have shown that those attributions are unlikely to be correct and, in any case, utterly unprovable. Those orthodox assumptions will therefore be rejected and the more contemporary research will be taken as a basis for the purpose of the analysis (E. Pagels 1981: 61-62; C. Panati, 1996:100). According to the Gospel of Matthew (written from 65 to 75 AD), at the end of the eight Beatitudes, during the famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus would have uttered the famous words: « You are the salt of the earth ». In order to allow a cognitive interpretation of the literal relationship between *salt* and *apostles*, without reference to the rest of the sermon, this statement will be taken momentarily as an authentic, historical fact. Considering the sentence in isolation and following the cognitive method, one could write that Jesus was using metaphorical language to clarify for his disciples the meaning of an abstraction about their role and about the quality of his feelings towards them. The metaphor was a kind of tiny parable which equated the essence, quality and cultural attributes of the source domain, salt, with a target domain corresponding to the ideophatic image that the speaker had of his disciples and of their mission. The intent was not to create poetic language. The aim was clearly pragmatic. The purpose was to transmit an abstraction in the most efficient way. The most direct method to address the disciples was to use for them a conceptual metaphor based on a vehicle whose domain belonged to their everyday life and to which they could relate through an easy process of « imaginative rationality » (G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, 1980:193)

This metaphor illustrates clearly that, as demonstrated by Lakoff's theory, « the locus of the metaphor is thought », not language as claimed by Davidson (Lakoff, 1992: 2). It is not a verbal phenomenon but a « species of thought » or cognitive process through which the conceptual domain of the disciples' duties can be understood in terms of what is known about salt. The metaphor shows that « as soon as one gets away from concrete physical experience and starts talking about abstractions and emotions, metaphorical understanding is the norm » (Lakoff 1992: 4). The role of metaphor is to bring the listeners back to a familiar set of information and experiences through which the idea may be decoded. Such process requires of the receptors an imaginative ability and a capacity for categorizations and inferences which are necessarily subject to a kind of objectivity « relative to the conceptual system of the culture » (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 193). In the light of the relationship which exists between religion and metaphor, it could be proposed that both the choice of the metaphor and its decoding are metonymies of the « conceptual system » of the Jewish community during the first century AD. In that particular instance, the reference to « salt » is particularly felicitous. Salt was for the disciples, most of them fishermen, a very concrete field of daily ontological experience; it also had a current and obvious complex of religious and epistemic references. The cognitive theory assumes that the disciples would « map » the « source domain », salt, onto the « target domain », their role. Through a relatively unconscious mental process, they would establish a set of systematic correspondences between the two domains by transferring information and inferences from the source to the target. A plausible, open-ended, unexhaustive mapping of these correspondences between *salt* and *disciples* can be attempted:

Salt	Disciples
Field of expence.	
Sait gives taste to food, enhances the flavors.	By transmitting the Word and following the Beatitudes. the disciples enhance the meaning of life, investing ir with spirituality .
Field of Knowledge.	
Sait is valuable : Antiochus's gift to Jerusalem of 375 bushels of salt for temple service (W. Smith, 1986:581) Sait used as salary	The metaphor itself can be understood as «you are vaiuable, important, chosen... ■
<u>Sait preserves:</u> food against decay. Was used by the ancients to preserve the bodies of the dead.	The Word preserves good will against sin: preserves the soul against spirituai death, hell.
Field of religious practices :	
Salt is sacred: Old Testament: offerings of sait (Lev, 2:13). Covenant of salt (Nb, 18:19) Story of Lot's wife (Gen, 19:26), permanence of sait = statue.	The Word is sacred Disciples as salt: word as offering. Covenant between Jesus and disciples. Permanence of the Word.
Field of popular beliefs :	
Sait of hospitality: sharing a man's salt created mutual obligation (S. Thompson, 1989, vol 5: 166). <u>Magical powers of salt:</u> Throwing sait over the shoulder as death-repelling charm (B. Walker, 1988:521). Eating sait during storms (C. Miles, 1976:311). Eating salt at the beginning of a journey (C. Miles, 1976:311).	Obligations of the disciples towards Jesus. The Word protects.

Analyzed within the frame of accepted orthodoxy and in **reference** to the rest of Matthew's chapter 5, the metaphor **implies** that if the apostles possessed the qualities enumerated in the eight Beatitudes, they would preserve mankind within a certain **desired**, supernaturally endowed social and ethical order. The quality of salt as preservative is being « mapped » upon the « target domain ». The interpretation is reenforced by the addition of the gustative property of salt in the following fragment: « but if salt has lost its taste, how **shall** its saltness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. » In other words, the apostles would **lose** their ability to preserve mankind and enhance the meaning of life on **earth** if they lost faith and the qualities of the Beatitudes. Then, they would « no longer be good for anything » (Mat 5:13)

It is surprising to observe that while the metaphor per se opens a wide gamut of possible correspondences underlining the **utmost importance** of the apostles, the surrounding text **closes** the gamut and reduces drastically the span of inferences. The text demands the selection of the preservative and **gustative** properties of salt and defines strictly and exclusively the conditions. There is no **opportunity** for «**imaginative rationality**». Instead of enlarging the **scope** of the metaphor, the explanations reduce the interpretation and the status

of the disciples as they impose a dogmatic reading. This puzzling effect of the surrounding text upon a cognitive metaphor can, in some cases, be a way to refine positively the purpose of the metaphor, giving to the decoding a level of insight and revelation. This process can be illustrated by observing how it functions in a traditional tale based on another salt metaphor. Just as Shakespeare would have King Lear do it, a King asked his three daughters how much they loved him. In Carmen Bravo-Villasante's version of the folk story, the youngest girl answered that she loved him « como la carne a la sal » (C. Bravo Villasante. 1979, Vol 3:135). At this point, in the first paragraph of the story, the reader does not know if the gustative or the preservative quality of salt or both are being highlighted. But at the end, given an unsalted dinner, the father realizes the value of salt as giver of taste and its cognitive parallel, the love of the girl for her father as giver of meaning to her life. The epiphany kills him, suggesting that the purpose of life was to come to this understanding. This recurrent motive in folk literature always ends in the same way: « experience teaches the father the value of salt » or the ultimate value of love (S. Thompson, Vol. 3:432). In the folk tale, the reduction of scope refines the meaning, pin-points the supreme, infinite importance of love and presents the import of the metaphor as an epiphany. In the gospel, there is a disquieting discrepancy between the set of possible correspondences and the way in which the preservative and gustative qualities of salt are highlighted. All sense of awe and epiphany is gone. The text of the sermon (Mt 5:1 to 7:29) has converted the metaphor into a limiting, authoritarian and self-conscious statement which logically ends with « for he taught them as one who has authority ». The metaphor seems out of place; it does not really fit the text; the cognitive eloquence of the metaphor is buried by the sermon.

This discovery leads the reader to wonder why this metaphor is used. It awakens suspicions and demands closer observation of the surrounding text. Would not the precise description of their expected duties, preceded by the explicit Beatitudes, followed by the long enumeration of rules and including the Lord's Prayer be far more than enough to clarify for the apostles whatever was expected of them? This entire « sermon on the mount » covers seventy verses without any interruption, from Mt.5:1 to Mt.5:28. The length and the difficulty of the text undermine any efficient didactic purpose; this second disquieting fact cannot fail to renew suspicions: the text certainly does not sound like a faithful repon of an actual, spontaneous sermon delivered by Jesus, in Aramaic, to a group of fishermen. Matthew is not the only gospel writer to render the episode. A much shorter passage, in Luke, presents many of the same ideas, in a similar language. However, Luke's beatitudes are only four; according to him, this scene did not take place on a mount but on a « level place » (Lk 6: 17), without the unnatural theatricality implied in Matthew: « seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain.. » (Mt 5:1). Luke's version occupies less than ten verses and does not include the metaphor **Disciples As Salt of the Earth**. Matthew and Luke's gospels were started on the same year, 65 AD, five years after the completion of Mark's which served as a basis for both and which offers no reference to this sermon. Luke was the traveling companion of Paul (J. Metford, 1983:164, C. Panati 1996:460) who never met Jesus but whose letters predate the synoptic gospels. The first letter to the Thessalonians dates from the Winter of 50-51 AD (A. N. Wilson, 1992:17) almost twenty years after Christ's death. It foretells the imminent return of Jesus (1 Thess 4: 16-18) from the sky and it urges people to remain pure and chaste (1 Thess, 4:3) and to keep a look out on the skies for, as predicted by Daniel, « there would come with the clouds of heaven one like a son of

man »(Dan 7:13-6th BC). In the light of those pieces of information. Matthew's homily appears undoubtedly as a thorough compilation of the essential principles of the pauline selective reconstruction and interpretation of what Jesus's teachings might have been. Matthew gave to this compilation the fictional, narrative frame of the Sermon on the Mount by developing the idea of the Beatitudes found in Luke's text. It would seem that the expression « you are the salt of the earth » has been put into this fictitious sermon on the mount by the religious genius of Matthew, a Jewish tax-collector fascinated by precise and systematic correlations between the Old Testament and Jesus's life. The sentence must then be observed as part of a fictional narrative and as part of a normative compilation.

Since the metaphor does not fit the surrounding text. why does Matthew choose to splice it in? What can be deduced from the cognitive purport of its different signs and is the metaphor and original creation of Matthew? First the metaphor has a role, regardless of its semantic and cognitive content. Worded as it is, the sentence gives the fictional speaker the opportunity to address his receptors directly. This stresses the complexity which arises from the socio-semiotic elements of the situation of communication that is being presented. The direct « you » is the axis of the relationship. It establishes a partnership to decipher the metaphor. Pierre Bourdieu stipulates that, to be productive, religious and political languages must involve a co-construction of meaning between speaker and receptors (P. Bourdieu 1982:15-17; p.149-166). In that sense, the introduction of a cognitive metaphor in direct address could not be more felicitous: it encourages group participation and creativity. Ted Cohen calls this function of the metaphor « an achievement of intimacy » because the speaker and his receptors « become an intimate group as the latter are invited to participate in the decoding of a network of assumptions, hypotheses and inferences » (T. Cohen, 1979:7). Here, of course this opportunity offered by the metaphor is denied by the rest of the text. It could be deduced, therefore, that one of the rhetorical imports of the metaphor is to create an atmosphere of « intimacy », an illusion of possible co-construction: it is an obvious diplomatic and political device. However, the socially stimulating effect of the metaphor is deepened by the Jewish « conceptual system » (G. Lakoff) at work within the pronoun « you ». This « you » is a « thou » in the sense which has been defined by Martin Buber: «When Thou is spoken. the speaker...takes his stand in relation to his audience », (Buber 1958:4). Each disciple is to feel himself as the speaker's « thou...with no neighbor and whole in himself...as he fills the heavens »; yet, « this does not mean that nothing exists except himself, but all else lives in his light » (M. Buber 1958:8). This philosophical interpretation of « you » is the one implied by Matthew who reinforces it through the next, parallel metaphor in the following verse « you are the light of the world » which, incidentally, is an actual borrowing from Mark (4:21), and which combines « you/thou » with « light ».

Following this impact of the pronoun « you », the verb to be in « you are » cannot be read simply as a copula introducing a contingent quality. « You are » expresses existence and reality; it refers to each apostle's essence and true nature. Philosophically, « being » implies, as Erich Fromm underlined, « the concept of process, activity and movement,...being is becoming » (E. Fromm 1976:13). The verb includes a notion of « inner activity », of intent; it requires « the productive use of human powers » (E. Fromm, 1976:76). This productiveness becomes part of the role of the apostles. Since the utterance defines, by its « illocutionary force », the essence of individuals, it may be argued that it constitutes what Austin called a « performative utterance ». The sentence is a « speech act »

because it is not « merely saying something but doing something » (J. Austin 1976, p25). In conclusion, it may be argued that the covert cognitive and socio-pragmatic purpose of the subject and verb of the sentence is performative, which implies symbolically the ritualistic transformation of the apostles through the impact of those signs.

Another element of the utterance. « of the earth », analyzed within the frame of Jewish thought. refers back to the main metaphors of Biblical cosmology and eschatology. Those background metaphors constitute « the conceptual structures» onto which, according to Lakoff, the significance of « of the earth » will be « unconsciously and automatically organized » (G. Lakoff & M. Turner, 1989, p.89). The Jewish « conceptual system » includes the cosmology upon which the whole Old Testament is founded and which was current and plausibly convincing at the time of Abraham (1996 BC). It corresponds basically to the ancient Sumero-Babylonian three-layered cosmos of Heaven, Earth and Water. By the times of Alexander (350 BC) and then through the influences of Aristarchus of Samos's heliocentric model (3rd BC) and later of the Ptolemaic model (Amagest 146 AD), the Greeks had disregarded the old cosmology. However, Paul and the first century AD Jewish and Christian contemporaries of the Bible's compilation do not seem to have been disturbed by this obsolete cosmology. They accepted it because it was part of the « conceptual structures » necessary to the literal understanding of a cluster of mythic images belonging to their faith. This cosmology made possible the literal understanding of Daniel's vision (mentioned earlier), or of such episodes as the one of the Tower of Babel challenging God (c.1700BC, Gen 11: 45), or of Elijah ascending physically « with a whirling wind into heaven...in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire » (c.896BC, Chron. 21: 12-15) or again of Ezekiel's dream-vision of the heavenly throne (Ezek 1: 22-28). The assumption of the validity of that cosmology remains basic in the New Testament if the physical ascensions of Jesus and the Virgin Mary are to be read as hard facts, as they have been read by orthodox commentators for the last 2000 years.

This Old Testament cosmology mirrors what may be offered as root metaphor of Judaism and the other faiths of the Book: the image of God as ontological, transcendent Other. A chasm separates God and man; it can only be crossed by the awe of man in prayer and by the will of God in revelation. This sky God is so far away from man and nature that he is unbegotten: there is no theogony in the religions of the Book. He is so far from the earth that nature neither contains him nor exhausts his power. Consequently, the human and the divine are sharply polarized (M. Gauchet, 1985: chapter 4) The earth no longer is the womb and tomb of all life as when Gods and Goddesses, like Ba'al, Asherah or Kali remained in its depth. The earth has become a place of corruption which needs the help of prophets and disciples to be endowed with meaning and afford mankind a path towards salvation in the afterlife. Hence, the Jewish experience is coherently organized according to its root metaphor (G. Lakoff & M. Johnson, 1980, chap. 23). The metaphor being one of chasm between God and man/earth, the relationship becomes one of covenants. God's will confront man with demands. He becomes ubiquitous in human events and history and controls from above.

As stated by professor R. Maier, in religious communication, « not only does the text as such count, but also the other elements of the context, as does the way of presenting the text » (R. Maier, 1996:12). Here the important element is the place, the mount once more. After the episodes at Mt Senai (Ex33:20-23) and at Mt Herob (meaning « mountain of God» 1. Kings 19), after the influential above earth dream visions of the Old Testament and the

recurrent associations of Yahweh with mountains³, the reader cannot avoid a sense of *déjà vu* when Jesus « seeing the crowds...goes up on the mountain » to « teach » the eight Beatitudes: Matthew's sermon on the mount is a new covenant. Throughout the Old Testament, God's theophanies become more and more elusive. They show God hiding behind metaphors of concealment (a back, a burning bush, a throne..), becoming a commanding, yet disembodied voice. In Matthew, God's commands are presented indirectly through the redemptive son. The theophanic and dogmatic situation of divine communication in the Old Testament is automatically transferring its particularities to the new situation in the New Testament. The Old Testament's episodes provide the « context needed for the understanding of the utterance », « you are the salt of the earth », according to the Jewish « conceptual system » (G. Lakoff & M. Johnson, 1980:224). The perception of the situation of the sermon is « mapped » according to the well known previous descriptions of mount religious experiences. Those experiences are so deeply engrained into the world view that the imagination is constrained to process the new situation in function of the previous ones. What comes out is, once more, automatization and lack of freedom. Like the surrounding text, the setting of the sermon denies to the apostles the freedom to participate with « imaginative rationality » in the construction of the metaphorical meaning which concerns them so deeply that it pretends to redefine their being. They are preconditioned by the cultural context of which the text is both metonymy and reenforcement.

It can be concluded so far that, endowed with sacredness through its mount setting and the Jewish sense of « you are », this saying fulfills two functions: it creates an illusion of co-construction of meaning by allowing an atmosphere of « intimacy » and it imposes the selection of preservative and gustative qualities of salt as exclusive correspondences for the duties of the apostles to maintain mankind within a meaningful supernaturally imposed social and moral order. It remains to find out whether Matthew created and was the first one to use the metaphor « you are the salt of the earth ». G. Lakoff and M. Turner point out that adequate understanding « requires knowledge », and they give some examples by showing how much « appropriate knowledge » is necessary to enable a reader « to make sense of a Sanskrit poem » (G. Lakoff & M. Turner, 1989:60). The same type of care has to be taken with the present metaphor. Some research has uncovered the fact that the expression « salt of the earth » is a saying belonging to Canaanite and ancient Near Eastern cultures. Contemporaries of the Old and New Testaments had heard these words and must have known their meaning. It was a « common Semitic metaphor for enlightened seers » and it meant « true blood of the Earth Mother » (B. Walker 1986, p.887). This information shows Matthew's brilliant grafting of a previously mother centered mythic image onto a Judeo-Christian patriarchal root metaphor. Matthew's use of this metaphor is an instance of what M. Fishbane calls « the many remarkable attempts to absorb, reformulate, or otherwise integrate the mythic patterns, images and values of Canaanite and ancient Near Eastern religions (M. Fishbane 1981, p.33). Through this process, the utterance deepens its illocutionary force and performative, ritualistic import; it says to the disciples that « they », male followers of Jesus and not the females seers of Mother Earth, are indeed the true « salt of the earth ». The utterance redefines not only the status of the apostles but also the metaphorical « salt of the earth » itself and its switch from matriarchal to patriarchal significance.

Such symbols as the ones related to salt and the metaphors built upon them awaken archetypal interest and imagery. They trigger some deep sense of wonder which echoes in the mind and demands to be tapped through some image. The reason for the force of universal symbols might be found in their « experiential and physical basis» (Lakoff&Johnson, 1980) and their related «bodily basis»(Johnson, 1987) . Lakoff and Johnson apply the « physical basis » principle mainly to « orientational metaphors » (G. Lakoff & M. Johnson, 1980:14-17) but it could be suggested that much of the weight of « salt » in metaphors comes from the physical and experiential basis of that mineral. The taste of salt is the first flavor that touches the gustative cells of the foetus long before its birth. It is the taste of the amniotic fluid, of the micro-ocean of the womb, where life grows. That is probably to match this prenatal environment and hoping for rebirth that Egyptians kept the mummies in a brine solution called « natron » or « birth fluid » (B. Walker, 1986:886). Alchemy offers an impressive testimony of the imprinting of that first taste of life: the alchemical symbol for salt is the same as the symbol for the water element, « the straight sea horizon dividing upper and lower portions of the world » (R. Koch, 1955:65). The same prominence was given by the 16th century Paracelsians who based the universe upon « the tria prima » of which salt was the first mystic principle before sulphur and mercury. « Salt thus appears not as a substance, but a cosmic principle » (M. Haeffner, 1994:198) , so much so that Khunrath (alchemist 1560-1605) called salt the « physical center of the earth » (M. Haeffner, 1994:199) Not surprisingly, salt is related to creation myths: In Norse mythology, for instance, the primaeval cow Audumla

Licked the salty blocks and by the evening of the first day a man's hair had come out of the ice. Audumla licked more and by the evening of the second day a man's head had come Audumla licked again and by the evening of the third day the whole man had come. (K Crossley Holland, 1980:4)

Some early Jewish popular beliefs allege that « salted water may be converted into flesh » (S. Thompson. Vol. 2:56, D 478.10). The symbolic logic of these myths appears clearly if the indestructible qualities of salt are taken into consideration: While the body decays after death, its salts remain, they are the last residue, the leftover, the element which frames the beginning and the end. It endures in contrast with the phenomenal world, and the salt goes back to the physical center of the earth . Since the idea of its own decay is for the ego a terribly repellent and frightening concept, it is not surprising to discover that the value of salt has a deep psychological grounding. At the same time, the living body needs salt in its diet not only as a condiment but as a necessary antidote to the heat of the climate, for both humans and animals, as can be read in the Old Testament (Job 6:6; Is 30:24). There cannot be any doubt about the link between salt and enduring life. Is it, then, mere coincidence to discover that the two great liberating victories of the Israelites happen in a so called « Valley of Salt » (David over the Edomites, 2 Sam 8:13, 1 Chron 18:12 and Amaziah, 2 Kings 14:7, 2 Chron 25: 11)? Scholars do not agree upon the exact geographical situation of that valley but it is thought to be in the area of Mount Jebel Usdum, a mountain composed almost entirely of salt several hundred feet high and seven miles long, not far from the Dead Sea (Gen: 14: 3) and whose original name was Sea of Salt (W. Smith: 581)!

The «experiential basis» for the value of salt can also be extracted from the fact that tears, blood and semen taste like salt. Those three bodily fluids have always been regarded as potent drops. When water evaporates from the tears what is left is salt produced by human emotion. Man is the only animal to shed tears. Tears may form in the eyes of a dog or a cow but they have probably little to do with their feelings. Even babies do not usually cry with tears until they are between one and two months old. Because they represent compassion and suffering, the tears of holy personages are supposed to have healing virtues, while it was thought that witches could not cry. Strikingly, the shortest verse in the whole Bible is one concerning the power of tears: « Jesus wept » (Jn 11:35). Here Christ's tears are believed to represent the outpouring of divine love, compassion, and benevolent power necessary to rise Lazarus from the dead. This same power of tears is pointed out through the disparity between a Norse myth and its parallel in the Old English poem «The Dream of the Rood» (ca. 7th century, anonymous): Odin's son Balder had been killed by the mistletoe twig but could be « wept out of Hel » as long as « each substance of the nine words wept for him ». Only one person refused to weep, the giantess Thokk, condemning Balder to stay among the dead (K. Crossley-Holland:150-161). On the other hand, in line 55 of the « Dream of the Rood », which describes Christ's crucifixion from the point of view of the cross, it is written: « Weop eal gesceaft »; «The whole creation wept» (M. Swanton ed, 1970:93) at the sight of Christ's death and of course, he was risen. The salt of tears is the salt of emotions, miracles and victory over death.

The narrow connection between salt and blood, experienced in their similar taste has already been recognized in the pre-patriarchal meaning of « Salt of the earth » as « true blood of the Earth Mother ». The similarly salty taste of semen probably led to the same organically based, but male-centered, salt/semen/blood mythic complex. The correlation may be briefly illustrated by the Egyptian pharaohs' coronation rites: During the ceremony, a mystical fluid called « Sa », the invisible semen of the God Ra, magically infiltrated the veins of the king, permeated his blood and filled him with Divine power; the pharaoh became, like the Canaanite seers, « true blood », not of the Earth Goddess, but of Ra. A comparable association pervades the sexual views of the Talmud which shows semen as sacred seed and often equates it with blood because both are «fiery fluids» which receive life from the Divine flame (G.Langer, 1990).

Using Hanz Biedermann's wording, the symbolism of blood can be summarized by saying that it « is widely considered the element of divine life that functions in the human body » (H. Biedermann, 1994:43). In the realm of rituals, salt and blood became equated: « salt was accepted as a substitute for the Mother's regenerative blood ... because it came from the sea womb and had the savor of blood (B. Walker, 1986:886). In the Bible, the sprinkling of salt (Lev. 2:13; Num 18;19) was most likely a substitute for the sprinkling with blood. This correspondence can be observed at the linguistic level, in the etymology of such words as «blessing» and « immolate » which are both related to ritualistic offerings. « Blessing » comes from the Old English « betsian » and earlier

Bleaswean » meaning to sanctify by sprinkling with the blood of sacrificial animals or war captives (R. Graves 1958:29, 340). To « immolate» comes from the Latin « mola », a sacred salted flour prepared by the Vestal virgins, and which was sprinkled on the sacrificial animals offered to the Gods(B.Walker, 1986:887).

Since blood and salt are tightly entangled within the concept of sacrifice in the Bible, is it possible to avoid the idea that there might also be a cognitive, epistemic correspondence between sacrificial offering and the performative utterance « you are the salt of the earth »? Could the **immolated object** be the disciples' ego, the ego-centered living which has to be slain so that the heart may become « merciful », « pure »,

meek »...acquire the purified state described in the beatitudes? This notion is echoed by St Jerome who calls Christ himself « the redeeming Salt that penetrates Heaven and Earth » (quoted by H. Biedermann, 1994:294) because He had to be sacrificed to redeem mankind. This sacrifice of the disciples would be like the melting away of the ego so that, through mysticism, the ultimate may eventually be reached. At this point of the interpretation, the hygroscopic property of salt and its affinity with water are being added to the sacrificial epistemic correspondence. These physical properties of salt are « mapped » upon the Western typically (though not exclusively) confrontational concept of religious experience⁴: The ego lets itself dissolve away; like salt in water, it becomes transparent and absorbs the Divine which penetrates it from above; like salt, the ego is invisible but it does not disappear and it is not personally extinguished; it persists in an elevated, purified state, as indestructible as the soul in its incorporeal, orthodox definition.

CONCLUSION

It has become obvious that the interpretation of the sentence «you are the salt of the earth» depends upon two factors. On the one hand the meaning is contingent upon the root metaphors of the religion and the « conceptual system » which inform the imposition of the different signs. On the other hand, at a deeper level, the eloquence of the metaphor is grounded in the universal «experiential basis » which stands behind the mythic images and powerful symbols related to salt.

The force of the metaphor could not be dismissed by Matthew. Perceiving its richness and flexibility, he adapted it to the new faith, grafted it on the Hebrew patriarchal root and imposed its reinterpretation by introducing it within the normative text of a fictional sermon delivered with « authority » and redefining the individual signs of the sentence. The usurpation of the metaphor and its redefinition are both metonymies of the «conceptual system» of the first century AD Jewish and early Christian society. The insertion of the metaphor is actually a multi-leveled political action: Being a patriarchal appropriation of a female-centered mythic image, it is still an attempt to overpower the previous Earth/Mother centered religion, as well as its correlate social, economic and political systems. Much of the Old Testament⁵ tells the struggles of the Israelites to impose, usually by force, their new patriarchal order and distant, male, sky God in a land whose customs and religion were dominated by the female Earth principle. The land of Canaan was indeed a land of « milk and honey » but it was not an empty land, « its inhabitants were a powerful people, the towns were fortified and very big » (Num 13:28). It had to be conquered; the altars were destroyed and the images broken. The expression « salt of the earth », being a linguistic icon, a prepatriarchal mythic image of the religion, its mutation in Matthew's gospel amounts to a violation of sacred material which echoes the burning of the asherim.

Another political level is made obvious by the rhetoric style and the socio-semiotic aspects of the discourse. The « intimacy » created by the metaphor makes more easily acceptable the demands of the text. The Beatitudes encourage the disciples and the dominated social classes not to care about « hunger and thirst », « persecution » and poverty, not to rebel but to « rejoice and be glad » for their « reward is great in Heaven ». for eternity, away from the corrupted earth. This, of course, transforms the organized religion into the political associate of the dominant class. The same principle applies to the husband/wife relationship described further during the sermon.

Matthew's political and religious genius engineered the semantic mutation of the metaphor to meet the purpose of the institution of a new organized religion, but, ultimately this transformation works because the metaphor draws its power from an experiential basis embedded within the body and the senses. As predicted by David Tracy, « the study of metaphor » has afforded a « better understanding » of the religious « phenomenon » expressed in a single metaphor. On one level the study of this metaphor revealed the text as political rather than religious. However, on a deeper level, the metaphor is a mythic image: it stands out as a bloc of gold which can be melted and reshaped but which remains gold. The Canaanite and the Christian metaphors are different but they are made of the same cognitive inferences grounded in the same « bodily and experiential basis ». The salt of the Gospel is like the soda salt used by the glass maker; it is invisible, yet material, concealed into the clear substance of the crystal glass which reflects the light. The Canaanite salt is also the true enduring essence. the material, « true blood » of the Goddess; it is like the thread which is the pattern and the panern which is the thread.

It seems that the cognitive decoding of the « experiential basis » of a religious metaphor is of utmost importance to the understanding of religion. Religious metaphor appears to be rooted deeply into the body, its experiences, fluids and functions. The most spiritual activity of mankind feeds on the material element, the soma, the gross, carnal, dense, natural body, on the arena of the senses. The «bodily basis» is the mysterious, experiential well of power from which the imagination draws the insights that can convert salt, the chemical sodium chloride of daily experience into the mythic image of Salt.

NOTES

1. Standard scriptural abbreviations will be used throughout the text.
2. Nag Hamiota (upper Egypt): discovery in 1945 (two years before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls) of a large jar containing 48 Coptic Gnostic works, a total of 700 pages. Among the most important texts are: The Gospels of Thomas, Philip and Mary Magdalene. The Gospel of Truth, The Treatise on Resurrection. The Dialogue of the Savior... (J. Campbell, 1964: chap 7).
3. Biblical connections between God and mountains: Exod 3:1, 24:17; Deut 4:10, 4:15, 5:4; and ubiquitously in the Book of Psalms: 48, 78, 99; and linked to the symbolism of the mountain is the reference to «Rock»: Ps 18, 19, 28, 31, 42, 62, 71, 92, 94.
4. See among others accounts by St Francis, St Teresa. St. John of the Cross.
5. Old Testament references to the struggle of the Hebrew to impose Yahweh over the pre-patriarchal deities are too numerous to be quoted; see as typical: Judges 2:13, 3:7; Sam 7:3 - 4; 1 Kings 15:13; 11 Kings 17:9, 23:4 - 15; Deut 12:2-3, 16:21 for the prohibition of «Asherim» as an example of this constant strife for supremacy.

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