



The Metaphorical and Metonymic Understanding of the Trinitarian Dogma

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ABSTRACT

Written in the spirit of cognitive semantics, the paper is an attempt at analysing the limited understanding by Christian believers of the Trinitarian dogma as presented in biblical and theological texts. Though ultimately an insoluble mystery for human reason, the dogma can be shown to have a measure of metaphorical and metonymic coherence. At the same time, the paper claims that human access to transcendental notions is, in a deep sense, inevitably metaphorical, and consists of an elaborate network of mappings of human-sized notions onto the domain of the divine. This network is claimed to be a manifestation of the root metaphor GOD~HUMAN. The author further claims that the opposite root metaphor, HUMAN~GOD, constitutes one of the warrants, together with divine inspiration and the context provided by Revelation, of the truth of statements about God made on the basis of the first root metaphor.

KEYWORDS: cognitive semantics, religious discourse, mapping, metaphor, metonymy, theology, truth, trinitarian dogma, root metaphor, metaphoric-metonymic coherence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is a belief upon which the faith of all Christians rests, as St Caesarius of Arles declared in one of his sermons (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, henceforth C.C., p. 55). All Christians are "baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son,

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and of the Holy Spirit; not in their names, for there is only one God [...]: the most Holy Trinity" (ibid.). This is "the central mystery of Christian faith and life [...] the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them" (ibid., p. 56). "God has left some traces of his Trinitarian being" in his 'oikonomia', that is his works, but "his inmost Being as Holy Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to reason alone" (ibid.).

These words provide sufficient reasons to make a study of our limited understanding of this mystery an extremely interesting task. The first reason is its very centrality to our faith. The second reason is its transcendental nature, which simply baffles human logic: how can three be one and one three? But the fact that it is above human logic does not mean that there is no coherence at all in it. In fact, there is a mysterious internal coherence in this belief, a weak glimpse of which we get through the language of the biblical passages which contain God's revelation of the mystery to the sacred writers. This coherence may only be glimpsed, as if from an immense distance, thanks to the metaphorical and metonymic abilities of human beings. The Bible uses some basic metaphors and metonymies to talk about God, exploiting some of them in unheard of ways. Christian theological reflection on most doctrinal issues has since the earliest times worked to a very large extent within the conceptual networks established by these metaphors and metonymies, and has exploited them in new ways or used other metaphors and metonymies from the stock offered by the culture and language of the theological writer'. The trinitarian dogma, as fixed by the first ecumenical council at Nicaea and by the second ecumenical council at Constantinople, reiterates these metaphors and metonymies.

This is hardly surprising, in view of the highly figurative character of religious language in general. Religious language has to be figurative because it deals with conceptual domains and entities which are not conceptually and linguistically apprehensible in an immediate, direct way. Therefore, when discussing religious experiences or religious concepts, the person of faith, or the theologian, has to use metaphor and metonymy, which are cognitive models that help humans to conceptualise experiences which are not what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) termed 'emergent concepts', *i.e.* nonmetaphorical gestalt concepts emerging from direct experiences, such as 'object', 'up', 'down', 'person', 'container', 'here', etc. After all, this situation does not apply only to religious language, but to other special types of language, like scientific language; and, given our cognitive makeup, the use of metaphors and metonymies is advantageous to theology, science, and any other explanatory enterprises (Mac Cormac, 1976). In fact, the use of metaphor and metonymy is pervasive in all sorts of language, including ordinary language (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

In this essay I will study the metaphoric-metonymic network that underlies the formulation of the Trinitarian dogma and the language of some of the biblical passages that led to it. I will begin with the description of some of the main metaphors and metonymies that are used in the formulation of the dogma and in the preceding scriptural passages. Instead of analysing just the formulation of the dogma as crystallised in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, I will also study the basically metaphoric-metonymic structure of the theological

discussion and elucidation of the dogma. Since the fact of analysing all or even just a representative subset of the main theological contributions to this discussion throughout history would go far beyond the bounds of this essay, I have chosen the relevant sections of the recent Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), as an authoritative compendium of the dogmatic teachings of the Catholic Church³. Then I will attempt to identify the fundamental metaphors and metonymies whose interaction constitutes the dogma, and will simply suggest how it could be made somewhat coherent at the figurative level, even if still not intelligible from a logical-referential standpoint. However, the suggestions given in part 3 should only be taken as the way in which one could analogically imagine, but by no means explain, how God can be one and three. Finally I will discuss the implications of the coherence of these metaphors for the problems of tmth and the understanding of religious language in general.

The description and analysis of metaphor and metonymy in this essay has been done in the spirit of cognitive semantics. The reader is assumed to be familiar with the basic tenets of the cognitive theory of metaphor and metonymy, as developed over the past two decades by writers like Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Johnson (1987), Lakoff (1987, 1990, 1993), Lakoff and Tumer (1989), Tumer (1987, 1991), as well as by Kovecses (e.g. 1990), Gibbs (1994), and many others.

This essay is then a semantic study, not a theological essay. But since I am a Roman Catholic it should be clear that I will ultimately be writing from my faith. I am not an aloof external observer of the dogma. I am an active believer in it. This means that I have written this study not only as a modest contribution to cognitive semantics but even more as a manifestation of faith. I follow here St Augustine's admonition, expressed at the beginning of *De Trinitate*, to mistrust those Christians that, when writing about God "consider it beneath their dignity to begin with faith, and who are led into error by their immature and perverted love of reason" (quoted in Muller 1990: XIV).

II. METAPHORS AND METONYMIES IN THE TRINITARIAN DOGMA

In my view there are two basic 'root metaphors', to use Mac Cormac's term, in the scriptural revelation and in the theological formulation of this dogma: the metaphor in which people are understood in terms of what we may know about God, and the metaphor in which God is understood in terms of human concepts. These metaphors can respectively be referred to as HUMAN~GOD and GOD~HUMAN. A root metaphor "serves as the basic assumption underlying the way in which we describe the entire enterprise of science or religion" (Mac Cormac 1976: xii-xiii). Root metaphors are hypothetical suggestions about the nature of the world (*ibid.*)⁴. That is, on the one hand, there is a mapping from what we know about God onto certain aspects of men (HUMAN~GOD). This metaphorical mapping' is prompted by Revelation, when we are told that man was made in the image of God himself. On the other hand, there is a more widespread mapping, GOD~HUMAN, which maps human-based conceptual categories onto categories in the

domain of the divine, as a way of partially understanding the latter; this metaphor is present in the very language of the Scripture, which uses human categories to convey what God has revealed about Himself, and obviously, too, in the corresponding theological language. Both root metaphors can be understood (i.e. each is a successful metaphor) because there seems to exist in many cultures a yet more abstract root metaphor whereby aspects of lower forms of being are understood in terms of aspects of higher forms of being, and vice versa. The overarching root metaphor in question is what Lakoff and Turner (1989: 170-181) call 'THE GREAT CHAIN METAPHOR'. The two root metaphors that we have distinguished up till now could also be regarded, therefore, as two different manifestations of this more abstract root metaphor⁶.

These two root metaphors will be discussed again at the end of the essay, but it should be clear now that they are not mere variants of each other, since they map different semantic structures. Of the two, by far the one which plays the most relevant role in Scripture and theology, and which is manifested in a greater number of minor metaphors is GOD~HUMAN, but HUMAN~GOD guides in an essential way the insights gained from it, as will be demonstrated later.

II. 1 Submappings in GOD~HUMAN

The manifestations of this root metaphor are a number of submappings. All of these submappings are in themselves subordinate metaphors, and the term 'metaphor' will also be used for them. A hypothesis that, more or less explicitly, an important group of cognitive linguists sustain today, is that *most*, if not all, human abstract categories are at least in part understood metaphorically in terms of non-metaphorical, human-centred, spatial concepts like verticality, front-back orientation, source, path, goal, point, etc., or in terms of concepts which can themselves be shown to be ultimately comprehended, at least in part, as spatial configurations, like area, container, object, etc. (Lakoff 1990, 1993, Turner 1991, Johnson, 1987). For example, the notion of love is in part understood metaphorically in terms of spatial notions like that of container and substance, as in *I am full of love*; see Kovecses 1990. And notions like those of the various types of interpersonal relationships, and most abstract notions, are also often understood metaphorically in spatial terms. Take as an example the notion of power, understood in terms of vertical spatial orientation: *John has power over all of us, He's at the top*, etc.; or an abstract notion like that of event, especially action, which is often understood as spatial movement, as in *John is on his way to success* (see Lakoff 1990, 1993). Obviously, purely spatial interpersonal relationships do not tend to be constructed metaphorically: *John is near Peter*. The abstract notion of the human person is also normally understood metaphorically in terms of containers (see Kovecses 1990). However, other components of our notion of a human person, like experientially direct bodily concepts such as those of body parts are of course normally understood nonmetaphorically; but these are also often mapped onto God, as when we talk of God's hands or eyes, or heart.

Most of the human categories identified in the present study as metaphorically mapped onto the domain of the divine are among those for whose ultimately spatial character those

linguists have provided abundant evidence. Therefore, the ultimately spatial character of so many of these categories cannot be in principle a distinctive classificatory criterion, since most of them display it to a greater or lesser degree: the source domains of the groups of metaphors established below are most of them in some degree spatially understood. Thus in principle most of these human source domains discovered in the submappings of GOD–HUMAN should be included in the space-based group of concepts by the classification in Table 1 below. However, the table creates a group for source concepts directly understood in spatial terms (verticality, container, etc.) which, as we shall see, are often mapped directly onto the domain of the divine. And it then creates three special groups: one for abstract notions, another for the human person, and another for human interpersonal relationships.

The reason for setting aside these three special groups is that these groups of source concepts are particularly relevant in the constitution of the trinitarian dogma, as will become evident in the ensuing discussion. Interpersonal relationships are treated as a special group because of the large stock of source concepts they provide for the dogma, but they could also have been included in the group of concepts related to the human person. On the other hand, some of the categories that are not included in the group of source concepts pertaining to the human person could equally have been included in them, like action, which can be regarded as an aspect of people. And the abstract notion of personhood can also be assigned to the group of source abstract concepts, which includes action, existence, etc.

Table 1: Human conceptual source domains metaphorically mapped onto the domain of the divine

<i>Experiential folk notions of tri-dimensional space as source domains</i>	verticality, place, movement, container, boundary, light, etc.
<i>Metaphorically understood abstract notions as source domains</i>	existence, being, essence or substance, time, events, action, causation, etc.
<i>Metaphorical and non-metaphorical notions of the human person as source domains</i>	personhood, emotions, bodily life, etc.
<i>Metaphorical and non-metaphorical notions of human interpersonal relationships as source domains</i>	power, authority, status, family relationships (father/mother, son), love (as a relationship), language and communication, groups of individuals, social roles

11.2. Submappings in GOD~HUMAN with experiential models of spatial concepts as source domains

I present and briefly discuss below some examples where the source domain is a strictly spatial domain, like those of tri-dimensional space and movement, or a domain, like physical entities and size, whose conceptualisation presupposes the spatial domain.

11.2.1 Verticality

In the Nicene Creed (henceforth, N.C.) we read that Jesus “came down from Heaven”⁷, and in

the Gospels (e.g. Mk 16: 19) we know that he "was taken *up* into heaven". This concept is used to partially comprehend the notion of Heaven as 'God's place', and of God as 'being up'. There are a number of conventional metaphors in which the *up* pole of the verticality axis is mapped onto positive concepts like 'goodness', 'power', 'social status', 'intelligence', 'spirituality', etc., which help make this mapping to the divine comprehensible.

II.2.2 Place

In the same passages, Heaven is conceived of as a place in space ("*from/up into* Heaven"). But we know from other biblical passages that Heaven is not necessarily tied up with spatial coordinates.

II.2.3 Movement in space

The same passages, and many others, map the notion of movement in space, with the associated notions of *source* and *destination*, onto the divine: the Holy Spirit "*proceeds* from the Father and the Son" (N.C.), Jesus is "*going to* the Father" (Jn 14:28). He will "*send*" to the Apostles the Advocate "*from* the Father, the Spirit of Truth who *comes from* the Father" (Jn 15: 26).

II.2.4 Containers and boundaries

The container image-schema (Johnson 1987) is fundamental in the conceptualisation of the Holy Trinity, since, as we shall see later, the Holy Persons are conceived of as containers and so is the Trinity itself. But it is pervasive in the biblical and religious language about the divine, for example, when Heaven itself is viewed as a container ("*into* Heaven"). And allied to the notion of container is that of boundary, or limit, as when St Gregory of Nazianzus speaks of the "infinite co-naturality of three infinities" (C.C.: 61). The notion of infinitude is understood metaphorically as a lack of spatial boundaries, and this metaphorical notion is itself, within *GOD~HUMAN*, mapped to God.

II.2.5 Physical entities, size

The concept of physical entity is an 'emergent concept', which has nonetheless a spatial configuration. This is why it has been included in this section. One of its subordinate categories, 'person', will be commented upon later. An important spatial dimension of physical entities is size, which is mapped directly onto the notion of 'importance, status' and the latter onto the divine in Jn 14: 28, when Jesus says: "the Father is *greater* than me".

II.2.6 Light

This is another concept in this group. Light occurs in space and should thus be regarded as a spatial phenomenon. It is often treated metaphorically as a physical entity which can move or be transferred, or measured, as when we say: *The light went out*, or *There is too much light here*. Light and dark can also be personified, and stand for Good and Evil. This ontological metaphor

makes it easy to understand the mapping onto Christ of a personified Light, like when He is treated as the Light in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, as in Jn, 1: 9 ("The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world")⁸.

II. 3. Submappings in GOD~HUMAN with experiential models of abstract, non-emergent concepts, as source domains.

This, admittedly heterogeneous, group of submappings includes human abstract notions themselves metaphorically and metonymically understood, which are mapped, as source domains, onto the target domain of the divine. This is only a representative subset of all the abstract notions that are used to talk about God, assembled on the basis of their occurrence in scriptural and theological texts about the Holy Trinity. Given their large number, I will give a few examples of each and will only offer a brief comment on the most relevant cases.

II.3.1 Abstract notions in general (viewed as physical entities of some kind)

Abstract notions are commonly conceptualised as physical entities, and this is reflected in everyday language (Johnson 1987, Lakoff and Johnson, Knvecses 1990). Grace and truth, for example are conceptualised as physical entities of which the Father's only Son is "full" (Jn 1: 14) and which we have all received "from his fullness" (Jn 1: 16)⁹. A special subtype of this ontological metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) is when it is at the same time a personification metaphor, for example, when we say that "I was guided by love". This ability to personify abstract notions is carried over to the discussion of, for example, God's attributes: in the Old Testament (henceforth, O.T.) we find in later writings a consistent personification of God's wisdom, which is said to share God's throne, and be omniscient (Gerard 1995: 1287).

An abstract notion like that of love is used by St John to give us the most fundamental insight about God's nature: God is love (Jn 4: 8,16).

II.3.2 Existence

This notion is often metaphorically understood as a location in space (Lakoff 1990, 1993). Therefore, the existential interpretation of *he* in Jn 1: 1 ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God ..."), or in the Council of Florence's formulation, "The Holy Spirit is eternally from Father and son ..." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, henceforth, C.C.), maps our metaphorically understood notion of existence onto the notion of God's existence.

II.3.3 Being

The same and other passages are more appropriately interpreted theologically as referring not only to existence but also, and more appropriately, to 'being' in the purely ontological sense. This ontological notion of being, which was borrowed into early Christian theology from contemporary Greek philosophy (see Kelly, Ch. 1) is probably an abstraction metaphorically

derived from the notion of spatiotemporal existence, which constitutes its experiential grounding. This human philosophical notion is predicated of God.

II.3.4 Essence and substance

We saw above how truth and grace are conceptualised as physical substances. But there is an abstract sense of the term, denoting something like 'essential component'. This philosophical notion, which was incorporated into Christian theology from Greek philosophy, is probably a metaphorical projection from the experiential notion of a mass object. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) talk about the metaphor **ESSENCE IS MATERIAL SUBSTANCE** as underlying Aristotle's notion of essence. The metaphorical understanding of the notions is present in the Nicene Creed: "true God from true God, begotten, not made, *of* one Being with the Father", where *of*, which has a partitive value, evokes the idea of a material component. It is also present in theological discussions of the trinitarian dogma that talk about the *consubstantiality* of the three divine Persons (C.C. 57-59).

II.3.5 Time

Time is to a large extent conceived of as space (Lakoff 1990, 1993). This metaphorical notion of time is projected onto the notion of time as applied to God. For instance, eternity is conceived of as 'boundless time': The N.C. says that Jesus is "eternally begotten of the Father" (C.C., 47).

II.3.6 Events, action and causation

Divine-related events, divine action, and divine causation, are understood in terms of human-related events, action and causation. And human-related events, action and causation are in large part understood metaphorically via a series of mappings from the spatial domains of movement and forces, which make up a coherent pattern called by Lakoff (1990, 1993) the event structure metaphor. This metaphor conceptualises causes as forces, changes as movements, and actions as self-propelled movements. It is clearly at work in expressions like "through Him (Christ) all things were made" (N.C.), or "[...] the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without blemish to God" (Hebrews 9: 14). They are consistent with this metaphorical understanding of action, in which means or instruments (even if they have a personal character) are metaphorically understood as paths to a purpose (which is regarded as a location).

If divine action is understood via this metaphor, so is causation, but in a special elaboration of it: causation is progeneration (Turner 1987). This is obvious in biblical passages telling us that God is the father of all creatures, and it explains in part why a family role like that of father is mapped onto God.

Causation is also frequently understood as a spatial source: "True God *from* true God" and, "[...] the Holy Spirit [...], who proceeds *from* the father and the Son" (N.C.). Also when the 6th Council of Toledo (638 A.D.) declared that the Father is "the source and origin of the whole divinity" (C.C., page 58).

One of the special cases (what Lakoff 1993 calls 'a dual') of the event structure metaphor regards events and actions as physical entities which can be acquired (as in I gave *my* son a *hug*, or Take *my* word)¹⁰. In any case, the 'objectification' of events and actions, and of many abstract notions, is a common metaphor in many languages (just consider eventive nouns like dance, destruction, or *fall*), which occurs independently from, but which is consistent with, the event structure metaphor. It is not uncommon for some of these objectified events to be personified (cf. expressions like *I* saw the face of Death, or artistic conventions like that of representing victory as a woman). This tendency explains why God's word (his linguistic action) is often personified in the O.T., a personification which paves the way for the later understanding of the real personal character of the Word in the Holy Trinity (see Gerard: 1471), as revealed in the New Testament (henceforth N.T.).

II.3.7 Life

This is a concept that is partly understood by means of a number of metaphors, among them LIFE~JOURNEY (Lakoff and Turner 1989). The concept of 'living being' is an emergent concept, but the abstract notion of life is, at least in part, metaphorical. This human metaphorical notion of life is itself mapped onto the infinitely more mysterious notion of God's life, as in Jn 1: 3-4: "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people". A usual metaphor for life is LIFE~LIGHT. The preceding passage makes use of this metaphor to tell us something about God's life (and about life in general). Our human concept of life is also mapped onto the new (spiritual) life received through Baptism: "Baptism gives us the grace of new birth in God the father" (1 Corinthians 12: 3).

II.3.8 Grace

The theological notion of grace derives from the human notion of grace as gratuitous help or favour, special benefit. This human notion is metaphorically understood as an object, usually a mass object, which can be given, as is shown by the preceding quotation. See the earlier note about Greg Johnson's study of grace.

Similar remarks could be made about other metaphorically understood human abstract concepts which are often used to talk about God or some aspect of Him, like knowledge and understanding, mind, similarity, plans and purposes, etc.

11.4. Submappings in GOD–HUMAN with experiential folk models of the human person as source domains: personhood, emotions, bodily life

This is a special group of submappings which could in part have been included in the preceding group, since notions of personhood are abstract notions. Both folk and philosophical notions of personhood ultimately depend on some basic metaphors. The fundamental metaphor is PERSON–CONTAINER, whereby persons are understood as bare containers for their mental and

emotional life. This metaphorical understanding of personhood is projected onto the understanding of the divine Persons. There are numerous examples of this. St John, referring to Jesus, says: "From his *fullness* we have all received, grace upon grace" (Jn 1: 16). He later reports Jesus as saying : "The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells *in* me does his works. Believe me that I am *in* the Father and the Father is *in* me" (Jn:14: 10-12). See also Jn:16. The C.C (p. 60) says: "We do not confess three Gods, but one God *in* three persons". So the divine 'substance' (as Christian theology has used this term since Patristic times) is all of it in three different metaphorical containers.

The metaphor HEART—LOCUS OF EMOTIONS is closely allied to PERSON—CONTAINER. When we say that someone is close to our heart, we are conceptualising emotions as being located in a container (which is also inside the person-container). *Emotional categories* are an important part of models of personhood. This metaphorical location of emotions is also used by St John: "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (Jn 1: 18).

Other non-physical attributes of personhood such as volition, or mental life are also frequently mapped onto God. But even bodily attributes of the person are mapped onto God, as when we are told that God's hand is in everything, or that He can *see* everything, etc.

II.5. Submappings in GOD~HUMAN with experiential folk models of human interpersonal relationships (especially family relationships) as source domains

II.5.1 Power, authority and status

These closely intertwined notions are often understood in terms of spatial metaphors, typically with verticality and size as source domains, and their metaphorical understanding is mapped onto the divine. When Jesus says "[...] the Father is *greater* than me [...]. I will no longer talk much with you, for the *ruler* of this world is coming. He has no power *over* me; but I do as the Father has *commanded* me" (Jn 14: 28-31), the basically metaphorical concepts of power, status and authority, which can, of course, be expressed by means of synchronically non-metaphorical expressions like *command* or *power*, are mapped onto the realm of the divine. Notice that Christ, "true God from true God", "came *down from Heaven*", and the Father spoke *from heaven* in Christ's baptism and transfiguration (Mt 3: 17; 17: 5). On the other hand, Christ, after his resurrection, is "seated *at the right hand of the Father*" (N.C.). This last quotation is a metaphorically and metonymically complex anthropomorphic image of power and status, which is mapped onto the divine".

Human notions in the domain of power and status, like that of 'Lord', 'King', or 'Glory' are also very frequently mapped onto the divine, as is well known, both in Scripture and in theological writing.

II.5.2. Family relationships

The human notion of family is projected onto the notion of the Holy Trinity. The human notion

of fatherhood is a source domain to gain some understanding about the nature of the First Person of the Holy Trinity, and about His relationship to the Second Person. The notion of sonship is a source domain to grasp an essential truth about the nature of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity and His relationship to the First Person. Part of what we know about human fatherhood and sonship can thus be analogically applied to God the Father and God the Son and to their relationship: progeneration of son by father, and sharing of son in father's nature (as when we say, "my father died, but he still lives in me"), mutual love, obedience of son to father, etc. There are multiple N.T. passages where this parent-son relationship is revealed. Some of the most significant of them are Jesus' Baptism ("A voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son. the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'" (Mt 3: 17)); His Transfiguration (Mt 17: 5); Peter's confession (Mt 16: 17); and Jesus' formal statement of His divine Sonship before the high priests (Lk 22: 70).

The notion of fatherhood is also used to refer to the relationship between God and his other creatures. The metaphor highlights here the fact "that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority: and that he is at the same time goodness and loving care for all his children" (C.C., 57).

The notion of motherhood can also be mapped onto God, as in Is 66: 13 ("As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you"), to emphasise "God's immanence, the intimacy between Creator and creature" (C.C., 57). Some feminist theologies, like Sally McFague's (McFague 1986), have proposed to replace the GOD~FATHER metaphor by the GOD~MOTHER one, as more appealing and beneficial to our modern world. But, despite the many advantages of her proposal, I believe there is no need to eliminate more traditional metaphorical models of God. It may simply be sufficient to emphasise the projection of maternal concepts onto God, and add them to our stock of theological metaphors. No single metaphor will ever account for God's incommensurability; it may even be dangerous to concentrate on a single image, or just a few of them (Van Noppen, 1996). But I agree with McFague on her claim that we constantly need to find new ways to conceptualise God in an ever changing society.

The concepts of husband or bridegroom have also been applied to God by various O.T. texts (see C.C., 84, section 370).

II.5.3 Human love (as an interpersonal relationship)

We are here concerned with the mapping of the interpersonal aspect of the human notion of love, rather than of its intrapersonal, emotional aspect, onto the interaction among the divine persons and onto the interaction of God with His creatures. We are told in numerous biblical passages and by numerous ecclesiastical documents and writers that the Father and the Son love each other and the Holy Spirit, who equally loves them, and that God loves us and all His other creatures. We are also told that God *is* love in the first letter of St John (4: 8, 16). "By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love" (C.C.: 54). Our notion of God's love can only be

(poorly) comprehended in an analogical way from our experience of human love. And so the Bible gives numerous examples in which the Lord's love for Israel is compared to a father's love for his son, to the bridegroom's for his beloved, to a mother's for her children, to a husband's for his wife (C.C.: 53).

II.5.4 Language and communication

Whenever we are told that God 'in general' and any one of the Divine Persons spoke, we are assuming a human model of communication as a source domain mapped onto God. The N.C. says that the Holy Spirit "hath spoken through the Prophets", and Jesus said to the Apostles that the Spirit of truth "will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (Jn 16: 13); the Father spoke during the Baptism of Christ and His Transfiguration, God spoke to Moses, God speaks to each of us...

Even when Christian theology tries to elucidate the real nature of God's communicative activity, it has to resort to human categories of communication like those of 'word' and 'utterance', as source domains used to talk about the transcendental Word and Utterance: "Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in which he expresses himself completely" (C.C., p. 29).

II.5.6 Groups of individuals

Groups of people, like groups of entities in general, are often metaphorically conceptualised as containers. This partly metaphorical human notion of groups of people is transferred to the Holy Trinity, who is also regarded as a container: "O my God. Trinity whom I adore, help me forget myself entirely so as to establish myself *in* you" (Prayer of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity. C.C.: 62).

II.5.7 Social roles

We have already commented above how God, especially the Father and Jesus Christ, is understood as King, and as Lord, entitled to receive glory. But other humanly created social roles are mapped onto some of the divine Persons. The Holy Spirit is often called 'Paraclete', a Greek term which was translated into Latin as 'Advocate' ('Ad-vocatus'), that is, the one whom one calls to one's side. This expression has normally been (metonymically) translated into modern languages as 'Consoler' (C.C.: 160). Christ and the Holy Spirit are often called 'Teachers': in Catechesis it is Christ that teaches through the lips of the Catechist (C.C.: 95). And it is the Holy Spirit that teaches us to pray (C.C.: 564). The Holy Spirit is the "principal author" of Holy Scripture (C.C.: 72). He is also an envoy, as we know when Jesus Christ promises to send him.

11.6. Submappings used to illustrate the dogma

Of the submappings in the root metaphor under study, some of the most relevant ones in the

structure of the dogma are the personification of God's linguistic action as His Word, the personification of Christ as the Light, the mapping of the parent-child relationship onto God, and the mapping onto Him of the notion of spatial movement. These submetaphors have been used to illustrate the dogma, especially at the time when it was being formed (see Kelly 1968: chapters 4, 5, 9 and 10).

The following section is an attempt at showing how some of these submetaphors can be used to illustrate the mysterious coherence of the dogma.

III. METAPHORICO-METONYMIC COHERENCE IN THE DOGMA

The preceding survey of human source domains and divine target domains contains just a small subset of the many submappings in GOD~HUMAN that underlie some of the key biblical passages where the trinitarian mystery is revealed, and the formulation and discussion of the dogma. The purpose of the survey was to show the enormous richness of this root metaphor, but no attempt was made to discuss the way in which these submappings can be used to illustrate at a purely figurative level our (very limited) understanding of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. This is the purpose of the following section. Of course, the mystery is and will always remain a mystery, but revelation and theological reflection over it have at least given it some degree of figurative coherence, which has been arrived at on the basis of those submappings, and which might constitute a figurative illustration of the mysterious coherence of this dogma, the mystery of God's pluralistic simplicity. In any case, it should be stressed that what is presented below are just a number of suggestions to illustrate analogically, in an imaginative way, the Christian belief that though apparently contradictory, the propositions in the dogma have to be compatible, because they are based on what God revealed to us about Himself. However, the proposals below are based on some of the theographic metaphors studied so far, which are themselves just mere imaginative attempts at coming to terms with a Reality that ultimately surpasses us. Therefore they do not constitute an explanation of the dogma, which would certainly be a pointless task. They are just some of the possible ways of exploiting some of the most frequently used submetaphors in the formulation of the dogma, namely, those listed in II.6 above. As we shall see presently, the apparent figurative coherence of these various submappings with the dogma and with each other, can be achieved principally by proposing a series of metonymies (III.1 below). The attempts at illustrating the dogma by means of these metaphors without recourse to the metonymies are shown in III.2. to be less fruitful.

III. 1. Metonymies

In my view, the submetaphors in II.6 can be made more coherent with the dogma and with each other by applying to them several specific instantiations of the part-for-part general metonymic type studied by Radden and Kovecses (in press). These linguists propose two general types of

conceptual relationships: a) the relationship between a whole ICM¹² or part of it; b) the relationship between two parts of an ICM. These relationships can give rise to three general types of metonymies: a part of an ICM for the whole of it, the whole of an ICM for a part of it, and a part of an ICM for another part of the same ICM. These general types of metonymies can be instantiated in several specific subtypes. For instance, the part for whole type can be instantiated by metonymies where a part of a thing stands for the whole thing, by member-for-category metonymies, etc.; the whole for part type is instantiated by metonymies where the whole of a thing stands for a part of it, by metonymies where the whole event stands for a part of the event, etc.; the part for part type is instantiated by agent for action and by action for agent metonymies, by instrument for action metonymies, etc. Radden & Kovecses offer numerous examples of each kind.

It is not easy to decide exactly which of the specific instantiations proposed by Radden and Kovecses the relationships below fit into, but to me it is obvious that these are cases that respond to their general metonymic relationship 'part-and-part' and to the general metonymic type 'part for part'. The metonymy-generating relationships in question are:

- The relationship between God and His word, his linguistic action.
- The relationship between a light and its radiance.
- The relationship between a parent and her/his offspring.
- The relationship between the initial or the final point of a path and the mover along this path.

Let us explicate our proposals.

God utters His word and then His word can stand for Him. There exists a specific metonymic relationship between action and agent, whereby one can stand for the other. We are concerned here with the case in which the action (the word) would stand for the agent (God). We have numerous conventional examples in many languages of this specific action-for-agent metonymy. Just think of deverbal nouns denoting agents which have as their lexical morpheme a verb denoting an action: *writer*, *speaker*. We can also often use referring expressions where the agent is identified by his action: *The man that helped you has come* (to refer to someone whose foremost characteristic in your personal experience of him was the help he provided to you). In an extreme figurative mapping, at once metaphorical and metonymic, we often simply nominalise the action, without any agentive inflectional morpheme, and use the nominalisation to refer to the agent typically characterised, in a given context where background knowledge is shared by speaker and listener, by that action: *Your help came* (meaning, in a metonymic abbreviation, 'the person that helped you'). Note that the action refers to the whole of the agent, not just to an aspect of it, although the agent is experientially known and mentally accessible only or principally from the perspective of his specific action.

Similarly, God's word can stand in our minds for the whole of God himself. This

metonymic substitution of the action for the whole of the agent might provide a metonymic bridge between the oneness of God and the fact that both the First and the Second Person are wholly God.

There is also a metonymic relationship between causes and effects. We are interested here in what in fact appears to be the more common metonymic kind arising in this relationship: effect for cause (see Radden and Kovecses, *ibid*). The relationship between a light-cause and the light that it brings about is an instance of the cause and effect relationship. The cases in which the light stands for its source is an instance of the effect for cause metonymic kind. Just think of the frequent use in English of the noun *light* to denote a match, which is a light-source, or when we ask a friend to bring some 'lights' (referring to some torches) to an evening party on the beach. or when we say *Turn on/off the light* (what is actually turned on or off is the electric power which brings about light). Similarly, if God is the cause of all Light (He is Light himself) and gives off Light, His light can metonymically stand for the whole of God Himself.

It is not clear in which type of metonymic relationship of those proposed by Radden and Kovecses the relationship between a parent and his/her offspring should be included. But the fact is that the offspring are often conceptualised from the perspective of their parents, typically from the perspective of their father, and especially by those that do not have yet any direct personal acquaintance with the children. The very conventions of naming normally use the father's name (the family name or last name) as the distinctive name for the children. We normally refer to someone whose name we do not know, or whose father is for some reason a particularly relevant piece of information to highlight, as *the son of...* And very often, too, we colloquially substitute the father (or the mother) fully for the child as a way of referring to the child. We may say *Here comes Archie* to refer to Archie's son. even though he has a different forename. So it is with the Second Person. He came to be known as the *Son of God*. The concept 'God' is a distinguishing attribute in the expression, and it overshadows the concept 'son'. Therefore the whole of God metonymically stands for 'Son of God', and the Son is thus called 'God'.

There is finally a metonymic connection between the initial and the final point in a path and the mover along this path. Expressions like *The London train* can refer to the train bound for or coming from London. We are concerned here with the metonymy in which the initial point in the path stands for the mover along the path. Among other cases of this metonymy we can cite the numerous examples in which we foreground the origin of a mover, as when we say *The student that came from Durhmn*, to refer to a student whose name we do not know, but whose provenance we do know. An extreme case would be the colloquial cases in which a locative expression is used with personal reference, somewhat like a personal name: *Reading is sitting over there*, referring to someone that comes from Reading. Similarly if the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, both of whom are God, He proceeds from God. And God, the initial point of His path can wholly stand metonymically for him.

In fact, in the realm of the divine, these four metonymies could be regarded as special cases of the container-and-contained metonymic relationship, which, in Radden and Kovecses's

view, can also yield two types of part for part metonymies: contained for container (as in their example *The milk ripped over* for the 'The milk container tipped over'), or container for contained (as in *John ate the whole box* (of chocolates)). As we have seen, the metaphorical conception of people as containers is also mapped onto the Divine Persons. The Father is regarded as a container for His Word, His Light, His Son, and His Spirit. The Word and the Light that, being contained in the Father, come out of Him, can stand for Him. The Father is God. So His Word and His Light can stand for God; that is, God, the Container, can be mentally accessed and identified via His Word and His Light, the Contained. In fact, the Word and the Light become in this way a name for the whole of God, just as *your help* became a name for someone characterised by helping you, or just as *lighr* (radiance) becomes a name for a light-source. These metonymies become so entrenched that they create a conceptual network in which *Word* or *Lighr* can be identified as, in fact equated with, God: the whole of God is His Word and the whole of God is His Light. And yet, if we move out of the metonymy, the Father is still different from His Word and His Light, much as the speaker is different from his word or a light-cause from its radiance. This is what Sabellianism, an early heresy in the history of the Church, failed to realise (Kelly 1968: 123), when, in an attempt to preserve the oneness of God against possible polytheistic deviations, it asserted that it had been the Father that had become incarnate as Christ, and had died and resurrected.

The Word for God and the Light for God metonymies can thus also be regarded as contained-for-container metonymies. The other two metonymies proposed above can be regarded as instances of the container-for-contained metonymic pattern. The Father-Container can stand for His Son-Content. The Father is God. Therefore the Son-Content can be mentally accessed and identified via His Father-Container, who is the one God, and can thus be called, not Father, but the Father's name, which is that of 'the one God'. And as before, the metonymy creates a conceptual network that leads to the identification of Son and God: The Son is the whole of God. However, outside the metonymy, the Father is still different from the Son.

Finally it is quite frequent for a container to be the initial point of the path followed by a mover. In the case of the Second Person this initial point is the Father. In the case of the Holy Spirit, there are two initial points, because He proceeds from the Father and the Son, both of whom are one God, as we know from the preceding metonymies. Therefore the Initial Point-Containers, each of whom is the whole of God, can stand for the mover. The mover, the Holy Spirit, can be mentally accessed and identified via these initial points, and can thus be called, not the Father or the Son, but their name, which is 'the whole of God'. Again, the metonymy creates a conceptual world that leads to the equation between origin (God) and mover (the Spirit), just as *Reading* could be identified with someone from Reading. The Holy Spirit is the whole of God. But again, if the metonymy is not activated, the Holy Spirit remains clearly differentiated from both the Father and the Son.

111.2. Metaphorical coherence

The submappings selected in 1.6 can also be given some strictly metaphorical coherence with each other without necessarily taking recourse to the above metonymies by noting that the notion of *container* is claimed to operate in all of them. But the coherence of each of them with the dogma is less convincing without the metonymies.

The PERSON–CONTAINER metaphor is closely allied to a set of other metaphors that are also applied to the divine. Each of the Divine Persons is conceived of as a container, and God himself, the Divine Being, is also conceived of as a container. We gave earlier, when dealing with the mapping onto the divine of the human notion of person, some examples of the conceptualisation of the Father and the Second Person as containers. The following passage is an example of the same mapping onto the Holy Spirit (Jn 3: 6): "What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is *born of Spirit* is spirit". The Father has Grace, Truth and Life (which, as we saw above, are metaphorically physical substances) 'inside' Him, and offers them to us in Jesus. After Jesus' Rising they are given to us by the Holy Spirit, who, being wholly God, as we know from the metonymies, and consubstantial with the Father and the Son, also has grace, truth and life *in Him*.

The notions of uttering speech, of giving off light, of progeneration, of emotions (in this case, love), of moral attributes (grace, truth and 'true' life in this case), and of spatial origin are all closely connected. As we can see, to that of container. This is so because the utterer, the parent, the experiencer of an emotion or the bearer of an attribute, can be regarded as a container, with words, offspring, emotions and attributes as the content coming out of it. And the beginning of a path may be precisely the container from which the mover comes out. Thus these metaphorical conceptualisations, which, as we saw in section II, are frequently mapped onto God, are all consistent with the conceptualisation of the person as a container.

The sharing of the container image-schema (see Johnson 1987) by most of these concepts is one of the facts that might explain why Christian theology has been able to identify the Word with the Son and the Light (that comes from the Light-Source) as names for the Second Person, Jesus Christ, and why it has been able to recognise the role of the Father as the origin of the Trinity and of the Godhead.

In the case of linguistic action, the words are distinct from the utterer, and via conventional metaphor, they can be conceptualised as physical entities, even personified. This capacity for personifying actions and events allows us to understand the fact that the Word of God can be a Person. At the same time, thanks to the metonymic relationship between word and utterer discussed above, the Word can come to be conceptualised as wholly God, and the metaphysical substance that 'fills' the Word as a Person is the whole divine substance. The Word is thus a Person, distinct from the Father, and at the same time, wholly God, with the whole of the Godhead in Him. And since we know from Scripture that God is eternal, the Word is likewise eternal.

The N.C. says that Jesus Christ is "Light from Light". This noun phrase (itself based,

among other sources, on the use of the term *Light* in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel) has to be metaphorically grasped. The Light-Source is metaphorically understood as a container and/or as the point of origin of a path traversed by the Light-Radiance. This metaphorical understanding has always been exploited since the earliest times in Christian Theology (see Kelly 1968: Ch 3) to illustrate figuratively how the Second Person can be different from the First, and at the same time be exactly like it, that is, have the same divine substance. The radiance is different from the light, so the theological argument goes, but at the same time it is no less light than the light-source; similar arguments were derived from other images, like the one that contrasted the source and the river (both of which were fully water).

The N.C. says that our Lord Jesus Christ is "eternally begotten of the Father", but that He is "begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father". The notion of progeneration is perfectly consistent with that of container, as we said above, since, at least the mother is literally a container out of which the child comes into the world. Even fathers can be regarded metaphorically as containers "out of which" their offspring comes into the world, as when a father says that his child has been born *of* him. In any case, our source domain knowledge of human progeneration includes the specification that a parent hands down to his child his genetic heritage, so that it may be said that both share some of their 'essential' characteristics. This transmission of physical features is metaphorically mapped onto the communication of metaphysical 'features' by the Father to his Son, which is known as the consubstantiality between Father and Son: both are equally and totally God. This consubstantiality is the same that we have metonymically deduced for the Word. This may be one of the reasons why we know that the Word is another name for the Son.

But there is, among many others, one part of our knowledge of human progeneration that cannot be projected onto the divine generation of the Son. We find here a cancellation of the epistemic entailment of the parental metaphor, since begetting someone implies bringing that person into existence; however, we are told that the Son is also eternal. This part of the mapping is blocked by our knowledge of the relationship between these Persons. We know, from various biblical passages, especially from the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, that the Son and the Word had always been and existed, that they are eternal, like the Father. We also know this as a metaphorical entailment of the mapping of the notion of light onto the eternal Light: if the Light-Source is eternal, then its radiance is eternal, because the radiance is simultaneous with the light. And in any case we would know it from the metonymic inferences discussed above that identify the Son and the Word as God Himself, with all His attributes, eternity among them. Therefore this is one of the many cases that might be cited in which our metaphorical account of the mystery is at odds with what we know through Revelation about the Divine Persons. In terms of the cognitive theory of metaphor, we would say that one of the submappings in the mapping from the source domain of parenthood onto the target domain of the Holy Trinity is blocked by what we know about the inherent structure of the target. This blockage is predicted by the Invariance Hypothesis (Lakoff 1990, 1993). An alternative figurative way to illustrate (but by

no means explain!) how the eternal Father is Father (thus origin) and how at the same time the Son is eternal, consists of reasoning from the father-for-son metonymy suggested earlier: if the Son is metonymically equated with God, then He must also have all of God's attributes, including eternity.

The metaphorical understanding of the 'spiration', as some theological texts termed it, from the Father and the Son that generates the Holy Spirit depends on the mapping of the domains of persons, emotions and personal attributes onto the relationships among the Divine Persons. But these source domains are themselves metaphorical and are understood in terms of spatial movement, containers, and physical entities. Our Christian theology tells us that the Holy Spirit "proceeds eternally from both [i.e. from Father and Son] as from one principle and through one spiration" (Council of Florence, as quoted in C.C., p. 58)¹³. We are also told by the N.C. that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son", and is the mutual love of the Father and the Son. These sentences express fundamental truths about a mysterious reality beyond our grasp. The only way in which we can gain some (poor) understanding of these truths is by using our ability for conceptual projection. Therefore we understand that the Father and the Son, thanks to their mutual love, cause the Holy Spirit to be eternal. But how do we actually understand this 'causing to be'? The metaphorical expression in the Council of Florence gives us a clue. We map the domains of containers and spatial movement onto human persons, emotions and attributes, and these onto the Divine Persons. People are metaphorical containers for their attributes and emotions; these attributes and emotions are substances that can remain in the person-containers or come out of them.

In the mapping onto the Divine Persons of this metaphorical model of personhood, a further possible submapping from the logic of containers and substances is exploited. The substances in a container can be projected out of them and move towards the same point in space where they mix into a new substance. In the Council of Florence's formulation the source containers appear to be two people simultaneously exhaling a breath (spiration), these two breaths mixing together in space into a new breath. These source containers are mapped onto the Father and the Son, the source breaths onto their attributes and 'emotions' (Eternity, Love, Wisdom, Grace, i.e. their Divine Nature, which, as we know, is wholly in both Father and Son), and the resultant new breath onto the metaphysical substance of the Holy Spirit. Again, an important part of our knowledge of the source domain is prevented from mapping onto the Holy Trinity, since the breath exhaled by the two people would have to be exactly identical, and what is more, it would have to be the *same* breath: the Holy Spirit is wholly consubstantial with Father and Son. Furthermore, the two breaths and their conjunction would have to be eternal. Perhaps a better illustration of the relationship between the first two Person-Containers and the Spirit might be the one suggested by the origin-for-mover metonymy proposed earlier.

All of the preceding suggestions have sought to make the submappings of GOD~HUMAN listed in 11.6 somewhat more compatible at a figurative level with the propositions in the dogma, especially by means of the metonymies proposed. However, Gómez Caffarena (1966: 308)

makes another proposal. which does not require any additional metonymy. He draws on the submapping, already noted in section II, of a personified notion of love ('Love') onto God. If God is Love, as St John says, then it seems 'reasonable' to think that He in His immense, eternal Solitude is not entirely alone, but that He has a sort of intimate, interpersonal Life, where Love can operate. Then God has used our own family concepts of 'father', 'son' to reveal something of His intimate Life to us. This proposal, again, is not an explanation, and it is not intended as such, but it is really attractive for today's man: it brings God closer to us, helping us feel comfort, rather than awe in His presence.

IV. CONCLUSION: FIGURATIVE VS. LOGICAL-REFERENTIAL COHERENCE AND THE HUMAN-GOD METAPHOR

The language of faith draws on human experience. This is what we have seen so far in this essay. We have surveyed a representative subset of the human-sized concepts, many of them metaphorical, that are projected onto the realm of the divine in an effort to grasp some important truths about God, or at least their essential aspects. This grounding on human experience and human cognitive structures has also been the 'strategy' of Revelation since the earliest times, even if at the same time it made us conscious of the unbridgeable gap cognitively separating us from God.

We have seen that the metonymies and metaphors that can principally, and only partially, illustrate the dogma of the Holy Trinity are relatively consistent with each other, and that they allow us to perform some inferences, especially metonymic inferences, that might reconcile, on a figurative plane, propositions that are incompatible on the logical-referential level. The remarkable thing about this figurative bridging of logical incompatibilities is that we carry it out every day, unconsciously, and effortlessly, given the pervasiveness of metaphorical and metonymic categorisation and reasoning, as Lakoff, Johnson, Kovecses and many other linguists have demonstrated. Science, on the other hand, also uses these imaginative resources to gain new insights for which it still lacks precise concepts and language, as Mac Cormac (1976, 1985) and Soskice (1985)¹⁴ have shown. Therefore religious language is by no means alone in needing to use figurative language and in its frequent use of metaphorical and metonymic reasoning.

But religious language, even more than ordinary or scientific language, is *inherently* metaphorical and/or metonymic, and it is normally *doubly* figurative. The reason for claiming that religious language is inherently metaphorical is that the mere fact of talking about God by using human language and categories, constitutes in itself a conceptual mapping of our cognitive structure onto the divine. We often express in our everyday life concepts that are comprehended nonmetaphorically, in their own terms. In Lakoff's or in Johnson's view, these are basic bodily-based preconceptual 'image-schemas' ('verticality', 'movement', 'part', 'whole', 'centre', 'periphery', etc.), and other experientially 'emergent' ones; and we use them both in ordinary and in scientific or poetic language. But whenever we use even these nonmetaphorical concepts

to talk about God, we are carrying out a metaphorical mapping of a human cognitive domain onto God, the Wholly Other. We cannot comprehend God in His own terms, because He is not apprehensible by our mind; we can only know about Him what He has revealed, and elaborate on this Revelation. But our manner of accessing this knowledge is inevitably metaphorical and/or metonymic (Soskice 1985: 96), i.e., by projecting our human categories onto Him.

The reason for the statement that religious language is doubly metaphorical is that a large part of our concepts, even some fundamental ones like person, cause, or time (Lakoff 1990, 1993) are themselves understood at least in part metaphorically or metonymically, so that when religious discourse (inevitably) maps human concepts onto the domain of the divine, it often maps onto it the mappings by means of which the human source concept is understood. Even when common human terms are used in Revelation in unprecedented senses (Van Noppen 1996), these new senses are grasped thanks to the mediation of established metaphorical correspondences, like the new sense in the N.T. of *word* (the Word), whose comprehension was doubtless facilitated, as we claimed earlier, by the human ability to personify actions.

It is important to point out, however, that this does not mean that man is in any way a model for God. Quite the opposite. There are numerous aspects of human experience that simply are incompatible with what we know about God. For example, when we are told that God is 'Father' we apply our human experience of fathers, but not all of it can be applied, because our experience of them "also tells us that human parents are fallible and can disfigure the face of fatherhood and motherhood" (C.C., 57). This part of the mapping would be blocked by the Invariance Constraint. It was claimed earlier that this constraint also accounted for the limitations of the fatherhood metaphor as an illustration of the relationship between the First and the Second Persons, in that 'begetting' could not presuppose 'bringing into existence' in the generation of the Son by the Father.

The fact that we can only glimpse what God is by using imaginative cognitive mechanisms does not mean that either Revelation or Dogma are not true, or that they are only true in a figurative sense. Anything we say about God is a mapping of our cognitive categories onto God, even if that statement is a dogmatic statement, or even if it is contained in Revelation, which has been cast in human concepts and language. However, for Christian believers, these statements, no matter their ultimate metaphoricity, are literally true. Our *comprehension* of those truths is largely metaphorical and metonymic, but the truths are such, independently from the way we can mentally access them. Of course, owing precisely to the ontological chasm separating us from God, our comprehension of those truths will always be imperfect.

There is an old discussion on the truth-value of metaphorical statements, a discussion which cannot simply be conducted in purely logical-positivist terms, as Soskice has stressed (Soskice 1985: Ch 6 and 7 and p. 148). Their truth-value may be assessed in a way relative to the specific context of utterance and the background knowledge and goals of speakers and listeners (Soskice 1985: 5ff, Mac Cormac 1976: vii, 48), not on objectivist terms (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 170-185). In any case, there are at least three warrants for the truth of statements

about God.

The first of these is what I called earlier the HUMAN–GOD metaphor. This metaphor has a biblical basis. The Bible tells us that man was created in the image of God (Genesis, 1:27). In this metaphor, what is known about God, no matter how imperfectly, can be mapped onto man, except for what is not compatible with our experiential knowledge of men (for example, we are not purely spiritual, eternal, almighty, or free from sin). The metaphor predicts then that man's cognitive capacity, including our ability to find commonality in disparate concepts, that is, our metaphorical and metonymic ability, must reflect in a very limited way some aspect of God's nature. Therefore, metaphorically- or metonymically-based statements about God made in dogmatics or in theology on the basis of Revelation, have in principle the potentiality to provide true insights about God's nature, even though these insights will at best be a mere glimpse of it.

The HUMAN–GOD metaphor implies much more: if man is not a possible model for God, God is really a model for man. In a mysterious way, the model of notions like progeneration, family, love, life, light, etc. is ultimately the Father's parenthood, the community of Life in the Holy Trinity, Their Love, Their Life, Their Light. Thus, we can understand metaphorically (GOD–HUMAN) and very imperfectly what it is for the Father to eternally beget the Son, but we can be certain that this eternal divine progeneration is the origin and standard of human progeneration (C.C., 57). Therefore, there has to be some mysteriously profound truth to a statement that regards God as a father, as a mother, or as a loving husband.

These images have a biblical basis. But we could suggest others that would also have the potential of providing true insights. We may want to conceptualise God as the deepest layer of our being, as in Robinson's famous metaphor (Robinson 1963), and so doubtless say something potentially true about God.

We have an ontological connection with God, which we can only account for in a figurative way, by saying that He is our model (a model whose features we can just perceive hazily) and we His image. That is why I speak of the HUMAN–GOD metaphor. As images, we can safely assume that our features somehow, though very imperfectly, correspond to those of our model, and in this way form in our mind a very imperfect, yet approximate, image of our model. This is why I speak of the HUMAN-GOD root metaphor as a warrant for the GOD–HUMAN root metaphor.

The second warrant, the most important of the three for a believer, is the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who will guide the Church in its pursuit of truth and the statements about God's nature proposed by each believer.

In principle the HUMAN–GOD metaphor and the inspiration of the Spirit are supposed to lend plausibility to statements about God. However, these statements, inevitably metaphorical, also have to be confronted with what is known about God through the rest of Revelation and dogmatics, and they have to be consistent with it and with the knowledge gained from other metaphors and metonymies firmly established in the theological teachings of the Church. This is the third warrant for the truth of a theological statement, which constitutes a filter against

erroneous theories that may seek to describe God in terms that contradict what God has actually revealed about Himself in Scripture or in dogmatics. An example was Arius' heresy, which misunderstood the traditional interpretation of the progeneration metaphor and sought to map the complete human notion of fatherhood onto the generation of the Son by the Father, with the result that he claimed that the Son had had a beginning and thus was not eternal, and ultimately not divine either (Kelly 1968: 227-231).

Whenever a proposition is made about the Divine, a traditional theological attitude should also be observed. It is implicit in my claim that any theological proposition about God is always to some degree metaphorical because God's infiniteness cannot really be modelled by our mental categories and by our experience. This theological attitude is the *apophatic* stance. No matter how sophisticated a theological theory is, it will always fail to fully explain God, to really be able to say what God is. An important difference between scientific and theographic metaphors is, incidentally, that scientific metaphors can eventually be proved or disproved to provide real insights into the object of inquiry, whereas theographic metaphors always have to be formulated apophatically. Cognitive semantics, which has emphasised the metaphorical nature of a very large part of human conceptual networks, including scientific ones, provides a compatible linguistic methodology for apophatic theology (Boeve and Feysaerts 1996).

NOTES

¹ According to Gómez Caffarena (1966: 307), medieval theologians, though fully conscious of the impossibility to explain the mystery in logical terms, tried nonetheless to show that the coexistence of the three Realities, or Persons, of God, in one inseparable Being was not completely contradictory, if they are regarded as three Relative Realities subsisting in the perfect unity of God's Absolute Reality, and following a certain order of 'procession', but not a temporal one. St Augustine's earlier treatise is closer to the New Testament, as it is based on St John's use of the term *Word (Logos, Verbum)* to refer to the Second Person, who has thus, as Augustine suggests, an intellectual origin in the Father, whereas *Spirit (Pneuma, Spiritus)* is often used in the New Testament in connection with love. A unitary Reality can only be differentiated internally on account of the two main spiritual activities, namely, understanding and loving. Thus the Son, according to Augustine, proceeds intellectually from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son through love and intellect. Augustine's doctrine has been accepted by the Church, but not dogmatically. However, all of these speculations are bound to fail, and they are also metaphorical, because they map human concepts like 'love', 'reality', etc. onto the divine. It may be more interesting, rather than trying to explain the mystery, to bring it closer to us by exploiting the time-honoured metaphors that have been used to illustrate some of its aspects, or by suggesting new ones, provided they are not used to make claims incompatible with the Church's dogmatic tradition.

But the extent of this pervasiveness depends on the particular conception of metaphor one adheres to. In Lakoff and Johnson's view, and in the present writer's, even some cases of conventionalised metaphors would be regarded as metaphors, and not as literal language. For a discussion of this issue, see Mac Cormac 1985: 57-71, and Traugott 1985: 17-57.

³ One may disagree, even as a Roman Catholic, with **some** of the positions defended by the Catechism on certain moral issues, but as far as the main dogmas of our faith are concerned, the Catechism simply repeats the traditional doctrine of the Church, which every Roman Catholic is supposed to share and accept **freely**.

⁴ Mac Cormac says that root metaphors lead to myths, but in my view they can be part of Revelation. Revealed truths may sometimes be mediated by myths (as in **some** Old Testament narratives), and certainly revealed in metaphorical language and cognitively accessed by means of metaphorical **projection** (see part 4 below). But the truths themselves, are by no means 'mythical', if by this term we mean 'fictional'.

⁵ The fact that this projection from God is part of our faith **does** not make it any less a metaphor, since by means of it a domain is **partially** understood in terms of another domain. We **will** discuss at the end of the essay the subject of the truth of these mappings.

⁶ THE GREAT CHAIN METAPHOR, as proposed by Lakoff and Turner (chapter 4) **basically** consists in a very abstract metaphor, the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor, whose mappings are guided or motivated by two entrenched cultural **models**, namely, THE BASIC CHAIN OF BEING and THE TAKE OF THINGS (which are themselves combined into 'the Extended Great Chain'), and by the pragmatic maxim of quantity. There is no space here for a detailed exposition of each of these ingredients, but THE GREAT CHAIN METAPHOR **explains** a large number of mappings in which **lower** order forms of being and their attributes can be mapped to higher forms of being and their attributes, and viceversa: people as animals, animals as people, things as people, natural phenomena as animals; it **also** explains the mappings that cannot occur.

⁷ The English version of the Nicene Creed is the one reproduced in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 47-48.

⁸ I owe to one of my anonymous reviewers a plausible **source** for this use of *light* by St John: LIGHT is a conventional metaphor for THE GOOD. This property (and thus its metaphoric counterpart LIGHT) metonymically stands for the person that carries the property: GOD/JESUS. In my view, perhaps even the GOOD AS LIGHT metaphor is metonymically based, since there is a conventional association between light and positive evaluation in most cultures.

⁹ Greg Johnson's contribution to the L.A.U.D. Symposium on metaphor and religion (Johnson, Greg 1996), elucidates the Christian concept of grace as the gift of God's **presence**. As a **gift**, grace is then metaphorically conceptualised as a physical entity which can be given. G. Johnson presents grace as conceptualised via the 'moral accounting metaphor' studied by Mark Johnson (1993), which maps the exchange of goods onto moral interaction. G. Johnson's study thus lends support to my claim that grace is, **like** so many other abstract notions, metaphorically understood as a physical entity.

¹⁰ An anonymous reviewer of this essay suggested that it is more accurate to say that events and actions are often treated metaphorically in these expressions as the handling of objects, rather than as objects acquired. **Unfortunately**, s/he did not adduce any examples that justified that claim. In any case, Lakoff's view seems to be quite consistent with the **often** observed fact that action verbs are **often** replaced by periphrases consisting of verbs such as *have*, take, *give*, receive, and an eventive **noun**: *have a walk*, take *a blow*, etc., in English and other languages.

¹¹ The experiential basis of this image is metonymic: people that **regularly** appear physically **close** to powerful people usually derive from them a measure of power and status; therefore, **closeness** to powerful people stands for power. On the other hand, the right hand has had since **biblical** times an association with positive evaluation; the basis for this symbolism is probably **also** metonymic, since the right hand is the more useful and thus **valuable hand**. On the basis of **all** of these metonymies, the rich gestalt image of being seated (by implication, on a throne or on a prominent seat) at the right hand of a powerful person, becomes a conventional metaphor for the concepts of being

in favour with a powerful person and sharing in his power.

¹² ICM stands for 'Idealised Cognitive Model' in Lakoff's terminology (1987). We have ICMs for countless events, situations and abstract constructs: ICMs for travelling, for apologising, for emotions and categories, etc.

¹³ The statement that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son (filioque)* did not appear in the Creed confessed in 381 at Constantinople. It means that there is an ontological, not temporal, 'order of procession' according to which the Father first communicates His substance with the Son, and then, the Spirit proceeds from both. It was dogmatically confessed by Pope St Leo I and gradually introduced into the N.C. by Latin liturgy between the 8th and the 11th centuries. This is even today a point of disagreement with the Orthodox Churches, who claim, as the Eastern Christian tradition had always done, that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father through the Son. As Gómez Caffarena states (1966: 307) this disagreement appears today as a terminological rather than as a serious theological dispute, perhaps owing to a different elaboration of the same metaphor. Both accounts should be regarded as complementary (C.C. 59).

¹⁴ It must be pointed out that neither Soskice nor Mac Cormac, nor Van Noppen, also quoted in this essay, subscribe to Lakoff and Johnson's theory of metaphor: however their accounts of scientific and religious metaphor are very illuminating.

ABBREVIATIONS

C.C.	Catechism of the Catholic Church	Mt	Matthew
Ji	John	N.C.	Niceian Creed
Lk	Luke	N.T.	New Testament
Mk	Mark	O.T.	Old Testament

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