

Analogy and Metaphor

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by Brian Wicker

One very obvious feature of the current theological scene is a divorce between—in Pascal's celebrated distinction—the God of the Philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That is to say, the people most interested in religion, mostly members of the 'counter-culture', are generally hostile to the intellectual exploration of religion and religious language. Their religion centres on 'love and consolation', to use Pascal's phrase, not upon rational argument or analysis. Another way of putting this is to say that the God of Religion is naturally spoken of in *metaphorical* language, while the God of the Philosophers can only be spoken of in *analogical* language. I am concerned to argue that, despite the anti-intellectualism of the 'counter-culture', it is still necessary to have a philosophical foundation for religion, and that this involves accepting the validity of analogical language, even if the most significant religious language we have today is to be found in the metaphorical speech of singers, poets and story-tellers. It is important, therefore, to establish the right relationship between analogical and metaphorical language. The following analysis of a sonnet by Hopkins is offered as a brief preface to a discussion of the two-dimensional structure of any language that purports to discuss God.

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The best way to clarify the differences between metaphorical and analogical language is to take a concrete example. A sonnet by Gerard Manley Hopkins offers some instructive illustrations of the problems involved.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And all for this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.¹

¹*Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Third Edition edited by W. H. Gardner, Oxford University Press, London, 1948, p. 70.

In this poem, we have at least three distinct ways of talking about God. I shall call them simile, metaphor and analogy. The similes are perhaps the easiest to understand. God's grandeur will flame out *like shining from shook foil*, and it gathers to a greatness *like the ooze of oil crushed*. In the first simile, the likeness is to a piece of gold-foil. As Hopkins explained in a letter, 'Shaken gold-foil gives off broad glares like sheet lightning and also, and this is true of nothing else, owing to its zig-zag dints and creasings and network of small many-cornered facets, a sort of fork lightning too'.¹ As W. H. Gardner points out in his commentary on the poem, 'the shaking of the foil signifies an important doctrine: life itself must be shaken, disturbed, jarred, before the deepest instress can be felt and the heroic virtues . . . appear'.² In the second simile we have God's grandeur compared to an industrial process. 'Crushed' is the verbal link between the omnipotent World-Wielder and the pitiful, obtuse human agent, who so easily forgets both the source and the true purpose of all this power', as Gardner puts it.³ This power is, of course, the power of industrial and commercial technology, which so easily obscures the 'dearest freshness deep down things' and thus the work of God himself. Now what is it that marks these off as similes? Well, it is to be noted first of all, that God's grandeur is like the shining of shook foil in some fairly precise respects, and we are expected to recognize that the simile only extends to those respects. Gold-foil has a variety of attributes, but we are not supposed to consider all of them in understanding the comparison. For example, the noise made by shaking foil would be too feeble to act as a sign of 'grandeur', and is thus irrelevant to Hopkins's simile. Now it might quite justifiably be said that Hopkins's similes are arbitrary and forced: 'metaphysical' in the literary sense. The poet has to work hard to make us see the point of them. But then simile is always a self-conscious and artificial device. The comparison does not choose itself from the natural web of language, but has to be deliberately chosen, cultivated and made to yield a special meaning. No doubt some similes are 'better' than others, but this is not because some things are naturally more 'like' the object in question than others, but because in some cases the writer has made a better job of picking out the aspects he wants and suppressing the rest. A simile is justified if it works. No other criteria need to be applied to it. As long as we can be made to see the comparison and its significance, the writer has done all that can be expected of him.⁴

So much for the similes in the poem. What about the metaphors? The most obvious cases of metaphor come in the first line and the last

¹*Letters of G.M.H. to Robert Bridges*, London, 1935, pp. 168-9.

²W. H. Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Vol. II (London, 1949), p. 230.

³Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁴Hopkins's simile only just 'works' in this sense. Some readers thought that he had in mind the term *foil* as used in fencing. Luckily the simile made some sense even then, but not the sense Hopkins intended. See Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 230n.

two. Here we have more than a limited comparison of specific attributes. We have the apparently unlimited attribution of one kind of life to a being which in reality has life of another kind. In the first line, Hopkins does not *liken* God's grandeur to an electrical storm: he says, to quote Gardner's commentary, that 'the world *is* (my italics) a thundercloud charged with beauty and menace, with the electricity of God's creative love and potential wrath'.¹ Hopkins himself made clear the basis of his metaphor: 'All things are charged with love, are charged with God and if we know how to touch them give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring and tell of him'.² The metaphor, then, consists in the quite unqualified assertion that God *is* an electric charge in the world. This is not an assertion of likeness in some particular respect or respects: the extent of the comparison is indeterminate. Its basis is a kind of identity, or at least a kind of mutual participation. How it is possible to make a meaningful assertion of this sort is in any case a kind of mystery. What I want to note here is that metaphor is quite a different thing from simile. For if, in some sense, the metaphor holds, then we can draw from it ideas which perhaps the writer himself had no thought of when he wrote it. Hopkins, in his comment quoted above, has drawn some of the implications for us, but there may well be others just as valid. For example, despite the modernity of the electrical image it is possible to see it as merely a way of extending a very traditional idea. Perhaps it is only a modern way of asserting God's unpredictable and shockingly lethal power—the power that, for instance, killed Uzzah when he put out his hand to steady the ark on its way to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6, 6) or which caused hinds to calve prematurely in a thunderstorm (Psalm 29).³ But there are other things one might draw from the metaphor that could have theological implications for the future as well as for the past. For instance, one might consider the fact that since man has begun to harness electricity for his own use, a new dimension has been added to the way he thinks about God. We can now make an electrical discharge at will, we can charge our batteries, we can measure the strength of electrical charges by means of the gold-leaf electroscope (from which, no doubt, Hopkins first got his metaphor). Does this mean that the significance of the metaphor has changed beyond all recognition? Must we now think of God as somehow within our control? Or has the metaphor simply become inappropriate? If so, what shall we replace it with? These are difficult questions, but whatever our reply, we can certainly say that the metaphor is not only in continuity with a traditional idea, but

¹Gardner, *loc. cit.*

²Cf. Hopkins's *Comments on the Spiritual Exercises in Notebooks and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Humphry House, London, 1937, p. 342 and note.

³Or, for that matter, which always terrified James Joyce. Ellmann notes of Joyce that 'the thunderstorm as a vehicle of divine wrath and power moved Joyce's imagination so profoundly that to the end of his life he trembled at the sound. When a friend asked him why he was so affected, he replied "you were not brought up in Catholic Ireland"'. Cf. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, London, 1966, p. 25.

that it has added something to it, linking the past tradition with modern thought and culture. It has developed theologically. Indeed, it may be that this kind of growth in metaphor is what theological development really consists of.

A different kind of metaphorical example is to be found in the last two lines of the poem, in which the Holy Ghost 'broods' over the world. This metaphor, I suppose, comes ultimately from the first verse of Genesis, but it is mediated to us, as Gardner points out, via *Paradise Lost*:¹

'Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant.'

Now in the original Genesis image, 'God's spirit hovered over the water', and the reader was supposed to recall Deuteronomy ch. 32, v. 11ff, in which Yahweh is said to be

'Like an eagle watching its nest,
Hovering over its young,
He spreads his wings out to hold him
He supports him on his pinions.'²

When we read the Genesis lines in the context of Deuteronomy, we see that what has happened is that the Genesis poet has made the Deuteronomy simile into a metaphor.³ But as a metaphor for creation *ex nihilo* of course it is philosophically unsatisfactory. For the waters of Genesis are already created—they are the offspring of God's Spirit, which now hovers over them with watchful care. But if the Genesis metaphor is unsatisfactory to a writer like Milton on philosophical grounds, because it does not exactly square with creation *ex nihilo*,⁴ neither is it simply a creation myth of the pagan type. It is better to say that here is a metaphor struggling to express something that can only be stated in *analogical* terms. But Milton does not follow that struggle to its logical conclusion—it would hardly make for great poetry. Instead, he takes up the metaphor and re-interprets it magnificently in terms of 'impregnation' and 'hatching out'. But properly speaking, such a metaphor can only apply to a process within the world. It can hardly help to express the idea of creation as such. So finally Hopkins, no doubt recognizing this, and appropriating also the image of the Holy Spirit as a dove, transforms the metaphor into one appropriate to the Holy Spirit and his role in overseeing the world-process. It has become a metaphor for that continuously creative energy within the world that is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

¹*Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 19-22.

²Jerusalem Bible translation, London, 1966. Cf. the Editors' note on Genesis I, 2.

³See Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1954, Chapter 6 (on 'Metaphoric Tension') for an interesting theory as to the relationship between simile and metaphor, and the process by which the one may turn into the other.

⁴Creation *ex nihilo* only becomes explicit in the Bible in 2 Maccabees 7, 28.

One of the most important and characteristic features of any metaphor is that we can, indeed we must, deny its literal truth if we are to understand its metaphorical significance. Whatever Milton or Hopkins may say, God is not a broody bird, even though they want to say that metaphorically-speaking he is. It is at this point that we can bring out one of the crucial differences between metaphor and analogy. For in analogical talk about God, we do not deny the literal truth of what is said, even though we affirm that the statement is only true as long as we remember that it is no more than analogical. When we say that God is the cause of the existence of the world, for example, the word *cause* is being used analogically. But this does not mean that (as with metaphor) we want to deny the literal truth of the statement. On the contrary, we want to affirm it. The point of such analogical language is that, if the theory of analogy is true, we can stretch the meaning of the word in question to cover things which, in everyday talk, we do not normally have in mind. Of course, such 'stretching' is possible only in the case of words which are sufficiently open-ended to be stretched without breaking. To take an example from the Hopkins poem, the word *bird* is not very elastic, in that only a fairly restricted and well established range of entities can legitimately be called birds. This is why we can only call God a bird by way of metaphor: that is, by a means which involves the denial of the literal truth of the expression in order to make the metaphorical point. On the other hand, the word *cause* is very elastic indeed, in the sense that there is no prior, established limit to the range of things that can be causes. We sometimes argue over the cause of an event almost endlessly, precisely because the exact limits of the word *cause* are ill-defined. It is in virtue of this fact that it is possible to say that God is a cause without necessarily stretching the word to breaking point. In fact, we don't know what its breaking point is. Remembering this distinction, we can now look for the analogical language (if any) that is to be found in the Hopkins Sonnet. It is not far to seek. There is only one truly analogical statement in the poem, and this centres in the word *because*. It is because the Holy Ghost broods over the world that, even in the darkest moment of gloom, dawn begins to spring. God, Hopkins suggests, is in some sense the cause even of the most permanent and unchanging rhythms of nature, like the movements of the planets. Behind all the secondary causes—the electrical storm, the industrial factory, the desolation of the countryside by man's activity, the slow revolution of the earth—'broods' the perpetual creative causality of God the Holy Ghost. Implicit in the word *because* is the idea of God as cause of all the changes in creation; and it is this attribution of causality to God that is the fundamental analogical statement in the poem.

It remains to show why, despite the differences between the various kinds of statement in the poem, the sonnet does succeed in being a unified utterance. I think the unity of the poem lies in the fact

that the sestet, which is mainly an analogical statement centering on the word *because*, gives the answer to the question posed in the primary *metaphorical* octave. It might even be suggested that what the poem is saying is that metaphorical language is itself incomplete without an analogical underpinning. Metaphor (the octave) raises questions that only analogy (the sestet) can answer, while conversely analogy can only answer questions that are raised in a metaphorical form. In the octave a metaphoric relationship is established between God and the world. God is present in the world as thunder and lightning, as the dynamism of the human industrial process. In this sense God has been brought down to the level of the world's concerns, he has become 'like' the world. But he is put on the world's level partly by a kind of positive absence. The world's concerns have blotted God out, for 'all is seared with trade' and the soil is 'bare now'—bare of the growth-processes that were once the true signs of God's creative power. He is both in the world and not in the world, he is embodied in it (the storm, the oil-crushing plant) and absent from it (the bare soil, the commercialism). The world both accommodates and banishes him at the same time. It is because of this paradox that the question arises: why do men now not reckon his rod? Men cannot obey God unless he is sufficiently embodied in the world to be recognizable, but they cannot refuse to do so unless he is absent effectively enough for men to be able to forget or ignore him. The octave of the sonnet is designed to generate this problem. It does so by creating a single metaphorical relationship between God and the world which makes the question inevitable. The answer that the sestet gives is the assertion of an underlying causal relationship between God and the world. God is not only the cause of the planetary revolution that ensures that every dusk is followed by a new dawn. He is also the cause of the perpetual 'freshness deep down things' and the fact that 'nature is never spent'. He *is* still available. This second part of the poem is therefore one single, complex causal proposition, corresponding to the single metaphorical proposition of the octave. But whereas the effect of the metaphors in the octave is to bring God down on to the horizontal level of the world by identifying him as the inner dynamism of the world's ongoing process, the effect of the analogy, with its unmistakably vertical implications (God is above the world, penetrating it 'deep down' with a causal energy, or presence, that comes from the abode of a bird that lives on high) is to separate God from the world, to maintain him at a different level from the plane of finite worldly experience. Considered as a whole therefore, the poem embodies in its very structure the intertwining of two 'axes', the one horizontal (the axis of metaphor) and the other vertical (the axis of analogy).

However, each of the two parts does contain some elements of the other. Within the metaphoric relationship of the octave, we find an

analogical relationship embedded. This is the implicit 'because' which underlies the whole metaphoric argument of the octave. God is being ignored and forgotten by the world *because of* man's own pre-occupation with trade, toil and technology. In this sense, the relation of man to the world, which has been so 'bleared' that it can no longer descry God's presence, is one of natural affinity. That is to say, the 'seared', 'smudged' world is a fit image of man's own materialism. The spoiled world reveals man's natural tendency to ruin his environment by forgetting God's creative and re-creative power. An exactly corresponding point can be made about the sestet of the poem. Within its primarily analogical emphasis on the causal relationship between God and the world we find buried metaphors of which the most obvious is the 'brooding' metaphor itself. This metaphor is simply the imaginative embodiment of what is at stake logically in the analogical word *because*. The metaphor fills out the analogy, by adding a new dimension to it, a dimension of significance that can only come from the metaphoric 'axis'.

Two further points are worth making here about the interrelation of metaphor and analogy.

1. The two axes of the poem's language are inextricably connected, as the warp and woof of the poem's tapestry. Or, to take a musical parallel, they are related as the vertical harmony and the horizontal melody of a single musical score. When we see the relationship between analogy and metaphor in this way we are precluded, not only from simply assimilating the one to the other (Dorothy Sayers *et al.*) or pretending that all words are metaphorical (G. K. Chesterton *et al.*); we are also precluded from imagining that we can speak simply, in one-dimensional terms, about anything, let alone about God. We are not, and cannot be, one-dimensional men however hard we try. As the poem suggests, there can be no metaphor without a corresponding analogical relationship being involved somewhere. There can be no horizontal speech, speech on the level of purely temporal, secular experience, without some vertical implications. This is why, as Philip Wheelwright puts it, the 'mythic consciousness may be a dimension of experience cutting across the empirical dimension as an independent variable'.¹

2. As has already been suggested, analogical predication in theology carries us out of the empirical towards God. But metaphor brings God down to our level. In metaphor we begin by taking God for granted, so to speak, and bring him into contact with things in finite experience. The God of whom metaphor speaks is, in a sense, a familiar character in an easily intelligible story. It is for this reason that metaphorical language about God is naturally concerned with the God of religion, for it ascribes a human, animal or even inanimate kind of existence to God, and attributes to him some of our own

¹Philip Wheelwright, *Poetry, Myth and Reality* in *The Language of Poetry*, Edited by Allen Tate, Princeton, 1942, p. 11.

imperfections and limitations. Metaphor, one might say, is intrinsically incarnational. In fact, as I want to argue later, the Incarnation is, indeed, the making of a metaphor into a literal truth. But this kind of language about God also places him on the plane of time. And it is a consequence of this fact that metaphorical language about God tends naturally towards *narrative* forms. For it is only in stories that it is possible to display God's involvement with time, that is to say, to show him living on the horizontal plane of the world's processes and incarnate in them as a divine presence.

Egner on the Eucharistic Presence

by E. L. Mascall

The interesting and provocative article entitled 'Some Thoughts on the Eucharistic Presence', which appeared in the issues of *New Blackfriars* for August and September under the name of G. Egner, lead one to anticipate with eagerness the forthcoming book on which it is based. In the mean time I am glad to be allowed to make some comments upon it, and if these are largely critical it is simply because there is not much point in endorsing passages (of which there are many) with which one is in entire or almost entire agreement.

'I think that a consecrated host is still bread', Egner writes on p. 354, 'bread in precisely the way that an unconsecrated host is bread.' If what is meant is that all the natural properties of bread remain, I fully agree, and I would emphasize that I have just said 'natural' and not (using words in their modern sense) 'physical' or 'material'. There has been, from time to time, a lamentable tendency in Christian thought to assume that sacramental realities are concerned simply with the spiritual aspects of man's being (his 'soul') and that his material aspects (his 'body') need only natural nutriment. In the Catechism of the Anglican Prayer Book of 1662 there is a most unfortunate statement that, in receiving Holy Communion, the benefits are 'the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the Body and Blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the Bread and Wine', in other words that, while our souls need supernatural nutriment, natural nutriment is sufficient for our bodies. What has happened here (and I think it could be paralleled by a good deal of Roman Catholic writing as well) is that the duality of body and soul has been substituted for the duality of nature and supernature, with the consequence that, where we should have been told that the whole