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# Lumen Metaphoram: Metaphorical Reality Theory and its Application to the Evangelization of the Modern Roman Catholic Church

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*LUMEN METAPHORAM:  
METAPHORICAL REALITY THEORY AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE EVANGELIZATION  
OF THE MODERN ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH*

**A thesis submitted to  
Regis College  
The Honors Program  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Graduation with Honors**

**by  
Amber Koneval**

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## **Introduction: The Need for New Perspective**

**“We need to avoid the spiritual sickness of a church that is wrapped up in its own world: when a church becomes like this, it grows sick.”- Pope Francis**

One of the broadest critiques of the institution of the Roman Catholic Church in the twenty-first century is that it has become obsolete. It has become harder to relate to. It operates on a two-thousand year-old premise that has nothing to offer today's pluralistic, global society. Pope Francis, the 266th Pope has called for a rejuvenation of the Church. While he himself has begun the work of making the Church hierarchy more accessible to both the lay faithful and those who are outside of the Church, he has charged the Church to “Find new ways to spread the word of God to every corner of the world”. In a faith that has long been missionary, it is an assertion that is not new. Rather, it is a call to enliven the Church's central task that has always been encouraged.

In the Church of today, specifically that of the American Church, old methods of evangelization will not be sufficient. That is not to say that these old methods of evangelization were not sufficient for the growth of the Church and the spreading of Christ's Word their own times. The ways in which today's American perceives reality have progressed. New technology, new modes of understanding and communicating with disparate cultures, and new scientific breakthroughs have substantially changed the way in which today's people relate to themselves, to others, and to their cultural and earthly environments. The process of inculturation becomes more prominent, and is complicated by American literalism and individualism. Pope Francis, in recognizing the importance of globalization to the richness of faith, has stated that new

evangelization will only be successful when “everyone is integrated, but each player maintains his particularities, which, at the same time, enrich the others” (Francis & Skorka, 157). In other words, today’s Church needs to find a way to bring her message to the whole world, but in a way that does not colonize or erase the cultures of people not a party to the image-and-language creating of that message. It requires a way to express that message that makes sense and brings life to that culture without asking the culture to join itself to the Church as it is institutionally and historically a Euro-centric, patriarchal, and colonialist entity.

Pope Francis has stated that the Church today must ask herself two essential questions: “How will you pray?” and “How will you help your community enter into the experience of God?” (Francis & Skorka, 229). This asking must include the task of critically analyzing both of those ‘hows’. Are our methods of prayer hurting others? Are they self-serving and deny the community of the Church? Are our methods of helping our community essentially ego-centric, refusing to validate the disparate experiences of others? Do our methods name and tame God, rather than lead others into their own experience of Him in all of His glory? Do we bring God’s message to people in such a way that we simply present dogma, rather than plant the seed for growth in both ourselves and in the community we are attempting to evangelize?

In his first encyclical, Pope Francis reminds us that in faith, we find “the willingness to let ourselves be constantly transformed and renewed by God’s call” (Francis *Lumen Fidei* 24). He also points out, however, that we have been neglecting that transformation both in our individual faiths and in our communal practice of the Church and how she interacts with the world. In some fundamentalist circles, this would mean that the Church should simply turn in on herself and close off, holding tight to dogma, to protect herself from the pluralism that the world has opened itself up off to, in the name of preserving the ‘faith’. Rejuvenating the Church in faith

means quite the opposite, for faith “is not a private matter, a completely individualistic notion, or a personal opinion: it comes from hearing, and is meant to find expression in words and to be proclaimed” (Francis *Lumen Fidei* 38). Therefore, going forward, the Church needs to think in terms of how evangelism can be heard, how it is going to find expression and be proclaimed in a way that speaks not just to the individual who makes independent choices within themselves, but to whole ideological systems and growing conceptions of what it means to be human, and what the meaning of life really is.

This brings us to the subject of expressing the faith. There can be a temptation for members of a literalist, individualistic society to turn their need for scientism on to their faith, creating a need to define to the nth syllable the abstract, theological concepts. Another temptation is to continue to couch religious language in imagery and symbolism that, for centuries, was used to oppress people, or structures of imagery that no longer applies to the ways in which people live today in the name of fundamentalism, or in the Catholic context, a static kind of traditionalism. The Jesuits, in their concluding decree on how to express the faith put forth in the documents of the 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation in 1995, advised that “We need to listen carefully when people say that the gospel does not speak to them, and begin to understand the cultural experience behind this statement” (*Mission and Culture*, 24). In finding her place in modernity, the Church needs to be mindful less of what she is saying, but of the way she speaks.

Therefore, I propose in this thesis that the answer to Pope Francis’ call to find new ways to spread the gospel is in first examining the language, and then the very process of building the language in which that gospel is spread. When we ask ourselves, in the words of Father Howard Gray, SJ, with the spirit of true discernment “what now is the most effective, most enduring, most universal, most appropriate gospel service we can offer?”, the answer is not to change the



gospel or to alter it, in that we feel like we must change Truth (Gray, 28). The answer is not to violate or throw away the Doctors of the Church, nor the rich Tradition of the Church. Rather, we must recognize that, coherent to sacred Tradition, there is a way to re-evaluate the ways in which we build our own perspectives of reality, both individually and communally, in order to find better ways in which to speak the Truth that the Church, in faith, calls us to express.

In the chapters that follow, I will present metaphorical reality theory as a useful way in which to improve the dialogue of the Church with the current secular, pluralist and global world without sacrificing any of the Church's intrinsic messages. By adopting metaphorical reality theory, we can change the way we speak- and through doing so hope that the gospel, in all of its glory, will continue to be spread throughout the world in the fullness of faith.

## **I. What is Metaphor?**

In this thesis, I will be endeavoring to lay out what promoting a metaphorical view of reality would mean as applied to the evangelization of Roman Catholic faith. In order to do so, I must first explain what I mean by a metaphorical view of reality. Before I can do that, however, the meaning of metaphor must be clarified.

The Oxford English Dictionary's first definition for 'metaphor', established in the 1500's, is a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable. In 1836, the definition of 'metaphor' expanded to include something regarded as representative of something else, especially as a material emblem of an abstract quality. In this view a metaphor is a literary device that is used to create flowery diction, to enhance what can be more logically described. It is an ornament to plain, scientific language, designed to augment feeling or layer abstract meaning onto the everyday. This would suggest that metaphor is 'extra'. It is pretty language, not necessary language.

In making concessions to this specific definition of metaphor, the key theorists for metaphorical reality, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, admit that "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 5). However, the nuance in this definition reflects a shift of focus. Rather than simply being 'applied' to 'suggest a resemblance', Lakoff and Johnson posit that, while the metaphor still joins two unlike things by creating a resemblance, the end goal is not the resemblance itself.

Rather, the purpose of the metaphor is understanding novel experiences in terms of the cache of experiences already available to the person employing the metaphor. Metaphors

themselves are “poems in miniature”, suggesting that the metaphor itself has intrinsic meaning, rather than being a device through which a larger meaning, which would come from the poem or piece of literature in which they are employed, is devised (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 323). The intent of the metaphor itself, then, is to create meaning in and of itself.

In his work with the ways in which metaphor are used in culture-building, Kari Syreeni describes metaphor in this manner: “Metaphor was not conceived as metaphor; Homer’s poetry appears metaphorical to us but not necessarily to him” (Syreeni pg. 324). In other words, those who employ metaphors in their poetry or prose do not necessarily intend them to be augmentations or ornaments. Rather, metaphors are employed as the means through which one brings diverse experiences to his or her audience in an organic, natural way. Syreeni calls this ‘metaphorical appropriation’: “...the textual vehicle and the reader’s situation are conjoined by means of the tertium of the symbolic world” (Syreeni, pg. 329). This suggests that this form of ‘appropriation’ is a process that is entirely natural, rather than a forced ‘poetic’ process. It is natural to attempt to use the language of shared experiences to introduce novel experiences.

On the whole, Lakoff and Johnson agree. They go further to suggest that all of “human thought processes are largely metaphorical”, and that “...the concepts that occur in metaphorical definitions are those that correspond to natural kinds of experience” (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 6, 118). In this view of metaphor, metaphor is recognized as the primary, and possibly only, process through which the human mind is able to construct an abstract perspective of reality.

### **Metaphorical Reality Theory**

Lakoff and Johnson propose the idea of metaphors as a “matter of conceptual structure”, which develops the idea that the creation of metaphors is a natural process through which

humans are able to make sense of their own perceptions of reality can be applied, wholesale, to the perception of reality itself ( Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 235). In other words, humans perceive reality through metaphors. By creating tension between two unlike experiences and bridging gaps between abstract concepts through personal reference, humans make meanings through which to understand their world. For example, in the metaphor 'love as hunger', we take the abstract experience of the feeling 'love' and liken it to the physical feeling attributed to hunger, at the same time that we liken it to the physical need for sustenance, as well as its constant recurrence. Through this we come to one aspect of what it means to 'love', building a platform from which to construct further metaphors that either pertain to love, or build off of the network of our understanding of love to describe other abstract experiences.

The theory works itself out like this: we begin with a grounded, tangible experience of reality, described in terms given to each individual in the context of the social linguistic world in which one lives and through his or her own experience through his or her senses- touch, taste, sight, and sound. From there, the individual begins to create a relationship between how those senses interact with their experiences with more abstract and subjective concepts- time, romance, loyalty; emotions. In that context, the individual creates a metaphorical structure of concepts that works on a highly personal level, rooted in bodily experience. From there, individuals are then charged to relate their own personal conceptual systems to those of others, who have in turn created their own metaphorical structures based on their own experiences of their senses and how abstract or subjective concepts relate to said experiences. The individual, it must be noted, is pre-conditioned to borrow their own personal metaphors from concepts provided by the community. This renders their personal conceptual systems only as effective as the larger system that they are borrowing from.

In a community, we could not consider all individually created metaphorical structures valid, lest there be a complete and total breakdown of systems of comprehension through a lack of relatedness. Therefore the third step is taking individual metaphorical concepts and measuring them against each other to create a kind of collective metaphorical system through which to relate the experiences of the individual against the experience of the collective, communal whole. From this conceptual system, the community decides how the community is to be run, by creating "...values [that are] not independent, but...form a coherent system with the metaphorical concepts [they] live by" (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 22). Metaphors that consistently generate from similar experiences, or are handed out by authority figures in the community become codified. Therefore, the community as a collective begins to comport itself using metaphors as a guide. For example, when we return to the above metaphor of 'love as hunger' and analyze the experience of love that hunger suggests, we recognize in it common behaviors towards love that stem logically from the metaphor. Love as hunger, as discussed before, has the possibility of attributing to the experience of love a physical pain, a physical necessity, and a constant recurrence of need. Behavior that follows from this understanding of love include a social obsession with love being necessary for human existence, that the experience of love must be recurrent (usually recurrently passionate), and that we are capable of dulling the 'pain' of the absence of love much as one would deal with physical pain- self-medication, over-feeding, coddling one's physical self.

This and other metaphors are well on their way to becoming 'dead metaphors'- metaphors that are no longer seen as illuminating a relationship between two dissimilar things, but rather as an actual definition of an experience. Concepts such as 'wasting time' and 'going our separate ways' become dead metaphors, so common in use that they are no longer

recognized as metaphors as they have become so widespread that they have been nearly divorced from the thought process delineated by a mere literary definition of what ‘metaphor’ is. We create laws and policies based on the idea that ‘time is money’, and react in relationships along the lines of thinking we are capable of ‘possessing’ people by ‘holding their hearts’ or ‘losing’ people through behaving badly. Time is no commodity, and people cannot have claims staked on their personage simply due to emotions; and yet humans behave as if these statements are undeniably true. This is because it is what we have *made* true, through dictating that our perception of reality is to be described in these terms that, though fundamentally dislike, hold in them a central, powerful similitude.

When the individual is exposed to a metaphor, whether in literature or in everyday life, “...the meaning a metaphor [has] will be partially culturally determined and partially tied to...past experiences” (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 142). The individual experience, feeding into the culturally accepted meaning for said metaphorical concept of the experience, feeds back into the individual’s understanding of that metaphor, i.e. the reality presented through it. It is through this process that humans are able to begin conversations surrounding abstract and subjective subjects in a way that is constructive, rather than simply speaking into baseless vacuums of communication. That is to say that human language, based on tangible experience, has a solid source, grounded in reality, that is indivisible from reality- but gives itself a creative relationship to that reality that allows for growth and development.

There is, in this process, a huge drawback. Metaphors, as they operate, take two unlike experiences and create meaning between them by highlighting similarities between the known and the unknown. This begins, however, with the acknowledgement that the two things are not actually the same- a metaphorical understanding of a concept is not a ‘definition’ of the concept.

Through creating a metaphor for an experience, we are not saying what an experience *is*, rather, “...we pick out the “important” aspects” in order to “experience, understand it and remember it” (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 83). We are not giving an anatomy of the full experience, but are rather declaring what is to be noticed, valued, or emphasized regarding that experience. It is only the aspect of the experience that is highlighted by the selective metaphor that is worth communalizing through communication.

The dark side of this method would be all of the aspects of individual experiences that are ‘left out’ of the metaphor itself. For if a metaphor is highlighting specific relatable aspects of an experience without being able to completely define the experience in question, then the metaphor is simultaneously downplaying, or negating, the aspects of the experience that are not covered by the metaphor being used. This may seem like only a small nuance in metaphorical theory, until it is recognized that “...truth is relative to our conceptual system” in that our entire basis of describing reality as a community is based in metaphorical concepts that cannot ever fully describe reality itself (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 193). If we were to only describe experiences using one ‘definitive’ metaphor, we would be forever excluding integral components of said experience outside of the individual or specific cultural setting. Therefore, many metaphors are needed to describe one concept. If we are to take time again as an example, several come to mind- ‘time as a commodity’, ‘time personified’, ‘time as a body of water’, etc. Each new metaphor takes up the slack where the last left off, either contextualizing the concept in a more specific way, negating some aspects of a previous metaphor, or highlighting an aspect of the concept that was overlooked in a previous metaphor.

Thus it is important to note that when discussing a current metaphorical system, one must always be aware of the multiple metaphors in use by the society or demographic in question for

various concepts and values. It is also important, when seeking to modify, change or get rid of current metaphors used in society, to note that there are always other metaphors already in place. To understand the metaphors that we currently have in place, especially for those that are authoritative concerning the more abstract aspects of the human experience, one must be mindful to approach these metaphors as *parts* of a whole, rather than as being the whole itself. From there, one can begin determining the appropriateness of either retaining or modifying metaphors in line with the ever-evolving reception of the human experience. It also gives a guideline through which to analyze the metaphors themselves, in recognizing for yet another reason that the metaphors we use are not definitions.

Understanding ourselves in relation to our world and each other through the employment of structural metaphors becomes especially pertinent in beginning to understand the nature of communication between value systems. When taken seriously, “metaphorical imagination is a crucial skill in creating rapport and in communicating the nature of unshared experience” (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 231). As metaphors create connections through which a community can name itself and tie itself to its individual members, so can metaphors create bridges between the larger community itself and the communities considered to be ‘other’ or ‘separate’. Cultures and modes of thought which are otherwise untranslatable become accessible when one acknowledges the disparateness between the structural metaphors of one culture to the next. Continuing on, using the metaphors of the collective of a different culture, one can backtrack to the ways that that metaphor affects individuals of said culture, and therefore give a more reliable template for gauging how individuals of that culture will react to specific metaphors in rhetoric. I hope to show, in the chapters that follow, that understanding that our perceptions of reality are



constructed through relatable partials, and not definitions, creates a different picture of compassion, of oneness, of equality and of dialogue or social action that seeks any of the above.

Above all, “Metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action, and only derivatively a matter of language” (Lakoff & Johnson pg. 153). It refers not only to the language being used, but how we comport ourselves, and how we view the reality before us, as well as the realities beyond us. But what does this mean in application? Let us start with current metaphors. By this, I mean the process through which current metaphors come to be, and how they remain in employ.

### **Applying Metaphorical Reality Theory**

Current metaphors, as mentioned earlier, are created when an individual seeks to make sense of an abstract or subjective experience while simultaneously relating it to themselves in social contexts. They create a bridge of creative tension between the experience and the senses, a metaphor, and through this create a practical understanding between the self and the experience. In creating the metaphor, the individual relates what is and is not important about the experience in question through illuminating different aspects of an experience and hiding others. The process of picking out what to illuminate and what to hide reflects the inherent value judgment that specific collections of metaphors create.

As a community, the metaphors of many individuals are gathered and the value of them ascertained. These metaphors are given or robbed of value by the process of being accepted or discarded by the community at large. The community sets its values by these metaphors- its laws, its social rules, its understanding of what is or is not moral; what is or is not human or full of worth.

For example: Through the act of commodifying time ('you're wasting my time', 'time is money!', 'I don't have enough time!'), people behave as if time truly were a commodity that can be spent, possessed, wasted, and utilized. We pay people for their time, rather for their output or demonstrable worth, when we pay 'on the clock'. It becomes a social norm to respect the time of others, as it is perceived by the community to have a tangible, measurable value. We make excuses for running the stop light (I'm going to be late, i.e. I'm disrespecting the value placed on the time of others to whom I have committed my own valuable time), we get into fights with our loved ones (you made me wait!, i.e. you have wasted something of mine that has value and worth that I cannot replace); we become satisfied by it (I enjoy wasting my time, i.e. I enjoy being able to relish that I can do what I please with this commodity that I possess).

Metaphors "...sanction actions, justify inferences and help us set goals" through their process of creating meaning through the relation of the abstract to the individual experience (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 158). Current metaphors become the very basis through which we act, react, and deliberate on decisions to be made regarding future experiences. The multiplicity of the metaphors we use allows us to see different facets of said experiences, as well as open the road to different options to take. When we balance viewing time as a commodity, as discussed above, with viewing time as a body of water, we begin to downplay the possessed, valued qualities that we perceive in time, and explore the possibilities of time being a part of nature, being fluid, and being nourishing and unpredictable. New mindsets become available when opposing, yet important aspects of the abstract experience are opened up.

The cache of current metaphors enable dialogue in order to create a more cohesive picture of the experience in question. According to the experts, "There is no one metaphor that will allow us to get a handle simultaneously on both the direction...and the content" of any given

experience (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 95). Metaphors create a web that becomes a guide for understanding both cultural experience in relation to the myriad of individuals that comprise it, and for individual experience as it relates to the experience of the whole. We return to the example of time. 'Time as Commodity' is only one piece of the conceptual puzzle- we also have the metaphors of 'Time as Body of Water', 'Time as Directional', and 'Time as Motion', to name a few. As discussed before, 'time as commodity' presents the individual and the community with the idea of time being measurably valuable, spendable, and tangible. 'Time as Body of Water' gives us the image of time as being fluid, an independently operating object of nature, as well as its capability of both being uncontrollable and containable. 'Time as Directional' and 'Time as Motion' give the idea that time is progressive, and requires progression of us as time 'passes', that time has the possibility of being 'lost'. Some of these images are complimentary, such as the images of time being valuable, tangible, and containable, through the 'Commodity' and 'Water' images, while some of these images directly cancel each other out- such as the idea of time being progressive as well as being spendable or containable. Working together, these metaphors highlight certain aspects of time, while downplaying others through a network of 'is' and 'is not'.

When analyzing the effectiveness and validity of current metaphors, it is important to refrain from trying to find the absolute 'truth' in the metaphor itself. While the metaphoric structure may create or point towards an absolute truth, no one metaphor contains it. Metaphors in and of themselves contain no singular authority or sacredness. Therefore, in discussing metaphorical reality theory the purpose is what "perceptions and inferences that follow" and what "actions...are sanctioned by it", rather than the "truth or falsity of the metaphor" (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 158). The focus is not on what the metaphor in and of itself may mean, but how it

is applied, what connotations that application may have, and what kind of actions or reactions to diverse experiences that the metaphor may excuse. To return to the idea of ‘love as hunger’, for example, we can see that in some cultural contexts the highlighting of ‘love’ as a physical need, as well as one that is natural, recurrent and must be constantly satiated for survival can lead to the equating of love with sex. Put too much emphasis on only the ‘hunger’ aspect of the experience of love, and you put too much pressure on sex, on behaviors that may coerce or even not stop to ask for consent. This emphasizes the real effect of the metaphor on shaping individual and cultural perception of reality, and whether or not this cultural perception is conducive to moral and progressive behaviors or not. Indeed, how metaphors function plays a large part on what we, in the end, may constitute as moral in light of the value system created by the metaphorical structure in play.

As the world progresses, so humankind diversifies its own experiences. What happens when the metaphors currently in use are shown to be ill-equipped to adequately relate to these experiences? New metaphors are in order. They need to be created, tested, and implemented. However, these new metaphors cannot simply be thrust into colloquial conversations. They must follow the same laws as the current metaphors do, providing “coherent structure, highlighting some things and hiding others” (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 139). The new metaphors, like the metaphors before them, must be chosen according to what aspects of the new experiences should be valued, and which should be downplayed. Those creating the new metaphors must do so in light of both individual and cultural experiences. The new metaphors must both fit in with the structure created by the multitude of previous metaphors, while striving to become authoritative in what that specific metaphor is attempting to delineate. It also could oust a previous metaphor entirely that has become obsolete or entirely incorrect in light of new moral structures created by

the new metaphors in response to novel experiences. For example, we look at the idea of ‘Good as White’. In Caucasian dominant, Euro-centric social structures, this metaphor has been used to dehumanize and demonize people of color in unacceptable ways. ‘Good as White’ takes as its dominant meaning the idea that the experience of ‘goodness’ is bright, clean, without blemish and in scientific language, a mixture of diverse colors to create one, unified light. However in the aligning of the Caucasian skin color with ‘white’, this also came to denote that white *people* were intrinsically good, while other races were not exactly equable to goodness. In today’s modern, global society, in which we recognize the inherent diversity in the human race and work towards equality between all forms and expressions of humanness that is respectful and celebrative of all cultures, the metaphor of ‘Good as White’ requires additions to its network to maintain the original image of the experience of goodness as being bright, clean and without blemish while at the same time emphasizing the mix of colors necessary to create ‘goodness’, as well as other metaphors that are not intrinsically linked to colors that have racist history in their undertones.

Those who would create new metaphors must be sensitive to the way that they are descended from old metaphors- what their emphasis would mean in what they have chosen to give value to. They would have to be aware of what old metaphors have already said, and what, if anything, is really being added to common conversation by either the creation of a new metaphor or the destruction of the old one. They must be responsible to the fact that “...a metaphor is a kind of reverberation down through the network of entailments that awakens and connects our memories of our past...experiences and serves as a possible guide for future ones” (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 140). The new metaphors cannot be created in a vacuum, or divorced from the ideas that gave birth to the metaphors that came before.

New metaphors must also be created with a sense of responsibility. They should not be introduced to the community simply for their shock value or the nostalgia that they provide for a small group of individuals. If a new metaphor is to enter the conceptual system, it must recognize that “it will alter that conceptual system and the perceptions and actions that the system gives rise to” (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 145). The user of a new metaphor must realize that it is not simply a literary device, but a catalyst for action and reaction. Through creating “similarities of a new kind”, the new metaphor gives rise to a whole new system of truth by forcing the audience to “focus only on those aspects of our experience that it highlights”, and through such forcing a new value system through emphasis (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 151, 157).

The necessity of adherence to the honor of traditional metaphors and the precautions that must be taken in order to create and accept successful new metaphors may seem daunting. However, this is not to discourage the discovery and implementation of new metaphors. In fact, “successful functioning in our daily lives seems to require a constant shifting of metaphors” (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 221). As society creates new technologies, clashes with different cultures, explores new religions, sciences and philosophies, it gains an awareness of new experiences. In order to make sense of these experiences, it needs new metaphors. Sometimes, those new metaphors make plain the inappropriateness of the current metaphors being used.

The acknowledgement that creating these new metaphors is a huge process is not to be a bar to the process itself. It is simply an acknowledgment that metaphors should be routinely updated and re-tested in order to remain relevant to the current cache of human experience. Refusing to do so puts a false faith in the perceived truth of the metaphor in and of itself, and stunts the possibility of reaching truth within the larger web of metaphors that would be much more accurate in relation to experience of said truth.

## **Going Forward**

If metaphor is the primary system through which reality is perceived, then what would that mean for more abstract concepts? What does that contend for the capital-T ‘Truth’ in such complex notions as religion? Going forward, I would now like to explore what it would mean to apply a metaphorical basis of reality to one of the world’s largest religions, Christianity, before applying it even more narrowly to the specific practice and preaching of the Roman Catholic religion.

Then from there, assuming the truth and validity of metaphorical reality theory and its implications for said religions dogma, I would then like to conclude by speculating on what this could mean for how education and distribution of the Roman Catholic faith should be amended accordingly.

## II. What is Religious Metaphor?

### Metaphorical Reality Theory in Religion

Having explored metaphor as a conceptual system, I would now like to contemplate what it would mean for religious discourse and practice if metaphorical reality theory were to be fully recognized. This is not to say that I endeavor to rehash simple metaphorical theology, in which metaphors *can* be employed in religion. Rather, I want to investigate the implications for religion that come with a view that we operate on the perceptions of reality that are built from a network of metaphors that must be continuously reinvented and restructured in order to remain valid.

In what follows, I consider that perceptions of reality are constructed using multiple metaphors in order to highlight all the important aspects of an abstract experience in relation to individual sensory experience. I then look at how this thought process might be applied to religion, in that it is often an experience of the heart and the mind over and beyond that of the senses, and how metaphorical reality theory lays out our process of reaching for the truth of said experience through the layering of multiple metaphors.

At its base, “religious rituals are typically metaphorical kinds of activities”, in which real-world relationships are used as the basis for the discourse surrounding the idea of a specific spirituality or deity (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 234). This is not to say that the religious rituals are false due to their metaphorical nature. Rather, there is no space within which to debate the truth or falsity of the metaphor. The goal of the metaphor is the real experience that it is attempting to relate. Therefore the question becomes one of appropriateness of the metaphor for the experience that it attempting to point towards rather than the truth of the metaphor itself.



Sallie McFague, a lead voice in metaphorical theology, describes this when she says that “...a metaphor is seeing something else, pretending ‘this’ is ‘that’ because we do not know how to talk about ‘this’” (McFague, pg. 15). In a religious context, the experience that is being pointed toward is so profound and beyond the human scope of experience that it utilizes metaphors for metaphors within its network. This is not a novel phenomenon, however, as this is not a choice that we have made apart from our natural process of synthesizing experience.

Metaphorical theology, through this view, does not exist in a vacuum. Religious metaphors are not created for the sole purpose of being religious, nor are they employed only because of the complexity of religious experience. As McFague puts it: “The primary answer to the question of why religious metaphorical statements are so powerful is that they are in continuity with the way that we think ordinarily” (McFague, pg 16). The difference between the everyday metaphors and the religious ones is not that we are only using metaphors to describe spirituality and religion. The metaphorical structure used in perceiving religious reality is simply so far removed from sensory experience that we become sharply aware of the disparity between the metaphors that are available to us currently and the essence of the experience that they are pointing to. However, as with mundane metaphorical structures, we are using the same method of picking out the important aspects of the experience with singular metaphors, and covering different aspects with the wealth of metaphors available. For instance, when we speak of God as Light, we speak of an experience of God that emulates our experiences with light- experiences of illumination, of warmth and guidance. When we speak of God as King, we speak of experiences of rule- codes of conduct required with obedience, protection of one’s monarch, punishment for the breaking of rules. In both examples, God is related to a common experience or image- not described by them- and through them we speak of different aspects of the experience of God.

Parker J. Palmer, in his book regarding vocation, *Let Your Life Speak*, describes the recognition of the importance of religious metaphors thus:

Metaphors are more than literary devices, of course: most of us use metaphors, albeit unconsciously, to name our experience of life. But these personal metaphors do much more than describe reality as we know it. Animated by the imagination, one of the most vital powers we possess, our metaphors often become reality, transmuting themselves from language into the living of our lives... We do well to choose our metaphors wisely (Palmer, pg. 96 )

Explicitly, Palmer is speaking of the importance of metaphors in their capability of shaping the way in which we live our lives. Implicitly, Palmer warns the faithful that, through metaphors, we ‘name’, and thus claim, our lives- assigning a responsibility to our imaginations that we may or may not consciously acknowledge, yet fully participate in through using our metaphors to dictate the way the world is. His caution calls us to be mindful of our metaphors, to create reality ‘well’ through their power. A worldview that accepts metaphorical reality theory in its entirety would argue that while not most, but all, of us use metaphors to create both mundane and religious perceptions of reality, the import still stands. The only thing that changes in recognizing the metaphorical perception of reality is the process in which we begin to consciously critique current metaphorical models, uphold metaphorical structures, and create new perspectives of reality.

## **Religious Metaphor**

From this, we recall from metaphorical theory of reality the ability of metaphors to change the way that we act, react and observe new experiences in light of the similarities that we

draw between those and our known experiences. It follows, therefore, that religious metaphorical structures do the same. Affirming or changing a lived metaphor doesn't just affirm or change the way we speak about something- it changes the way that the reality of said something is perceived entirely. For though we always remember that "there is a reality to which our constructions refer", we are only "creating versions of it" through our metaphorical structures- versions that may be painstakingly similar, yes, but not entirely the same (McFague, *Models of God*, pg. 26). This also asserts, through the nature of metaphorical structures, that it is not the actual religious reality or the experience that is being changed by the change of what metaphor is being used. Only the *perception* of the divine reality, which cannot be reached through human senses, is at stake.

Therefore to analyze religious modes of thought through the lens of metaphorical reality theory is not to trivialize or relegate religious experience to a literary plane. McFague says that a metaphor "is not an ornament or an illustration, but says what cannot be said any other way" (McFague, pg. 50). Metaphorical structuring of language presumes that there is no direct correlation to sensory experience that can be used for the expression of the religious concept or experience in mind. This does not mean that just any metaphor can be used to describe a new facet of a disparate experience, however. By acknowledging that the metaphor is saying what only it can say, we assume that there is some semblance of truth that only that metaphor can point to; that only it can reach. It assumes that other metaphors are ill-equipped for pointing towards the experience and that, while multiplicity is encouraged, there is a finite amount of metaphors that can be used for describing one experience, as there does exist a 'true' reality that is being sought, like attempting to catch an object by throwing many ropes of appropriate length and from many opposing angles.

So in creating a metaphorical structure for religious expression and discourse, how does one decide on the metaphors to be used? One cannot simply rely only on the current metaphors- we have already discussed how metaphors must be consistently updated in order to remain appropriate to experimental evolution. Due to the impact of metaphors as a conceptual system, as well as the precise nature of metaphors, effective metaphors cannot be pulled out of thin air.

First, religious metaphors must seek a certain level of tension. Andrew Hass, a lecturer in religion at the University of Sterling, argues that the truth sought in metaphors “must only emerge in tension” (Hass, pg. 185). Metaphors in and of themselves hang in the middle of that balance of ‘is and is not’- they attempt to describe what something is through employing a separate experience that is knowingly different as well as similar. The truth is in the space between what the metaphor is implying that the experience is, and what it is also implying that the experience is not through the aspects of the experience that it highlights. Throw in the common network of metaphors that accompany one experience and you begin to create a tension between the tensions of each singular metaphor, with the truth of the experience hanging precariously in the middle. To retain or change a religious metaphor, the tension must be preserved.

Second, religious metaphors must be mindful of both individual and cultural experience. This may seem to be a bit obvious. However, with globalization on the rise there is a temptation for religious institutions to operate their evangelism on the premise that all metaphors are the same from culture to culture, in the name of speaking directly translatable, defined truth, or that by latching on to what may seem to one outside of the indigenous metaphorical structure as the most parallel to one’s own structures you can convey the exact same message. This is wildly untrue. Owing to the fact that “we cannot learn or understand except through connection, through

association”, those who wish to manipulate metaphorical structures for educational or spiritual purposes must first pay respect to the metaphorical structures of others- what certain metaphors might mean both to a culture entire, and to specific individuals with their specific experiences (McFague, pg. 33).

Third, religious metaphors should not resist interpretation. Interpretation of a metaphorical structure is not antagonistic to the structure itself, but “an intrinsic part of imagistic language;... not tacked on, but [arising] from within it” (McFague, pg. 120). It is the attempt to delicately pluck at the tensive truth at the center of the metaphorical structure- the entire purpose of the network in the first place. This goes hand in hand with resisting the urge to see the metaphors themselves as the bearers of truth, rather than the road-signs leading to it. If the metaphor were to be a description of the truth, then it would be universally applicable- however, “for a metaphor to be acceptable, it need not, cannot, apply in all ways” (McFague, *Models of God*, pg. 70). Having no language capable of describing that which we cannot tangibly define, the urge to employ a single set of metaphors, or one metaphor, verges on an idolatry of the metaphor itself.

This brings us to the third criteria of religious metaphors: they should relinquish any exclusive claim on truth in and of the metaphor itself. This is again not to say that the metaphors cannot give insight to truth or point towards truth. It is not to claim that there does not exist a single, capital ‘t’ Truth at the crux of reality. It is only to say that the truth is not contained in any one metaphor, or even in any one metaphorical structure. However, “...metaphors and metaphorical narratives can be profoundly true even if they are not literally or factually true,” due to the fact that “the point is not to believe in a metaphor, but to see in light of it” (Borg, pg. 17,41). To ascertain truth of any given experience pointed at my metaphors, even in religious

context, it is important to be mindful that the language being used does not fully equal the actual experience being described.

So why bother? For one, we remember that our perspective on reality is a metaphorical one, and so any new experience is going to have to be approached through such an avenue. We see tangible benefits in the upholding of old or creation of new metaphors within the metaphorical structure of the tradition. The structure of a metaphorical perspective of reality demands that the metaphors be updated and modified to continue to hold a tension with the changing of society. These new metaphors “[shock] conventionality, [help] us to break habitual ways of interpreting, juxtaposes other possibilities with accepted ways, and hence allows us to question their adequacy” (McFague, pg. 174). For McFague, in our modern society this would include adopting metaphors of God that embrace the marginalized experiences of women, the disabled, minority groups, and interpersonal relationships that do not rely on a patriarchal or Euro-centric structure. In her work, she proposes the images of ‘God as Mother’, ‘God as Friend’ and ‘God as Lover’. Other images that could shock modern conventionality could include ‘God as Dependent’, and ‘Christ as Agender’ among others. The purpose of these ‘shocking’ images is not to uproot conventionality to the point of overthrowing tradition, nor is it to entirely discredit or ignore the importance of habitual ways of interpreting. Rather, this ‘shaking’ of the current metaphorical structures at play within religious tradition retain the conscious acceptance of God-speak as metaphorical, resist an idolatrous adherence to God-speak, and allow the religious community to honestly examine both the positive and the negative impact of the metaphors in play in their tradition.

Recognizing the metaphorical nature of our perspective of reality, and thus our perceptive of religious experience, allows us to grasp at more tools through which we can keep the religious

experience alive and pertinent to our other experiences, and the experiences of our cultures, in the modern day. It teaches us new, more correct and more empathetic ways to perceive and engage with reality through altering our perception of it according to our own intellectual climate, rather than to those of the past.

### **Religious Metaphor: Christianity**

As we move towards the specific calling of Pope Francis, we look to the faith structures of Christianity, and now endeavor to apply more specifically this metaphorical theory of reality to its tenants and practices within the cultural context of the United States of America. It is easier to see how accepting metaphorical reality theory can be overarchingly beneficial and necessary for religion-at-large, but becomes more complicated when more specifically applied.

For one, many Christian denominations believe in the inerrancy and Divine origin of the Bible, which contains the entirety of canonical Christian Scriptures. Their liturgy is permeated by it, and the faithful recite it as pure, unadulterated truth. However, if one is to take metaphorical reality theory seriously, a huge complication arises.

If the communication between individuals, and between communities, is naturally metaphorical, then it would follow that the documentation of such religious communication within a specific belief system would be similarly metaphorical in nature. Furthermore, "...the texts [Scripture] were written by limited people who expressed their experiences of the divine reality in the manners and mores of their historical times" (McFague, pg. 3). If we acknowledge that, along with the aforementioned necessity for metaphorical systems to be consistently upgraded in order to retain appropriateness and tension of truth for modern times, we realize that

the metaphorical language used in the Bible would, logically, be strained in comparison to the metaphorical language in use today.

That is not to say that the language used in the Bible is not understandable. The language in the Bible still operates on a self-sufficient metaphorical structure, and can thus be easily deconstructed and explained. However the problem is that the structure must often be explained and deconstructed to convey even a semblance of the original message. The metaphorical structure used today is wildly different.

To use a glaringly obvious example, most Americans do not operate on an agrarian system of living, but many of the metaphors in the Bible depend on rituals and realities of farming life in first century Palestine, etc. can be applied to twenty-first century United States. This may not seem like a huge loss at first blush, but consider: the original Scriptures were written and devised so that the audience, the faithful and the yet-to-be-converted, could feel the message of God down to their bones. They didn't need to go watch a documentary on the farming methods of hundreds of generations past to know what it meant to sort out the weeds from the wheat, or how precious fish and meat were. They *knew* it. They based their language, their discussions, their understanding around it.

In an age that is becoming increasingly digital, there is little evidence to support that the American population will ever understand agricultural metaphor the way that the original Christians did. Our current metaphorical structures are more likely to include elements of instantaneousness, introspection and global awareness than our predecessors did, to name a few. We have more free time, more inter-cultural options; more plurality. We are less likely to understand absolutes, or obstacles such as time or disability. In order to feel the Word of God



down to our bones, as they were written, then there needs to be an understanding that the original writings of the Bible, while highly valuable, are ill-equipped to fully permeate our modern metaphorical structures, even when translated into modern English.

That is not to say that the original message or intent of the Bible is obsolete. On the contrary, the message and intent of the Bible is essential to Christian faith, no matter how much time as gone by. The Word of God, incarnated in human history, is timeless as a message. The metaphorical structures that the Scriptures are encased in, however, that pointed to the truth with a tension that worked internally within various ancient structures can never be similarly accessible for a people for whom those metaphorical structures no longer apply. Part of later sections of this thesis will address how this problem can be circumvented without tearing apart the traditional root of this historically complex and rich religion. For the moment, it is enough to be aware of the complication.

Hand in hand with the out-dated component of the metaphorical structures solidified within the Scriptures comes the attitude by many of the faithful that holds that the metaphors contained within are not metaphors, but literal descriptions. Many contemporary Christians are unaware of the ‘is and is not’ character of the ways that we describe God- father, king, shepherd- and forget to remain critical and cognizant of the tension that those metaphors create with what aspects of the divine experience they either highlight or downplay entirely. As McFague points out, when one way of seeing God “becomes an idol, the hypothetical character of the model is forgotten and what ought to be seen as one way to understand our relationship with God has become identified as the way” (McFague, pg.9). The example that comes most readily to mind is the way of seeing God as ‘God the Father’. Instilled deeply into the tradition as a way in which to describe the familial relationship between God and His Creation, we run into a wall when the

faithful interpret this metaphor as God's very name. Gendering and assigning a human gender role to God limits God intrinsically to only one half of possible human gender expression, and has historically led many of the faithful to deny God any 'motherly' or female characteristics. By extension, these same faithful have designated women as 'lesser' creatures of God, as they are not imaged as perfectly as men who, through the literalizing of this metaphor, share the very gender of God. The idolatrous worship of God as male has become one of the mainstream 'ways' of seeing God, rather than the metaphorical network that expands the experience of God in relation to His creation.

-This insistence that the experience of God requires many metaphors to describe it, rather than one set of definitions is, again, not to say that there cannot still be one religious experience that is true, as many Christian denominations will claim. It is simply to recognize that the metaphorical structure within the tradition must needs be aware of its own limitations in being a light shining towards the Divine Presence, rather than pretending to be an actual naming of God itself whereby the divine reality can be controlled.

### **How Religious Metaphor is Inherent to Christianity**

Though some rather huge complications involved in accepting a metaphorical theory of reality have been mentioned, there are several ways in which Christianity has long accepted it.

The first example would be that of the parables. The New Testament, the only section of Scriptures that is specific to the Christian religion, is chock full of parables. Jesus gives to his disciples stories that are seemingly of the slice-of-life genre, and turns them with a specific interpretation in order to explain a specific theological concept or social argument in light of the teachings of His Father. As McFague argues, "...metaphorical theology is appropriate and

necessary for two reasons: metaphor is the way we think, and it is the way the parables...work” (McFague, pg. 31). So as much as the Scriptures may seem to present God’s Word in specific words and phrases, the argument for a metaphorical view of the Bible points out that even Jesus was convinced that the best way to spread the experience of God the Father was through letting the faithful feel the words in their own metaphorical terms- in speaking of the Temple, of the need for water, in terms of the social hierarchy a la mode-, in terms of farming.

Moreover, Jesus often provides more than one parable through which to illustrate his point. This suggests that the Savior was aware that “many metaphors and models” were necessary, and that “to avoid idolatry and...attempt to express the richness and variety of the divine-human relationship” He could not simply give one end-all, be-all story (McFague, pg 20). As a teacher, Jesus came in order to refresh and renew humanity’s relationship with their Creator, and in doing so left a blueprint that gave humanity permission to look at their current lives, at their current experiences, and see how they could be used to find an understanding of salvation and God’s love. “The parables, brief stories told in the secular language of Jesus’ time, are extended metaphors that say something about the unfamiliar, ‘the kingdom of God’, in terms of the familiar, a narrative of ordinary people doing ordinary things” (McFague, *Models of God*, pg. 50).

We’ve addressed how old metaphors in Christianity rely on the metaphorical structures of ancient cultures, and how Jesus Himself laid the groundwork for adjusting the cultural metaphors of a religion to fit one’s own time. But is that really important in Christianity today? Is studying the old ways as part of one’s own religious experience enough?

## Why Religious Metaphor in Christianity is Important Today

The question is not whether or not Christianity operates through a metaphorical system. It does. We operate here with the assumption that metaphorical reality theory is correct and all-permeating. The question is whether or not the metaphorical structures currently in employ in the Christian religion need to be scrutinized and/or upgraded for our modern sensibilities. We appeal again to the idea that metaphorical structuring is how we come at our own perspectives of reality, and that the structures are dictated by the current experiences of both the individual and the culture reacting and collaborating with one another.

McFague argues that it is this exchange that necessitates a constant reevaluation of Christian metaphor, urging that “the theologian ought not to merely interpret biblical and traditional metaphors and models, but remythologize, to search in contemporary life and its sensibility for images more appropriate to the expression of Christian faith in our time” (McFague, *Models of God*, pg. 33). It is important to note that in this context, McFague is not referring to mythology as a story that contains little truth in its details, and can only be true in its implication. Rather, she used the term to refer to that truth-in-tension that arises when one recognizes the ‘is and is not’ quality of the metaphorical structure put in play. For her, one of the main truths to be held in the Christian religion is a sense of mystery that upholds the sheer otherness of God, which at the same time does not deny God’s closeness to His creation. It is but one of the many things that must remain constant in our discussions of God, and one of the many things complicated by our limited capabilities of discussing God.

Michael J. Borg recognizes that “we cannot talk about God...except with the words, symbols, stories, concepts and categories known to us, for they are the only language we have” (Borg, pg. 22). This may seem obvious, but what is of interest is the more subtle implication that

this recognition carries. If we are to speak of God in the only language we have, it would seem common sense to resist speaking of God in antiquated terms- in a language we had, rather than actively have. McFague points this out when she urges for the creation of modern metaphorical structures, claiming that “the constructive character of theology must be acknowledged [which] becomes of critical importance when the world in which we live is profoundly different from the world in which many of the traditional metaphors and concepts gained currency”(McFague, *Models of God*, pg. 6). When we recognize that the language used to compile the Bible was second nature to the first Christians who received it, we also recognize that using those current metaphors in our wholly new structures carries with it a kind of emptiness. Today’s Christians often receive the Word not in their bones, but in strained echoes, like dying reverberations of history.

How then do we update the metaphorical structures of Christianity today? The answer is not to completely overhaul the system and create a whole new language for it only based on today’s experiences. We recall that metaphorical systems are created in cooperation between the individual and cultural experiences, which are in turn influenced and tightly tied to the histories of both the individual and the community as a whole. As Elizabeth Johnson, a lead feminist theologian, states: “...language about God has a history” ( Johnson pg. 6). Within the Christian community, this includes the long, rich history of the Church from its very beginning, with all of its negative and positive implications. As Borg suggests, “...the historical and metaphorical approaches to reading the Bible need each other” (Borg, pg. 44). So the Bible itself cannot simply be thrown out or rewritten. That would be denying a very important basis for the current metaphorical structures that the Christian community could endeavor to build.

However, the modern Christian belief systems could benefit from the creation of new, modern metaphorical structures outside of the Bible. McFague claims that “the root-metaphor of Christianity is not any one model but a relationship that occurs between God and human beings. Many models are needed to intimate what that relationship is like; none can capture it” (McFague, pg. 190). Therefore, while modern Christians may be mindful of the history of the metaphorical structures that have been used to describe the experience of God, they may be simultaneously encouraged to create new metaphors that retain the original tension of truth while incorporating current individual and cultural experience. In fact, this process seems to be completely necessary if “all our language about God is but metaphors of experiences of relation to God”, and thus Christians must continue to create new metaphors and test the appropriateness of old ones because the nature of the God-metaphors “[prohibits] from absolutizing any models of God” (McFague, pg. 194). This opens current discussion of Christianity, and allows the discussion to transcend ‘intellect’ and ‘theological study’ and flow down into the bones of the modern believer.

Theology that uses the Bible as a historical guide for the metaphors that were, in this view, must “reflect, in tough-minded, concrete ways and in language and thought forms of one’s own time, about what salvation could, would, mean now, to us” (McFague, *Models of God*, pg. 45). This again does not mean simply choosing ‘flowery language’ that would make Christianity more palatable. This means critically selecting from the current metaphorical structures in use the most appropriate metaphors to point at the real relationship between God and Creation in this day and age. McFague warns against selecting metaphors willy-nilly, saying that “if metaphors matter”, as we have been arguing thus far they are, due to their natural function of creating individual and cultural perspectives of reality, “then one must take them seriously at the level at

which they function, that is, at the level of the imaginative picture of God and the world they project” (McFague, *Models of God*, pg. 65). There must be an acknowledgement of the fact that the way Christians view their relationship with God is going to parallel with the way Christians view their relationship with one another and with God’s creation. As Johnson posits: “...the symbol of God functions as the primary symbol of the whole religious system, the ultimate point of reference for understanding experience, life, and the world....Speech about God shapes the life orientation not only of the corporate faith community but in this matrix guides its individual members as well” (Johnson pg. 4). Therefore, when selecting metaphors to uphold, reject, or introduce into the metaphorical structure of Christianity, one ought to consider both the contribution of the metaphor to the truth-tension of the structure of the whole, and the possible actions and/or reactions that come out of the tension that that specific metaphor creates.

There cannot be a fear of testing continuously these metaphorical structures of God on the grounds that doing so would trivialize the experience of God. Instead, “...metaphors of God, far from reducing God to what we understand, underscore by their multiplicity and lack of fit the unknowability of God” (McFague, *Models of God*, pg 97). It is only through recognizing the metaphorical nature of our struggle to relate our own individual and cultural experiences of God in the Christian context that we resist the urge to simplify God into a set of rules in stone. Rather, we acknowledge that God is continuously offering experiences of Himself even today, and that said experiences can only truly be encapsulated by a language all their own.

### **III. What is Catholic Metaphor?**

We now delve ever deeper into the real world consequences of accepting metaphorical reality theory within a religious context. In earlier sections, we applied, in broad terms, what this acceptance may mean for religion in general. We then narrowed this down to a Christian worldview. We will now narrow this even further and take a look at how accepting metaphorical reality could affect Roman Catholicism.

#### **The Catholic Challenge**

We begin with the challenge that the Roman Catholic religion inherently presents to an acceptance of metaphorical reality theory. In some circles, people even consider the two to be incompatible. The resistance is understandable. The Roman Catholic religion puts much stock in the reality grounded in her sacraments. A related dispute that continues today in interreligious theological spheres arises from the Catholic insistence on the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the True Blood and True Body of Christ. Suggesting that such religious practice could be affected by a metaphorical perception of reality seems to some to border on sacrilege. Insisting that the language surrounding this profound theory is simply metaphorical can, to today's literalist and fundamentalist society, make it seem as if recognizing metaphorical reality theory would ask Catholics to drop claims to the fundamental truth of the sacraments altogether.



And that's only one of the seven sacraments, with the sacraments themselves being only one part of the larger theological structure.

There are other, subtler, arguments against accepting metaphorical reality theory as well. Some of it involves the current imagery that is used to dictate God's relationship to His Creation. Much of this depicts a God who is highly involved with His Creation, and yet is at the same time above and beyond it. In *Living the Catholic Faith*, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput states, "God reveals Himself to us, not the other way around" (Chaput, pg. 30). When used as an argument against metaphorical reality theory, this can seem to suggest that the current faithful have no means in which to dictate which images for God can be used, as the images from tradition are the only ones currently believed to have been given to the Church as a whole by God. On the same thread, David Yount in his work on prayer, *Breaking Through God's Silence*, warns that "We are made in God's image; God is not made in ours" (Yount, pg. 18). His concern would be in the possibility that accepting a metaphorical reality theory in Catholic practice would encourage a damaging sense of pride on the part of the worshiper who seeks to 'alter' the way they perceive their deity.

Others would find that the attitudes that they fear would accompany an acceptance of metaphorical reality theory to be unpalatable. For one, we recall that metaphorical reality theory demands that the metaphorical structures in employ to be regularly scrutinized from generation to generation to ensure appropriateness. Those who adhere to the belief in an all-present, never-changing God can see this as a move to attempt to 'bring God down to man's level', when "God does not have to be patronized to be accessible" (Yount, pg. 181).

Another criticism would be that the constant shifting of the metaphorical structures puts religion too far into the intellectual realm. This is not to say that metaphorical reality theory is in any way more logical or intellectual than pure faith. Rather, it is to say that there is an honest fear that accepting a metaphorical reality theory would place religion too deeply into the mettle of men's minds and take it wholly out of the mystery that is Creation's relationship with its Creator. As Chaput explains, the intellectual component is "a vital way of knowing both God and the world. Yet, when it becomes the only way of knowing, it ends by attacking, rather than ennobling, the human person" (Chaput, pg. 43). In other words, if the faithful do not allow themselves to let God have a hand in the religious experience, the faith itself is killed and becomes yet another pet project of the mind.

Finally, there is a fear that accepting a metaphorical theory of reality will encourage the devaluation of the images that have been used by the Church for centuries. In *Language, Metaphor and Chalcedon*, Stephen Need warns against this by stating that "Metaphors for God must not proliferate amorously, as if all were of equal value" (Need, pg. 254). This suggests that the current modes of thought contend that there is, indeed, a hierarchy of images in place. If supplanted, through too many metaphors, or all metaphors for God being treated as equal, the entire structure for 'imaging' God could be completely destroyed. This would entail the destruction of the 'communal' nature of the religious experience, as subjectivity would overrule objectivity, which could in turn discourage cooperation between perspectives in the Church. Need also points out the danger of picking out multiple metaphors out of a fresh naiveté, saying that the faithful must "always...be conscious of both the positive and negative contents of metaphor", or risk overlooking an unintended meaning through introducing said kinds of metaphors into the Catholic practice (Need, pg. 254).

These very real hurdles run the risk of rendering metaphorical reality theory entirely useless to the Roman Catholic practice as a specific tenant of Christian faith. So how can the two be reconciled?

### **All Perspective as Metaphorical**

We begin with remembering that accepting metaphorical reality theory into theological thought does not mean that we are to superimpose metaphors into the religious realm, or render current practices as literarily metaphorical. The essence of metaphorical reality asks us to consider that *all* of our perceptions of reality, beyond those that are immediately sensory, are constructed through the use of metaphor. Metaphor, in this context, describes the process through which an abstract or foreign experience is rendered relatable through paralleling the experience to one that is more tangibly available to either the individual or the community who is employing the metaphor.

In the broadest sense of religion, we recall that metaphorical structures are used to describe experiences that are beyond the scope of common human experience. As Ronald Rohlheiser notes in his work regarding rediscovering a felt presence of God, *The Shattered Lantern*, "...the divine reality cannot be grasped through a finite imagination" (Rohlheister, pg. 115). Rather, we take an indescribable experience and make it partially understandable through the process of metaphor; through connecting it to much more accessible individual and cultural

experience. We further this understanding by constructing complete metaphorical structures surrounding abstract or mystical experiences.

Therefore, we are not claiming that the sacraments or beliefs of the Roman Catholic faith are ‘merely symbolic’ and contain only half-truths. Rather, we contend that the Roman Catholic faith contains as much truth as is available to it through the language it uses to hold in tension that pure Truth that can only be pointed at through the weaving of a metaphorical network, much like the one in use in daily life. We recognize that “...all concepts and imaginative constructs that we form of God and of God’s ways are fundamentally inadequate to understand God,” a revelation born partially from following a concept intrinsic to all good theology known as the *via negativa* (Rohlfheiser, pg. 121). This approach of apophatic theology is the best gateway through which to apply the validity of metaphorical reality theory in Roman Catholic practice, and also one of the most valid ways in which to discuss its appropriateness.

We also address directly the fear that the acceptance of metaphorical reality theory would ‘water down’ or attempt to alter the nature of God Himself. When we accept that metaphorical reality theory is applied to the perception of reality through the relation of experiences, we also must accept that our metaphors are fundamentally structured around the experience of a component of reality that is beyond simple sensory understanding, and not around the component in and of itself.

Therefore metaphorical reality theory does not concern itself with the truth of who God is in His entirety. Rather, accepting that the perception of the reality of God for both the individual and the faith community is metaphorical, contends only that the metaphors are applicable for the *experience of the relationship between God and the individual, as well as God and the*

*community*. This simultaneously affirms the metaphors and metaphorical structures within the tradition of the Church and encourages the espousal of new, modern metaphors more appropriate to modern metaphorical understanding of current experiences. The goal is not to attempt to define God. The goal is, with our available language, to convey the God-human and God-world relationship both to those within the faith community, and without.

### **How Metaphorical Reality Theory Enhances Catholicism**

We now understand how Catholicism can be compatible with metaphorical reality theory. But compatibility with Catholicism is not a strong enough impetus on its own to ensure any need to recognize metaphorical reality theory. There must be a move from how the two are compatible to how the one may benefit from the other. I will now move to show how accepting metaphorical reality theory can intrinsically enhance the Roman Catholic practice, and enrich its attempts at modern evangelization.

We begin with God Himself, as He can be imagined within the Roman Catholic sphere. One of the phrases that comes to mind is ‘Thy Will Be Done’; the idea that God should be in control of His own Creation, that He is so above humankind that He is not only the author of Goodness, but is Goodness itself. In this context, the correct response to God is “a holy fear, an acceptance of the fact that in our understanding we never capture God or understand the ways of God” (Rohlheiser, pg. 108). A metaphorical theory of reality actively gives us that distance in refusing to claim that it is even capable of defining God in any capacity other than in relationship. For instance, with our earlier metaphor of ‘God as Father’, the conscious

recognition of metaphorical reality theory reminds the faithful that the image is claiming that God ‘is and is not’ Father. It gives the faithful the freedom to discuss what aspects of our concepts of ‘fatherhood’ can be safely applied to the experience of God, and which must be further complicated by additional metaphors, and rejects the idea of gendering or assigning God to an exclusive way of being as defined by human social roles, allowing the faithful to focus on the import of God’s ‘Fatherhood’ in relationship to our personal and communal experiences. For instance! The idea that many people do consider our current images of God to be definitions is concerning. “If language about God is taken literally, the result will be idolatry- an identification of language with the divine” (Need pg. 241). The acceptance of metaphorical reality theory fights against that, and puts language in its place in reference to the reality of God.

In her work on speech about God, *Theo-less-ology*, Carla Locatelli states that “The complexity of the notion of God, or to be precise, of the name of God, makes it clear that issues of naming, designating and signifying cannot be separated from apparently more simple issues of reference” (Locatelli pg. 343 ). In other words, when we even attempt to describe who God is, we must recognize that we are only able to do so in terms of relating our experience of Him with the experiences already available to our understanding. Accepting a metaphorical theory of reality presupposes this process of taking in abstract concepts. It therefore paints the process as more natural for the faithful, breaking down resistance to it. For instance!

We then address the Scriptures and their authority. We’ve already discussed how metaphorical reality theory does not discredit the language of the Bible. Rather, it places said language into the praised history of the faith. The Bible stands as proof that “...the inherent limitations of language did not dissuade God from revealing himself in the Bible in words we can understand”, without discounting the possibility of that kind of revelation happening again

(Yount pg. 102). It recognizes said language as being important as a guideline to where we might find the tensive truth through our own metaphorical structures at the same time as it recognizes that the metaphorical structures of the Scriptures are ill-equipped to serve their full purpose in today's changing world. Where many would confuse the Scriptures to be the only source for the Word of God, metaphorical reality theory forces the faithful to recognize that "the language of God is the experience that God writes into our lives", as was once claimed by St. John of the Cross (Rohlheiser, pg. 185).

There is also the matter of the Church herself. Though it seems Chaput would be wary of accepting metaphorical reality theory as it applies to God, his words make him seem like a prime candidate to see its usefulness in application towards the Church's relationship with her faithful. For one, he recognizes the danger of monopolizing any single experience of the Church's relationship to her faithful or to her God, by stating that "any time we emphasize one image of the Church at the expense of others, we get into trouble" (Chaput, pg. 74). This trouble being the misrepresentation or miscommunication of the Church in her relationships.

According to metaphorical reality theory, this is a problem that arises when a specific metaphor in a metaphorical structure is mistaken for a definition of the source of the experience it is describing. When we accept that the images chosen to represent the Church are in no way designed to be definitions, and are simply a perception of the reality of an experience, we become much more inclined to treat multiple images with equal amounts of respect. We do this because we are made to recognize the creative, collaborative nature of the metaphorical structure, and are able to recognize the significance and the importance of different aspects of one perception as an intrinsic part of our modeling.

And finally, we address where a metaphorical theory of reality is already shines through within the Roman Catholic tradition itself. This can be seen most blatantly in the history of the prophets and saints, whose recorded warnings and vision are written in some of the most beautiful language available to humankind. Abraham Heschel, a Jewish theologian remarks on his analysis of the Hebrew prophets, that

“...the prophet’s use of emotional and imaginative language, concrete in diction, rhythmical in movement, artistic in form, marks his style as poetic...Far from reflecting a state of inner harmony or poise, its style is charged with agitation, anguish, and a spirit of nonacceptance. The prophet’s concern is not with nature but with history, and history is devoid of poise “ (Heschel pg. 6)

The language that the prophets used is seen as taking place in a literary realm outside of sensibility. However, when accepting a metaphorical theory of reality, prophetic language becomes transformative in that it can be recognized as common, relational language that speaks to the modern metaphorical concepts in play in ways that the historical language of the tradition cannot. As Heschel continues, “what seems to be exaggeration is often only a deeper penetration, for the prophets see the world...as transcendent, not immanent truth” (Heschel, pg. 14). The point of the words of the prophets is not to embellish an established description of God, but to continue to make relevant the language used to create the relationship between God and His people.

Barbara Newman, in her analysis of some of the most prominent mystic saints, sees a similar purpose in poetic dream visions, wherein the purpose is “not the replication of conventional saintly experiences by the creation of aesthetically satisfying texts” but rather



enabling readers “to imagine, if not actually experience, the transcendent” (Newman, pg. 4). The point is not pontification, but in sharing an abstract experience in a way that taps into the metaphorical structures in play to connect with others. It places the experience behind the eyes of the audience, rather than before it.

Therefore ignoring metaphorical reality theory is ignoring the way that the Church has operated for centuries, if it is the way in which we couch all perspectives of reality to begin with. Refusing to update the metaphorical structures refuses the faithful of today the experience of knowing their own religious metaphors down in their bones. By continuing to push only antiquated metaphorical structures, we starve the modern Catholic Church a kind of vitality that can only be reached through aligning her with the language of her people today. Noel Rowe, in *The Choice of Nothing*, echoes this sentiment when he admits that he “had become very critical of what [he] saw as an alliance of literalism and dogmatism in the Catholic Church, an alliance which had made it too cocksure of its images of the sacred” (Rowe, pg. 226). If certain members of the Church refuse to continue the process of metaphorical reality, those members deny themselves a unity between modern sensibilities and a vibrancy of faith that is fully and organically developed.

## **Moving Forward**

So how can we apply metaphorical reality theory to the Catholic Church today? We have already discussed why we cannot simply just throw out the Bible. While the Church may need new metaphors in order to fully connect to this age, which does not require tossing out the tradition that gives the new generations its blueprints for existence. For the same reason, the Church needs not throw out the sacraments, the mass, the hierarchies and the current ‘ways of

doing things'. These are all a huge part of the experience of Catholicism, and cannot be easily erased, or necessarily even erased at all.

They can, however, be supplemented. Archbishop Chaput himself commends this when he states one of his own suggestions for revitalizing the faith:

“We need to read about the faith, and not just in Sacred Scripture...Buy good Catholic literature. Read it. Share it with other people. Reading directly helps us grow in Christ, by educating, inspiring, encouraging and motivating our hearts. It gives us key information that is missing from the culture around us.”

(Chaput, pg. 50-51)

Chaput's call for the Catholic faithful to consume good literature comes out of his assumption that, through reading good literature, we are able to grow in Christ through learning more about and being immersed more deeply in our own world. This is possible through the process of our metaphorical building of reality, allowing the faithful to submerge themselves in the many nuances within our modern metaphorical networks. All factions of Catholic Church must recognize the legitimacy of contemporary literature in its work of applying the tenants of the faith to new metaphorical structures that both heavily rely on the structures of the past, and blend with the structures of the future. The Church must allow the natural process of metaphorical reality theory to take place within its structures of learning and teaching the faith, to allow her faithful to feel her truth in their bones. Reading Catholic literature, analyzing the common metaphors of contemporary literature using Catholic metaphorical structures and using Catholic literature to teach, cannot simply be viewed as a hobby that some faithful can do in their

spare time. Rather, it should be actively encouraged within the Church, and placed alongside Bible study and the theological discussions of the Doctors of the Church.

#### **IV. Applied Catholic Metaphorical Theology**

##### **What is Missing?**

We've now discussed metaphorical reality theory and how it is applied to the Christian religion when it is applied to understanding our perspective of reality as a whole. We've gone more specifically and also discussed how this could apply to Catholicism and how the two are compatible. I will now endeavor to discuss why this would be specifically beneficial, above and beyond what is merely companionable.

Plenty of current movements in Catholicism have been addressing an internal need for new language within the Church. The most obvious would be the recent retranslation of the English mass parts. Another would be the labelling of current developments in theology, such as liberation, feminist, womanist, Latin@, etc. These disparate movements may address different issues within the Church's diverse constituents, but they coalesce at the same point- a dis-ease with the way that the Church speaks of, and therefore acts toward, certain members of her community.

Seeing the world from the view of metaphorical reality theory, we recognize that the disparateness comes, in part, from our misconception that language, especially language of theology and the divine, is in and of itself absolute. It comes from the resistance to work with a changing of possible perspectives feeding into the Church as a whole, and from the clinging to antiquated metaphorical structures that can actually harm individual members or cultures within the larger Church community. This in turn ensures that the Church spins its wheels attempting to explain or defend the old structures, rather than relating and translating them into newer structures that encompass newer experiences. In this process, the Church fights to remember what it is that she was trying to say through historical study, rather than bringing the Church into the perspective of reality in the now.

American members of the Church could benefit from self-awareness of their own place in the larger metaphorical processes of perceiving reality. Rather than attempting to progress within the Church in smaller sub-communities trying to make themselves heard over other voices, a shift in the way that the Church speaks about herself and her members would create more complete structures through which to have dialogue. It would span the bridges in discussion currently barred by disparate experiences in modernity that are hard to translate into the metaphorical structures of the Bible without first correctly spanning the purpose of the original structure through history, into the structures of today.

It would be foolish to assume that this would mean re-writing the Bible, or abandoning the Bible altogether in order to create a similar work that would be more comparable to today's metaphorical structures. For reasons already outlined, we know that this is both unnecessary and needlessly destructive. So how do we apply an awareness of metaphorical reality theory to Catholicism today?

## **Scriptures, Doctors and Poetry, Oh My**

In her own religious examinations, Kathleen Norris, a poet and essayist well versed in both Protestant and Catholic traditions, has come to some of the same conclusions as me. Namely, that to “inhabit” her own faith, she had to “rebuild [her] religious vocabulary. The words had to become real to [her], in an existential sense” (Norris, *Amazing Grace* pg. 3). Her experience of this, however, was not to completely uproot and change the traditional sources of knowledge in the faith structures she operated under (most notably, Benedictine practices). Rather, Norris points to a kind of third option- enhancing the metaphorical structures of the past *alongside* newer structures through pairing theological concepts and Biblical teaching with modern storytelling, in her experience through both prose and poetry.

This is to say that we are still beholden to Scriptures, the Magisterium, and to the teachings of the Doctors of the Church, but we are entirely free to discuss the implications of these encounters with God in our own language. Furthermore, our modern discussions are not to be seen as secondary or lesser in importance than those historical guideposts, but are to be regarded as on par and just as spiritually important in our current relationships with God and His Church. As the metaphorical structures of the past serve as guidelines through which to puzzle out our own experiences of God and the Church in the here and now, we must focus our work on ensuring that the Word of God and the experience of Him is accessible and understandable at the metaphorical structures in which we today live.

Cardinal Newman once said that “the All-wise, All-knowing God cannot speak without meaning many things at once”. Groups of the faithful have misused this kind of thinking to justify the upholding of Scripture as being unchanging in its exact wording. However, “...it is

the church itself that has fostered a narrowing of the imagination that is tantamount to heresy” according to Norris (Norris, *Amazing Grace*, pg. 201). While God Himself may speak with many meanings, it is near blasphemy to assume that single human conduits are capable, for all time, of incarnating God into any language that is ever subject to change and alteration. The result is a different kind of language that revolves only around the historical praxis of the religion, and can only truly be reached through heavy study and discussion. For the average layperson, this kind of intense scrutiny of one’s own religion is almost impossible, when you take in consideration time and educational restraints.

Norris’ suggestion is to immerse people in stories “that speak vividly of the human in relation to the holy” in order to “Serve as a corrective to religious code language” (Norris, *Amazing Grace*, pg. 213). For instance, in my own work with religious poetic expression, I have found it exceedingly powerful to align my own experiences with those from the Bible. Using my own experiences as the basis for metaphors for which to speak of God, who from my personal experience is equal to my positive experiences of pressure, calm and dryness, I have been able to speak of God in a way that bypasses the academic feel of such terms as ‘eschaton’ and brings the experience home to all of the ways in which to experience the coming ‘end times’ in a way that is grounded in modern experience and metaphors for those experiences, opening up the accessibility of religious discussion to all levels of the Church.

This would be my idea of creating a space for modern believers to be given the opportunity to feel the Word of God in their bones, rather than letting them float in and out of their ears. Norris says that “in worship, disparate people seek a unity far greater than the sum of themselves but don’t have much control over how, or if, this happens” (Norris, *Amazing Grace*, pg. 245). Noting the large similarity between this and her definition of what metaphor is- unity

through the tension of bringing together two disparate experiences- Norris is implicitly showcasing the importance of using metaphoric creative processes in order to properly experience God in the here and now. What works at the smallest unit of metaphorical reality theory expands into the larger concepts- pulling together the experiences of all kinds of peoples and cultures in order to understand and feel the presence of the One True God in all His Creation.

This is not to be blasphemous, or to disregard the importance of the words of Scripture, or of Holy Authority. It is to recognize that“...the words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just like the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, and became like men” (Norris, *Amazing Grace*, pg. 310). The words we use, and have used, to create perceptions of how we are relating to the experience of God are important both at the time of conception and continuing. That does not diminish the continuing importance of insisting that the tensive Truth held by the multitude of metaphors within the Catholic structure be re-updated and reexamined for relevancy. Old metaphorical structures can continue to remain important when contextualized and put in their proper realm of importance. Just as the insistence of Jesus’ and God’s continued incarnation into the midst of humankind is today, so should our insistence of the acceptance of His continued incarnation into our metaphorical structures of modernity.

### **Applying Metaphorical Reality Theory to Catholic Praxis**

Since metaphorical structures dictate the way we receive and react to reality, it makes sense that the Catholic Church has been progressing through the manipulation of said metaphors.

The history of the Church, then, is teeming of holy men and women who attempt to bring the saving experience of God into the everyday lives of lay people.

The most obvious example would be in the Psalms of the Old Testament. Norris points out that “even when the Psalms are at their most ecstatic” or frenzied with divine revelations, “they convey holiness not with abstraction but with images from the world we know: rivers clap their hands, hills dance like yearling sheep” (Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, pg. 6). Though the image of ‘yearling sheep’ may not be as widespread and readily understandable by the faithful today, the idea that the psalmists’ first recourse is to speak of their own experiences of God in tension with the experiences of the audience they are attempting to reach highlights the purpose and process of a metaphorical theory of reality.

When searching for the kind of metaphor that is most effective, both to write and to absorb into one’s own religious experience, Norris offers these guidelines:

Metaphor is valuable to us precisely because it is not vapid, not a blank word such as “reality” that has no grounding in the five senses. Metaphor draws on images from the natural world, from our sense, and from the world of human social structures, and yokes them to psychological and spiritual realities in such a way that we’re often left gasping; we have no way to fully explain a metaphor’s power, it simply *is*. (Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, pg 156) .

### **Specific Application for the Writer**

I now want to narrow my focus again in order to explore the specific application of metaphorical reality theory to the separate spheres of those who are to create the new metaphorical structures, and those who are to digest and analyze the new offerings.



We begin with writers who are one group of many tasked with the job of fostering new metaphorical structures from within which to speak of experiences of God. The first thing for Catholic writers seeking to participate in this endeavor is to remember that "...writing teaches us to recognize when we have reached the limits of our language, and our knowing, and are dependent on our senses to 'know' for us" (Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, pg. 11). That is, that writers seeking to renew metaphorical structures in order for Catholicism to expand its connections, cannot do so from the standpoint that the words, either the prose or the poetry is fully equal to the reality being described. Rather, the writer must be self-aware that his or her work is nothing but a metaphor for an experience that must bolster the tensive Truth being held by the multitude of other metaphors either already present or concurrently being created, or replacing an outdated metaphor that no longer applies. Rather than attempting to create an answer or a definition, writers must be concerned with relating an experience through concepts relatable to both the individual within the Church and the many sub-cultures within and without the Church community.

This means that the new metaphors being created must never presume that they can exist successfully without acknowledging their own function as a 'is and is not' descriptor of an experience with God. Noel Rowe, an Australian poet who was also a Catholic priest in the Marist order, warns that God-speak "cannot afford to let its identifying function overrule its dis-identifying function. It cannot afford, it cannot sustain, the presumption of referentialism nor the arrogance of literalism. Somewhat like Christ, it must empty itself and take up its cross" (Rowe, pg. 227). The writer who seeks to alter the metaphorical structure of religious speak must be humble. Writers must recognize the limits of their own language in order to subvert and correct

the current disorder of thought that comes from utilizing outdated metaphorical structures in modernity.

Writers must be privy to the arguments and the concerns of all of the people of the Church. They must see how the current metaphorical structures have, through the changing of language and images used for discourse, been warped and misused to oppress peoples of the Church at a rate incompatible with the amount of knowledge we now possess regarding globalization and the dignity of the human person in all forms. Refusing to alter our metaphors to allow for the evolution of our perception of reality effectively results in an exclusion of minorities who previously had no access to the teachings of Catholic Church, or who were oppressed for other reasons that the Church refused to make her concern. Rowe argues that “...the degree to which a religious institution reduces its truth to its language, the extent to which it becomes idolatrous, is the degree to which it loses real sympathy for those it sees as ‘different’, ‘marginalised’, ‘deviant’, ‘disobedient’,” (Rowe, Pg. 228). When the Catholic writer assumes that all old metaphors are sufficient, or seeks to create new metaphors without first seeking to test the implications, positive and negative, of their metaphors, they run the risk of continuing to oppress and refuse dignity to many of God’s children. Therefore, the Catholic writer must ask her or himself what aspect of the experience of God they are wishing to portray, and then from there decide whether or not their new or bolstered metaphor is sufficient to uphold that experience without the negativity that oppresses others, or if they should destroy or refuse to create said metaphor. The writer must not assume that they are changing the truth of the Church, but rather, that he or she is opening the truth of the Church, broadening the scope of her accessibility; shining her light more fully on the world.

The Catholic writer is not attempting to contain Catholicism in their writing, but rather are engaging with the Tradition through threading their way through existing metaphorical structures and attaching them to new, vibrant metaphors that open the world up to the meaning of the experience of God in today's world. As Rowe puts it, "...metaphor does not so much gather meaning to the centre as project it to the edges, as religion does not so much contain or protect mystery as be fractured by it" (Rowe, pg. 228). In applying this to Catholic writing, the writer should make themselves open to collaboration within the metaphorical structure, to allow their work to become a vehicle through which other members of the Church can have their own experience of God- not simply a projection of the writer's own experience.

### **Specific Application for the Reader**

On the other end, Norris also reminds us that "...poets speak with no authority but that which the reader is willing to grant them" (Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, pg. 37). That is to say that the audience of these new metaphors, the Catholic laypeople and faithful, have their own part to play in the implementation of any new metaphorical structures within the Church.

Accepting a metaphorical reality theory rather than a literalist view of the world, the layperson in turn agrees to understand that the metaphorical structures are not definitions, but descriptions of an experience. The reader allows themselves to be engrossed in 'negative capability', which, according to John Keats is being "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries" and "doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". The reader must let go of the idea that the writer is there to give them any sort of answer to their own experience

with God, and accept that the writer themselves are only attempting to relate via metaphor their own experiences with God, both individual and cultural.

The reader, the layperson and faithful, "...when seeking to be at home in himself and with God in solitude and silence...knows that metaphors, which insist on connecting disparate elements in ways that the reasoning mind resists, will be more of use than any treatise" (Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, pg. 157). The job is not to attempt to fit the new metaphors into the realm of reason, but to allow the metaphors to work within the structure that is already natural to oneself. To absorb them into the bones.

This is not to say that the audience is not to think critically about the metaphors being used. Part of the job of the reader is to look at something like the Psalms and ask: "What hidden bond exists between the word of wrath and the word of compassion, between 'consuming fire' and 'everlasting love'?" (Heschel, pg. 23). The reader of Catholic metaphors must look at the work being presented and think about the metaphors that are being used. Not as definitions, but as metaphors- what is being highlighted? What is being hidden? Where does this metaphor fit in the overall tensive structure?

The important thing to remember about implementing an awareness of the metaphorical reality theory is that it is a collaborative process between creators and receptors.

## **V. Catholic Metaphorical Theology In Fiction and Poetry**

*“Imagination is not a talent of some men but the health of all men”*

-Neil Hurley

### **Literature**

We have come to the juncture where we may accept that the promotion of Catholic literature, and analyzing modern literature, may be essential to furthering the Catholic message in today's world. But what does that mean, exactly? How should the literature be written and analyzed? What can be written or analyzed? What does this lens mean for literature in general?

Neil Hurley, in his piece on ‘Liberation Theology and New York City Fiction’, claims that literature can “help theology to perform its judgmental task even over ‘organized religions’ and help that same theology to avoid a type of imperialism which superimposes normative thinking and imperatives onto those areas of life under judgment” and that “theology and literature are help-mates” (Hurley pg. 339). Though a Catholic metaphorical reality theory would argue that literature does not instruct over the traditions of Catholicism, but rather serves it through opening up the understanding of it, it is noted that the idea of translating major concepts of Catholicism into ‘normative’ metaphorical structures is a main component of the theory. Therefore it stands that the first consideration in melding Catholicism with modern fiction is the idea that the fiction being written or being analyzed must be written from the normative metaphorical structures of *today*.

Though it may be comforting and noble to encourage parishioners to read from *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *The Hobbit*, due to their obvious Christian themes, the books were written fifty-seven and seventy-six years ago, respectively. They came from times consumed with different wars, rights movements, threats and technology. While they may prove to relate relatively well to today’s concerns, they do not address them from a vantage point that could have even imagined the makeup of today’s reality. The study of classics brings the benefit of being familiar with one’s own history, and a way through which we can connect to the richness of our traditions- why they were created, why they continue, what we are attempting to achieve. However there is little meaning in it if there is not, concurrently, a concrete acknowledgement of what is happening in the present.

In ‘Intending Metaphors’, Andrew Hass outlines the benefits of promoting the creation and consumption of more modern literature, going as far as to argue that putting religion together

with new literature makes the practice of faith more fertile and productive because “it’s ground keeps giving way...the metaphors keep falling short. And so we are forced to keep coming up with new angles, new directions, new images- the metaphors are always changing” (Hass pg. 184). In other words, modern literature creates a space through which faith and religion may actively engage with the world around itself through integrating its own language into the language being born out of new experiences and challenges. Rather than relying on rules applied to old, outdated circumstances, it allows the faithful to apply more accurately the teachings of Tradition to the reality of today’s world.

Hence when Neil Hurley advocated for more mainstream consumption of the modern fiction of his own city through his essays, he was advocating for the real, lived and shared experiences of people in his own reality to be over, or at least on par, with the handed down experiences of the early Christians of the first century. Focusing mainly on liberation theology, Hurley claims that “theology finds a ready ally in literature” because of its ability to “immerse ourselves in the inner reality of those characters described in order to help us form a spiritual judgment regarding the total impact of an environment” (Hurley, pg. 339). The faithful do not find themselves straining to decipher how the troubles of an ancient shepherd, or even World War era school boys, relates to their suffering with the growing wage gap and access to life changing medicines and instantly gratifying technology.

As the Bible itself was a “miraculous and divine act of drawing order out of emptiness and chaos” through applying the experience of God to the felt experiences of an entire culture, so must we regard today’s literature (Hurley, pg. 348). This is not to say that modern literature could ever equal the importance of Scripture to the tradition. It is more to say that we must elevate the value of consuming and creating newer metaphors as similarly important in the faith

life of the modern Christian. If God is in the everywhere, why can't we find Him in the exploration of today's individual or cultural yearnings for a different world, or questionings about what love and death are all about? Hurley frames this by asking if it is "too far-fetched to see in fiction an enlarged reflecting mirror of what we really are, what we really do" within which we create a "rhetoric of possibilities, yet-to-be-discovered alternatives" (Hurley, pg. 359). In this, modern literature as held up as a 'help-mate' to religion must be aware of itself as a reflector of inner turmoil and tranquility. It must seek to be honest, through either stating upright or parodying the mindset of a generation in a myriad of different situations. It must be read as such.

And the reading material must be diverse. In order to catch up to the reality of globalization in our world, we must step out of our boundaries of reading the literature of only one culture. We must read the works of Catholics in America, Catholics in Europe, Catholics in Asia and Africa alike. Catholics must read the literature of Protestants, Buddhists, Jews, Pagans, Atheists, Pantheists and those who are Islamic. We must analyze the works of many Americans, Europeans, Asians and Africans in the light of the truth of our faith- how it coheres, and where it jars- in order to truly understand the ways that we are approaching reality from different angles. A tenant of metaphorical reality theory stresses that "...truths expressible in one language may not be translatable into another, since each language may carve up the world in different ways" (Lakoff & Johnson, pg. 204). Therefore, rather than attempting to begin dialogue with other cultures and faiths through the exchanging of 'truths', it would be more appropriate to exchange experiences- through analyzing the metaphorical structures influenced by those experiences and finding a new thread of metaphors that can relate one structure to another.



In this, we find a much more specific and successful ‘unity’, without the pretension of assuming that all cultures and experiences can be substituted for any other. This methodology protects the individual and the separate cultures and celebrates the diversity into which we were Created, while at the same time acknowledging the sameness that can be achieved through respect and understanding. Like in literature, we “successfully write an eternal, infinite God into a story”, into the ongoing story of humankind attempting to relate to one another, and we “demonstrate how exactly He can interact with this limited, time-bound world of ours” (Fallen 39). We appreciate without appropriation, and we begin to understand.

### **Fiction (Specific)**

We will now delve into more specific examples of fiction being analyzed and used for religious purposes. Though it has been previously stated in this paper that the novels that have already been used such in past decades are not as useful in today’s day and age, we will be taking a look at a couple of dated novels in order to describe how those novels spoke to their own time period, in order to find a clearer understanding as to how today’s fiction must speak to its own people. We will also allow examples from all of Christian tradition, as many outside of the Catholic tradition have important lessons to teach would-be Catholic writers today.

#### *Ignazio Silone*

*Bread and Wine* by Ignazio Silone was first published in 1936 in response to fascism and Stalinism while the author was in exile from Mussolini’s Italy. In it, an exiled member of the Communist party, Pietro Spina, returns to fascist Italy disguised as a priest, and ends up finding meaning for his life not through politics or high religion, but through the peasants of the countryside.

In analyzing this iconic work of Silone's, Thomas Moylan delves into how, through narrative, Silone is capable of examining the praxis of liberation theology, rather than the "confidant and militant documents" of its theory (Moylan pg 105). As Hurley has argued regarding modern New York City fiction, Moylan argues for the effectiveness of Silone's story in making theology accessible to those outside of the field of theological study. Silone "directly experiments with an intersection of the religious and political that is immersed in popular experience" and "works within the diffused religious culture of common people" (Moylan, pg 106, 109). In effect, Silone went a step further than simply creating or mimicking a theory that blankets itself over an entire group of people. Rather, he created a group of characters, all of whom had their own backstory, motives, cultural and individual makeup, and tested them according to what their own perspective on theology would be, whether or not they themselves were truly aware of it.

Moylan points out that Silone is both applying theology through a "rereading of Scripture and Church teaching towards a new sense of engagement with the concrete reality of the time" through his protagonist's experiences with the peasantry, as well as attempting to illuminate the central tenants of liberation theology, both in negative and positive lights (Moylan, pg 110). While Silone attempts to figure out how liberation theology applies to countries affected by Stalinism and fascism, his character, Spina, "eventually realizes that he must work within the diffused religious culture of the people in order to create a narrative of empowerment and self-determination that would carry meaning for them" (Moylan, pg. 114). In other words, Spina recognizes that in order to make theology true for the peasants, he doesn't need to spend hours upon hours trying to prove that the theology is true. He simply needs to frame the theology in the metaphorical structures that the people understand in their bones.

Thus Silone's *Bread and Wine* is an example of fiction that is used to directly apply theology to a modern situation through 'testing' it in a created world that uses our metaphorical structures to come alive. This kind of weaving a specific theological concept into the narrative can be rather heavy-handed, and yet is effective.

### *C.S. Lewis*

C.S. Lewis is another author who makes no attempt to hide the Christology in his fiction. Beginning in the 1930's with *The Pilgrim's Regress*, Lewis' work is overtly used in order to further his own arguments and teachings regarding Christianity as a whole. However, unlike Silone, C.S. Lewis rarely used fiction to illuminate how to apply theology to today's world (though he did quite plainly in many of his essays and prose works).

Rather, C.S. Lewis was the kind of author who used fiction as a way to illuminate entire theological concepts in the abstract. This might seem redundant when we remember that metaphorical reality theory claims that all theological concepts are abstract in that they describe experiences that are in no way scientifically tangible. However, C.S. Lewis strove to create an abstract, fantastical view of theological concepts that fit into the metaphorical structures of his day- using symbols from popular fairy-tales and widely known cultural myths interwoven with a handful of children from his own world.

Robert Palma, in his analysis of Lewis' work 'Use of Analogy', calls the novels 'parables'. He claims he does so because "the term itself signifies brief stories thrown alongside the kingdom of God and Christian moral life, realities also described elsewhere more literally and conceptually" (Palma, pg. 94). These 'brief stories' conjure up, simultaneously, images that are on par with the normative images of the metaphorical structure of Lewis' own day, and the

images that were conjured by Scripture. Thus Lewis was capable of creating a world of fantasy in which Biblical concept could be understood without being studied, because they appealed first to the imagination, rather than the intellect, of the faithful. His goal was not to supplant Scriptures, nor to become a kind of side consideration in the life of the faithful. Rather, it was to make the Scriptures more accessible to one's very soul through the shifting of the metaphorical constructs while retaining the link to ancient structures long since outdated.

### *Rose Terry Cooke*

Rose Terry Cooke was an American writer who began publishing in the 1950's. In her prose and poetry alike, she strove to paint a picture of contemporary New Englanders that was wholly steeped in the practices of their personal faith life. Her characters were less authority figures than they were the everyday faithful who could, in their own way, spout theology as good as any Church elder. She strove to write her characters in such a way that she could emphasize that "...spiritual insight is available even to the theologically marginalized and untutored" (Holly, pg. 680). In her analysis of Cooke's fiction, Carol Holly, a noted scholar in the realm of twentieth-century American female writers, has noted that Cooke was an author who was focused on educating neither converts nor teaching difficult concepts of theology to her readers. Rather, "she forges a connection between the mission of the regenerated Christian and that of the Christian nation"- in effect, rejuvenating the private practices of the Christian faithful through depicting practical applications of commonly-known theology into many disparate situations (Holly pg. 688). Cooke is not afraid to challenge the power structure of her day through switching the power roles in a way that was both shocking and yet strangely reassuring to her readers. For example, Cooke in several stories has respected preachers who are painted as "abusive men in power" talked back to by female characters who berate them in the name of

clarifying for everyone concerned “readers of the story included- the true meaning of Christianity” by means of charity and compassion (Holly, pg. 694).

Again, through allowing theology to play out in fictional space, Cooke creates a “textual community of believers” who are “inspired by those publications to promote their own and others’ progress in holiness” through being given more modern, contemporary guidelines to follow when faced with the question of how to behave as a faithful Christian (Holly, pg 701). Rather than dealing with hypotheticals from thousands of years in the past, Cooke allows her readers to soak in stories absorbed in their own culture and their own metaphorical structures of self and reality, and builds from there. This use of fiction to enrich the personal lives of the committed Christian is one that should be taken into account for those wishing to look for material to enrich their own faith, or for those wishing to create new material for the faithful of this age.

### *Penelope Aubin*

Penelope Aubin was an English writer who began publication in the early 1700s. A devout Christian, she was driven to write in a mix of the “two supremely popular genres of her day- travel fiction and the amatory novel” (Gollapudi, pg. 669). Travel fiction, or any story that focused on adventures to the exotic third world countries that were being newly discovered and colonized, tended to be the realm of male protagonists. Aubin broke tradition in that respect through making the protagonists of her travel fiction unapologetically female- bastions of contemporary notions of Christian virtue, and fiercely defensive of said traits. Through this, she took the protagonists of amatory novels, or the romance novels that most often had women at their helm, and transported them and their subjects of desire out of the common English tropes and into the thick of imaginative action.

In this, Aubin was never attempting to lay out any kind of theology, foster any specific tenant of Christianity, or convert any nonbelievers. Rather, her focus was on the female protagonist and how the Christian emphasis on purity could serve as a backbone from which to realistically build strong female adventurers. Apurna Gollapudi notes that “in emphasizing chastity in her heroines, [Aubin] frequently endows them with a surprising potential for strength, endurance, and fierce resourcefulness that is quite different from the vulnerability wrought by sexual desire in the women of amatory fiction” (Gollapudi, pg. 670). In defense of their own virtue, Aubin’s characters can be seen escaping or killing their own captors, or using only their wits to defend themselves against becoming sexually objectified or violated by male characters.

Aubin’s fiction, then, displays an encouraging way to look at fiction. Aubin in her female characters showed a way that Christianity is of use to the faithful in a way that extends beyond one’s faith life and into a practical application that is so complete that it is near undiscernible from natural thought or action. Her fiction was of the most popular genre of her day, in the way that paranormal romances or dystopian science fiction would be thought of today, ensuring that the strength of her characters would be noted not just by scholars, but by the masses seeking entertainment. Her eighteenth century example provides us with a map from which we can discern today how to look at popular fiction with a Catholic Christian eye. We can ask ourselves what kinds of fiction outside of the inspirational genre fosters Catholic Christian values, and which ones do not, without having to limit ourselves to those that specifically call upon the name of Christ or the Church’s teachings. We can write fiction, and locate fiction, that is equally entertaining and in line with a Christian upbringing. We can use popular culture, and the most popular of our modern metaphorical structures, to teach and nurture the next generation of faithful.

## Poetry (Specific)

Poetry as well has a long standing tradition in its potential for illustrating theological concepts or aiding the faithful in putting words to their worship.

### *John Milton*

John Milton, most known for his work with *Paradise Lost*, is a good place to begin when talking about poetry and theology. Writing in the early 1600's, he set out with his exceptional intelligence to write an epic poem dedicated to the story of the Fall of Man, in which he would also explain certain tenants of his own philosophy and theology in terms understandable by allegory. Milton had already penned a rather more straight-forward theological piece with *De Doctrina*.

Samuel Fallen, in his analysis of *Paradise Lost*, posits that the latter had to have been written because “systematic theology is a better way to deal with conceptual ‘what’ questions” while “narrative seems to have struck him as a more effective way to address practical ‘how’ questions” (Fallen, pg. 35). In other words, Milton recognized where the ‘code language’ of religion was doomed to fail in its inability to fully bridge itself into the metaphorical structures that made up his contemporary perception of reality, both as an individual and as a member of several communal wholes (of religion, culture, etc.), and decided that verse was a more appropriate way in which to put his thoughts into the minds of his readers.

Fallen claims that one of the central projects of Milton's *Paradise Lost* “is to put forward a coherent theory of how an eternal, infinite God interacts with the limited world He created, or at least of how we can legitimately imagine Him doing so” (Fallen, pg. 36). In this, Milton's epic is an attempt to reclaim the experience of God in the modern imagination- or, put in another way,

to reclaim the experience of God inside the context of the metaphorical constructs that make up the perspective of reality that Milton is capable of creating from. In this, the succinctness of poetry versus the rambling, unmetered style of fiction provides the most direct link to the metaphorical structures by being hyper-aware of their existence within the piece itself. Thus Fallen argues that "...the notion of *Paradise Lost* as a literary container for a predetermined theology should be replaced with a model in which treatise and poem approach similar problems in different ways" (Fallen, pg. 36). Milton's poetry is not a way to explain theology in a way that is 'prettier' or simply more palatable than a straightforward theological document. It is a way in which to discuss theology in a way that *cannot be done otherwise while saying the same thing*.

#### *Gerard Manley Hopkins*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Jesuit priest of the late 1800's, provides an example of religious poetry that is less an attempt to work out theology and more of a way in which to describe the experience of God in one person's life to others in a way that is instructive, enriching, and encouraging.

David Downes, a Regis alum who dedicated his dissertation to the poetry of Hopkins, claims that Hopkins "was preoccupied with the task of opening up the language of the New Testament so that his hearers might enter into spiritual contact with Christian consciousness" (Downes 57). While Hopkins was in a position, as a priest, to simply preach his own religious experience to his congregations, or pen religious how-to's like many priests do today, he knew instinctively that it was not enough. There is a large difference between explaining theological concepts to a flock, and inviting them to feel it for themselves. Instruction and education is all well and good, but Hopkins made it his poetic mission to share his own religious experience in a way that could be felt down in the bones, no explanation needed. Rather than tell people what



kind of reality they should be feeling, Hopkins “proffers a newly opened reality that elevates the soul into the possibility of a new selfhood based upon forgiving love,” which was, in one sense, one of the most life-giving tenants of the Catholic faith (Downes 71). Hopkins ‘walks the walk’ in his own words, giving linguistic structure to an impossibly complex experience, rather than attempting to pin it and water it down. He retains divine wonder in his verses, inviting others to share in the glory as well.

Whereas Milton’s poetry is set up to explain theology, or the intellectual codification and guidelines by which we create an understanding of the Church and her relation to God, Hopkins’ poetry relates the experience of the individual to God Himself. His is an example of newly constructed metaphors that speak to a personal experience in order to encourage further personal experiences through the opening up of previously untested, or undervalued metaphors within the modern metaphorical structure.

## **VI. Conclusion: Implementing New Perspectives**

In examining the ways in which fiction and poetry have been used to enrich the lives of Christians in the past, and the ways in which analysis has yielded up the authors' processes in a way that we can mimic in the today, we are now charged with applying what we've learned to our future endeavors in spreading the Good News of the Gospel. In response to Pope Francis' call for rejuvenation in spreading the gospel, it is my belief that adopting metaphorical reality theory into our religious dialogues allows us to "lower the defenses, to open the doors of one's home and to offer warmth" (Francis & Skorka, xiv). Through branching out from dogma and Scripture and delving instead into the heart of today's metaphorical structures, we allow faith to engage us more personally, to respond to "a 'Thou' who calls us by name" (Francis, 18). Through accepting metaphorical reality theory, we find that this is possible without making any claims to altering the central Truths of the Church. At the same time, this allows the faithful the freedom to speak of the Truth in ways that reach deep down into their own experiences, both individual and cultural.

In my own works, I have the hope that my personal experiences will have the effect of opening up current metaphors in ways that speak to others who have had experiences similar to my own that are not fully explored in the modern Church in light of evolving metaphorical structures. From my position as an educated Catholic woman, from my position as a victim of abuse, sexual assault and rape, and from my position as an autistic individual it is my hope that through my own creation of metaphors that speak to my experience of God through the metaphors available to me in my immediate community will add to the nuanced description of our experience of God as a whole. Through this, it is my belief that we will progress, through my efforts and the efforts of Catholic writers everywhere, continuing to reach towards God in a way that is always open to His direction, to His continued revelation, and to His everlasting grace.

The creation and consumption of new Catholic fiction and poetry invites an evangelization of the whole person- creatively, intellectually, and spiritually. It is a calling out in love, as Pope Francis has defined in *Lumen Fidei* that love is “a relational way of viewing the world...vision through the eyes of another, and a shared vision of all that exists” (Francis, 49). To spread the gospel to all the world, in love, we must work cooperatively to bring each other to new perspectives of reality. We must work towards that tensive Truth that holds within it the pinnacle experience of God through creatively challenging the metaphorical structures through which we order our lives. We must critique incomplete perspectives of the past, while holding true to our roots as we push forward for more understanding, more growth; more love. We must look at our faith through the light of metaphor, and be unafraid of the ways in which that transforms ourselves and the ways in which we are capable of relating to our world. In that, we may find a new, rejuvenated Church- a new, rejuvenated people, growing and loving continuously towards the future Kingdom.

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