*Pastoral Psychology, Vol. 53, No. 3, January 2005 (© 2005)*
DOI: 10.1007/s11089-004-0554-5

# Metaphors for God: Why and How Do Our Choices Matter for Humans? The Application of Contemporary Cognitive Linguistics Research to the Debate on God and Metaphor

**Mary Therese DesCamp[1,3] and Eve E. Sweetser[2]**

*This article explores and critiques conservative and liberal theological understandings of metaphor in light of the contemporary research in cognitive linguistics. This assessment is followed by a cognitive examination of the biblical metaphors for God, their unconscious entailments, an assessment of why certain metaphors are more "effective" than others, and a short discussion of the implications of this "effectiveness."*

**KEY WORDS:** metaphor; cognitive linguistics; metaphors for God.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most passionately debated topics among philosophers and theologians in the past twenty years has been the meaning and status of metaphor, and its implications for how we speak about God. At the center of this conversation is the privileged status of masculine metaphors in discourse and worship, and the accompanying question of the appropriateness of alternate language that incorporates a feminine image of God. In order to evaluate this question, we need answers to questions which range beyond theology. If a liturgy is intended to help worshippers reach an appropriate state of mind for spiritual relationship with God,

[1]Mary Therese DesCamp received her Ph.D. in Biblical Studies from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California in 2004, and is ordained as a minister in the United Church of Christ.
[2]Eve E. Sweetser is professor of Linguistics and Cognitive Science at the University of California, Berkeley.
[3]Address correspondence to Mary Therese DesCamp, 24985 Carmel Hills Drive, Carmel, CA 93923; e-mail: revrev@redshift.com.



0031-2789/05/0100-0207/0 © 2005 Springer Science+Business Media, Inc.

it is important to consider what we know about the human mind, and how it may be affected by particular kinds of input.

For the most part, the starting place for metaphorical analysis in theological works has been literary or philosophical criticism; a given scholar's understanding of the function of metaphor seems to be dictated by her or his allegiances. But during the same time period, there has been an explosion in the research in cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics relating to the status and role of metaphorical structures in human thought. To date, little of the evidence brought forward by cognitive analysts of metaphor has been employed in the theological conversation about God.[4]

This article will argue that cognitive linguistics research is indispensable to the theological debate concerning metaphors for God. We will first summarize the positions of several major voices in the theological debate regarding metaphor, and then relate them to the basic results of cognitive metaphor research. We will present cognitively based analyses of Biblical metaphors for God, and finally comment on the implications of our research for theology and worship.

## CONTEMPORARY POSITIONS ON METAPHOR

### What Is Metaphor?

Theologian Sally McFague defines metaphor as an assertion or judgment of similarity, as well as difference, between two thoughts. According to McFague (1982, pp. 37–38), these thoughts are held in permanent tension with one another and are productive of a new reality. This creative tension between thoughts produces an open-ended re-description of reality, which has structural as well as affective power.[5]

Metaphor, in McFague's understanding, is a way of "seeing one thing *as* something else, pretending 'this' is 'that' because we do not know how to think or talk about 'this,' so we use 'that' as a way of saying something about it"(p. 15). Thus, thinking metaphorically means that one is spotting a pre-existing thread of similarity. But similarity alone doesn't mark metaphor: McFague argues that when two thoughts are brought together to form a metaphor, both are changed by the relationship.

For McFague, metaphor is inappropriate usage, a thought that is both true and not true. There is always a "shock and a shock of recognition" (1987, p. 35).[6] She

[4] Brian Wren is the exception to this broad statement. In his 1989 work, *What Language Shall I Borrow?*, he incorporates some early cognitive linguistic metaphor research, especially the claim that embodied human experience gives rise to all human language, including metaphor. Janet Soskice, in *Metaphor and Religious Language*, dismisses the work of Lakoff and Johnson by implying that they confuse word derivation with word meaning (p. 81).

[5] McFague describes her definition as "an amalgam of . . . views" from theorists such as I.A. Richards, Max Black, Douglas Berggen, Walter Ong, Nelson Goodman, and Paul Ricoeur.

[6] One assumes that in McFague's model, the "true" part of a metaphor corresponds to pre-existing similarity.

posits that metaphors go through three stages over time. In the first, metaphors are experienced as unconventional or inappropriate; in the second, they have both literal and metaphorical meaning (i.e., they are insightful); and at the final stage metaphors become commonplace, literalized and dead. These final stage metaphors have become so conventionalized that they take on the quality of definition. McFague thinks of these final stage metaphors as "models" because they are stable and provide a framework for explanation (p. 34).[7]

Janet Soskice differs from McFague slightly when she defines metaphor as a figure of speech in which one speaks of one thing in terms suggestive of another. Soskice cautions that one must not think of metaphor in terms of the meaning of individual words, but rather as a sum of the meaning of a complete utterance in context. She sees not two subjects but two networks of meaning that are brought together in order to create new meaning. While McFague insists on the connection between two thoughts which are brought into being by metaphor, to Soskice a metaphor is a form of language use, a linguistic phenomenon, with a unity of subject matter, and which draws upon two or more sets of *associations* connected with the two linguistic domains involved. Soskice specifically rejects the idea, however, that metaphor can be primarily a mental act or process (1985, pp. 15–16).

Roland Frye (1992), followed by Achtemeier and others, agrees with McFague in part when he defines metaphor as a rhetorical figure that carries a word far beyond its ordinary lexical meaning. Unlike McFague, however, he ascribes to certain biblical metaphors the ability to identify true essence (see below).

## Existing Similarity

All of the above-mentioned scholars except Soskice argue that thinking metaphorically means spotting a thread of similarity between two dissimilar things, whether they call those two things a *vehicle* and a *tenor*, or *matrices*, or *thoughts*, or *fields*, or *subjects*.[8]

## Metaphor as Extension of Meaning

McFague holds that a metaphor extends meaning by re-describing reality creatively. This position presumes that there is already a literal meaning present

[7]So while McFague acknowledges that metaphor is an everyday and bodily practice, her working definition of metaphor focuses on non-conventional metaphors. However, the authors of this article will argue that the conventional metaphors for God retain a power must be analyzed carefully before one attempts to replace them with innovative alternatives; this power is intimately tied to their entrenchment.

[8]Although there are problems with an analysis of metaphor based on the presumption of preexisting similarity between thoughts or linguistic meanings, these problems are more severe in the case of metaphors for God (as we will point out in the section on cognitive linguistics). Western cultures' human concepts of God are so strongly rooted in certain metaphors that it seems potentially circular to talk about preexisting similarity between our ideas of divinity and fatherhood or kingship.

prior to the use of metaphor, and that metaphor provides a new or unconventional interpretation of reality. Brian Wren agrees, and makes the point that metaphors are cognitive, in that they can bring us new knowledge, not just new linguistic meanings.

Elizabeth Achtemeier (1992) and Roland Frye (1992) agree that metaphor extends meaning: as Achtemeier puts it, biblical metaphor in particular is stretched so "far outside lexical meaning and ordinary usage that it provides direct insight as well as new understanding of the subject" (p. 5). Frye claims that the New Testament metaphors "Father" and "Son" have actual power to name: they are the "transparent equivalents to the divine reality" (p. 42).[9] Certain biblical metaphors for God are held to provide fuller representation than other metaphors, because Christianity is a revealed religion. Frye argues, "...only God can name God" (p. 17); hence, the name "Father" in the mouth of Jesus has truth claims beyond other metaphors. Achtemeier takes an additional step, arguing that the "God of the Bible has revealed himself in five principal metaphors as King, Father, Judge, Husband, and Master..."(p. 5).[10]

## Metaphor as Interaction

There is disagreement among theologians about the extent to which metaphor involves interaction between the two ideas or expressions involved. McFague in particular argues that metaphor is a two-way street: both fields (or subjects) involved in metaphor are changed when brought into relationship. She holds that human images used as God metaphors "gain in stature and take on divine qualities by being placed in interaction with the divine" (1982, p. 38). The logical conclusion of this argument is the potent and oft-repeated statement by Mary Daly, "If God is male, then the male is God" (1973, p. 19).

In the opposite camp, Frye sees no reciprocity between the two fields of a metaphor, and he vehemently denies claims such as Daly's, arguing that they ignore the history of interpretation and misrepresent God.[11] Frye claims that mainstream Christianity has always denied that "references to God as Father... indicate male sexuality, although similar language did indicate divine sexuality... in ancient pagan and Gnostic religions" (p. 20). He makes no attempt to identify just what rhetorical or linguistic mechanism is responsible for this difference.

[9]It is interesting that God as "Father" holds no sexual content according to Frye, but God as "Mother" results in a sexually charged image of deity.

[10]She does not discuss why these five metaphors, but no others, reveal God so particularly.

[11]However, a recent article by Adele Reinhartz ( 'And the Word Was Begotten': Divine Epigenesis in the Gospel of John, *Semeia 85*) argues that the Aristotelian theory of epigenesis may lie behind the "father-son" language in the Gospel of John. Her research raises important questions about whether early Christians may have understood Jesus as "God's son in a generative, perhaps even biological sense ..." (p. 99).

## "Dead" Metaphors and Models

Most theologians treat novel and conventional metaphors as essentially different in kind. McFague holds that a novel metaphor creatively shapes thought, while a conventional one does not. For her, most ordinary language is composed of "dead metaphors," metaphors that have lost their tension—their ability to shock—and thus are no longer insightful. This is, in many ways, the center of her argument against the metaphor God as Father: she claims that it is so dead that it has come to be understood as literal and hence is idolatrous. Janet Soskice generally concurs with this analysis though she is more careful about the way she pronounces a metaphor to be dead, and prefers to speak of it losing "its web of implications" (p. 73).[12] Frye doesn't address the issue of dead metaphors; instead, he claims actual correspondence to reality for those metaphors that McFague particularly targets as "dead."

While McFague devalues dead metaphors, she does value what she calls models, which are dominant metaphors, or metaphors with "staying power." These models suggest a way to order the world comprehensively: they lend themselves as a framework for a substantive theology. However, she notes that models are dangerous because they exclude other ways of thinking and can easily become literalized, that is, dead. She doesn't say, but one could assume, that a model is useful insofar as it continues to generate a spark of shock. She also sometimes calls models *root metaphors*.

Soskice also notes a relationship between models and dead metaphors, but she argues that metaphors are only a phenomenon of language use, while models are not necessarily linguistic (p. 101). She hesitates to say that a metaphor that has been lexicalized, or considered literal, still functions as a metaphor, though she acknowledges that it might.

Brian Wren further refines McFague's concept of *model*. He argues that the impact of a metaphor, or a simile, depends on its *development* (which he defines as the extent to which imagery is made vivid) and its *correspondence*, the number of contacts between two matrices. He contrasts the metaphor of the oil in Aaron's beard with the Body of Christ. It would appear that what McFague calls model is what Wren would call a metaphor with multiple points of correspondence.

Roland Frye believes that certain biblical metaphors serve as functional metaphors, or foundational symbols, upon which the entire organism of religious belief is built and through which it functions. It would appear that his functional metaphor corresponds to McFague's model. Unlike McFague, however, he sees no danger in models or foundational metaphors, but rather considers them as central and structural to faith.

[12]Soskice contradicts her own statement, however, when she claims that dead metaphors can provide "a structuring of experience of which we are for the most part unaware." This is the exact opposite of losing the web of implications.

Both camps of theologians understand that changing the metaphor or model that one uses for God is to change the nature of the relationship claimed between God and humans. They differ in their willingness to do so: McFague and Wren joyfully postulate new metaphors; Frye and Achtemeier hold that metaphors biblically revealed are privileged and different from all others.

## Metaphors vs. Similes[13]

Roland Frye in particular highlights the distinction between simile and metaphor. To Frye, a simile is a figure of speech that "does not posit a general association but rather an association applied to some particular sense within an encompassing lexical meaning" (p. 39). Hence a simile differs in both function and effect from a metaphor, with a simile specifying points of equivalency rather than directly naming. Achtemeier draws a similar distinction between simile and metaphor, based on the difference between person and function: she argues that a metaphor claims identity between God and some thing, while simile only claims correspondence between some aspect of God and that thing (pp. 4–5).[14]

McFague does not devote extensive space to simile, but like Frye she considers it inferior to metaphor. Her argument is based on the idea that the use of an explicit comparative word softens the dissimilarity between the two things compared, and hence a simile has less tension to it than a good metaphor.

Soskice posits that modeling similes, (e.g., *language is like a cracked kettle* . . . ) which emphasize dissimilarities and in which one subject is beyond full intellectual grasp, have the same kind of effect and function as metaphor. They differ only in grammatical form. She distinguishes between modeling simile and illustrative simile, which she believes focuses on similarities (e.g., *the sun is like a golden ball*), comparing two known entities point by point (p. 59).[15]

Brian Wren acknowledges a difference in form between metaphor and simile as well as a difference in popular perception. But he argues that both metaphor and simile are able to organize thinking, encourage a transfer of associations and

[13]For traditionalists, the emphatic distinction between metaphor and simile appears to be fueled by a desire to refute the claim that there are "feminine" names for God used in the Bible. (E.g., Isaiah 42:14, where God says, "I will cry out like a woman in labor"; or Matthew 23:37, where Jesus longs to gather Jerusalem together "as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.") Since these generally take the form of similes rather than metaphors, many traditional scholars seek to devalue the "truth" status of simile versus metaphor in order to discount feminist arguments. For reformers, the question appears to be more a matter of academic classification, since they have already argued that metaphors are human constructions.

[14]As Aida Besançon Spencer points out in her 1996 article (Father-ruler: The meaning of the metaphor "Father" for God in the Bible, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 39/3*, pp. 433–442) the Bible doesn't make the same distinction!

[15]But as one may notice, the sun is not like a golden ball: it may be round, and it may be yellow, but it is also very hot, very big, impossible to hold, moves across the sky, etc. There is no point by point comparison; it is merely a commonplace simile.

feelings between matrices, generate new insights, and move us at a deep level by their appeal to senses and imagination. He believes that metaphor alone, however, is capable of extending language, that is, suggesting new associations (p. 93).

## Substance and Figure

Frye argues that metaphor was used substantively rather than ornamentally by biblical writers. He therefore supports the ancient philosophical commonplace that metaphor can be used ornamentally: that there are literal assertions that are strictly true, and non-literal assertions that are imaginative or literary.

McFague argues for some distinction between everyday, familiar, "dead" metaphors, and what she considers to be metaphors worthy of the name, those wherein two thoughts stay in permanent tension with each other. She doesn't, like Frye, argue that there is a difference in the truth claims represented by a "revealed" metaphor versus another metaphor; but one could argue that her emphasis on the need for metaphors to maintain tension assumes that metaphors which are familiar and enmeshed lose their truthfulness because they are assumed to be literal but are not. So she subscribes not to an ornamental/substantive division between metaphors, but to a living/dead division.

Traditionalists sometimes consider saying, "God the Father is a metaphor," as a judgment that the phrase conveys no truth. This view follows the Aristotelian assessment of metaphor as false and rhetorically loaded. This stance, however, places a traditional theologian in a serious quandary: either we should give up on calling God a Father at all (if it is simply false to do so, and no real truth is conveyed), or alternatively we try to present Father language for God as "true," in which case we are reduced to saying it is *literally* true. But no Christian theologian thinks God is a literal human being.

## Is *Father* a Name?

Frye argues—like many traditional scholars before and after him (e.g., Barth and Pannenburg)—that Father is God's actual *name*; because only God can accurately name God's own self. The fact that Jesus called God "Father" means that "Father" is God's real name. While this is an interesting theological argument, from a linguistic point of view it is fallacious. *Father*, linguistically, is a relational term. The use of the possessive pronoun in *Our Father, My Father*, and *Your Father* is a linguistic indicator of the attempt to distinguish the father being spoken about from some other father; this is entirely unlike the usage of a proper name.[16]

[16]The only name for God found consistently without a possessive pronoun in either scripture is the Tetragrammaton.

Frye's argument also ignores historical context. As Marianne Meye Thompson so carefully points out, Jesus was a Jew of his own time, and in his time the name of God was not to be spoken. Rather, synonyms or alternatives were always used—hence *adonai, hashem* and even Jesus' *eli, eli* on the cross. "Father" is an attested usage from the Hebrew Scriptures and there are many cultural reasons why "Father" might be a preferred synonym for God.

Other traditionalists such as Kimel (1992) hold that in Jesus' mouth, *Father* has unique reference. He argues that kinship terms, when used in direct invocation and discourse, behave like proper nouns (p. 203–4). As an illustration of the working of this principle, he states that when his daughter says, "Father" she means him and only him. However, it is not possible linguistically to understand Jesus' utterance as a unique reference similar to Kimel's daughter's unique reference. *Father*, be it expressed as *Pater* or *Abba* or *Daddy*, refers to the unique male physiological progenitor. Even if one believes in the virgin birth, there are certain physical realities encompassed in the concept "Father" that simply do not hold true in Jesus' relationship with God unless one is willing to give God literal male reproductive capacity. Furthermore, if Kimel's argument requires us to imagine that *Father* becomes the *name* of each male parent who is addressed as "Father" by his children, then this seems to undermine the uniqueness of its reference to God; in the mouths of humans, at any rate, it is not like a proper name.

## God Language Is Neuter

Feminists have long argued that use of male language for God is sexist, and renders women "linguistically invisible" (Wren, p. 61). Traditionalists claim that "Father" used in reference to God is ungendered, citing a long history of Biblical interpretation to support their claim. We will not reprise the numerous discussions of this matter; however, traditionalists undermine their own argument about God language when they assert that "Mother" has gender-specific linguistic entailments.

For instance, Elizabeth Achtemeier argues that the use of a feminine image for God immediately involves the process of birthing. If God gives birth to the world, then the world must partake in God's substance, which makes one using a feminine image a pantheist, or panentheist. But here Achtemeier is making the common mistake of collapsing the biological reality of the source domain—female—with the target domain, which is God, who has no biological reality. And perhaps most importantly, if one argues that mothers and children share in the same physicality, given modern knowledge about reproduction, one must accede that fathers participate in that same physicality.[17]

[17] It is interesting to note that in the New Testament, two of the four feminine metaphors for God have nothing to do with birth or children—the woman householder searching for a coin, and the woman mixing yeast into flour. Finding a birth component in these metaphors seems eisegetical.

## COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AND METAPHORS FOR GOD

### Vast Indeterminacy

There is a vast indeterminacy in our understanding of God. From the point of view of cognitive linguistics and cognitive science, the concept of God exhibits an impoverished non-metaphorical reality. Since most people would agree that it is impossible to see, touch, taste, smell, or hear God in any physically comprehensible way, the non-metaphorical (literal) idea of God contains a lot of negatives (not human, not visible, not perceptible through hearing or smell or touch or taste, etc.) but little that is concrete. An abstract concept like this, according to cognitive linguistics, is often primarily understood through metaphor (Lakoff, 1993, p. 203).

This assertion raises howls from the theologians who oppose the proposition that human language for God is only a human projection. Frye and others argue that there is a difference between religious language and other language, and that metaphor behaves in an entirely different way when it is religious (revealed) language than when it is everyday language. But that thesis is not empirically supported; there is no indication that the brain processes information differently when one speaks of God than when one speaks of more mundane subjects. Human concepts of God must necessarily take place within the realm of human cognitive capacities. Stating this from a theological viewpoint, Brian Wren says, "Divine revelation cannot be made except through human experience"—to set them against each other is a false opposition (p. 101). Based on the findings of cognitive linguistics, the authors assert that metaphor in religious "revealed" language functions the same way that metaphor in every day language functions. If one wishes to argue differently, that argument can only be based on faith claims. These claims are not consonant with contemporary research about how humans make meaning.

### A Cognitive Definition of Metaphor

Cognitive linguists argue that metaphor is a matter of thinking, not a matter of language: human beings use metaphors to conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another. Metaphor imposes structure on thinking, and allows one to *reason about*, not just talk about, one thing in terms of another. Metaphorical concepts are not limited to poetic flights of fancy but are central and essential to our everyday thinking. Human beings need metaphor both to reason and to speak about time, causation, states, and other common abstract concepts (Lakoff, 1993, pp. 208–209). Readers of this paper are invited, if they doubt the pervasiveness of metaphor in everyday language, to try talking about time in any extended way without mentioning words related to distance, front-back directionality, or other physical spatial source domains.

In contemporary metaphor research, the input which provides the framework or structure for the metaphor is referred to as the *source domain*, and the input which is being examined is the *target domain*. For instance, in the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING, the source domain is seeing and the target domain is knowing. When using this metaphor, we speak about knowledge in terms of sight: *I see what she's saying*.

## Embodiment and Primary Metaphor

Metaphorical capacity springs from embodied cognition; human beings perceive the world through senses in combination with cognitive capacities. Contemporary theory holds that at the most basic level one uses primary metaphors, which are grounded in primary scenes, "recurrent, basic event-types which involve a tight correlation between perceptual experience and subjective response." (Grady, 1997, abstract p. 2). The research of S. Narayanan suggests these events establish permanent neural connections extending across portions of the brain dedicated to different experiences (1997).

All humans appear to learn primary metaphors, via constant exposure in infancy and childhood to the experiential correlations involved in the relevant primary scenes. All seeing infants, for example, experience salient and persistent coactivation of the neural domains of visual image processing and the neural domains involved in attributing location, shape, and interactional affordances to objects in the world; visual input is one of the most important sources of human everyday knowledge (cf. Sweetser, 1990). As Narayanan observes, repeated coactivation of neural subsystems results in permanent neural connections between portions of the brain dedicated to different experiences.

This relationship motivates the common metaphor, KNOWING IS SEEING.[18] Research on child language has shown that prior to the use of this metaphor, children conflate the two domains; the earliest uses of vision verbs refer not just to physical vision, nor just to cognition, but to visual experience as a source of new mental input. (C. Johnson, 1996). *See the duckies!* or *Let's see what is in this box* are common examples of early uses both to and by young English-speaking children. In these instances, knowledge actually co-occurs with and depends on vision. As the child grows and develops more complex understanding of both vision and knowledge, the two domains develop more complex and separable mental representations.

Differentiation between the domains of seeing and knowing does not, however, remove the neural links between them. The neural connection motivates a metaphorical mapping between the source domain of vision and the target domain of knowledge, as exemplified by uses such as *I see what you mean*. In this example, knowledge does not depend upon actual sight but upon "insight." Neural links

[18]In cognitive metaphor research, the standardized notation for a cognitive metaphor is "TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN." This convention will be used throughout the paper.

formed during co-activation of the primary metaphor remain available so that later one may speak of knowledge metaphorically in the language of sight.

It is common for the source domains of primary metaphors to be perceptual experience, and for the target domains to be some area of subjective response (e.g., KNOWING IS SEEING, ACQUIESCENCE IS SWALLOWING). For primary metaphors (though not necessarily all metaphors), target domains have less sensory content than source domains; but they are not necessarily abstract and difficult concepts. Rather, target domains are essential parts of everyday human experience. As Grady argues, primary metaphors "... map not from lower-level to higher-level concepts, but between very fundamental concepts of different sorts... [Primary metaphors] link the basic "backstage" operations of cognition with the kind of sensory images (in any modality) that we are most able to maintain and manipulate in our consciousness. In this sense, primary metaphors may be responsible for much of the substance of subjective mental experience" (pp. 135–136).

While primary metaphors are physically instantiated during infancy and early childhood, there also appear to be culturally entrenched non-primary metaphors, such as COMMUNITIES ARE FAMILIES. While this metaphor for communities may not be "hard-wired" in exactly the same way as primary metaphor, it is so culturally rooted that it functions as if it were literal truth (or primary metaphor!) for the culture in question. Certainly, GOD IS FATHER and ISRAEL IS A GRAPEVINE fit the criteria for culturally entrenched metaphor.

The use of a given primary or culturally entrenched metaphor, when one reasons about a particular domain in the language and structure of another domain, cannot help but shape the user's relationship to that domain. If one consistently thinks of a dog as one's best friend, one will talk to, stroke, play with, feed, and care for a dog in a way that is unimaginable in a culture where dogs constitute a protein source rather than a family member.

## Blending Theory

In their 2002 book *The Way We Think*, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner situate metaphor within an expanded understanding of *cognitive blending*. In cognitive blending, Fauconnier and Turner hypothesize that the processing of cognitive material by the brain takes place instantaneously and unconsciously. Human beings engage in cognitive blending—the ongoing, real time process of thinking—by recruiting and combining meaning from well-established cognitive structures (e.g., local context and primary or culturally licensed metaphors or frameworks) in order to build new meaning.

According to Fauconnier and Turner, this conceptual blending is an active and virtually unconscious cognitive process that occurs even as one thinks, and it is capable of performing new conceptual work on structures that have been previously entrenched. Blends can range from simple frames—the concept "mother"—to conventional formations—the metaphor GOD IS FATHER, ISRAEL IS A

GRAPEVINE—to wildly original combinations—dogs singing Christmas carols. The purpose of such blending is to compress complex ideas to a scale at which they can be easily manipulated by human minds. The compressions give us the sense of global insight. Blending enables humans to manipulate and to learn complicated concepts easily.

Fauconnier and Turner argue that such processing involves linkages and compressions: linkages between concepts that correspond in some way, such as time, role, or identity; and compressions as when diffuse items are compressed into a single framework. For instance, "Elijah" is a value for "Ancient Hebrew Prophet"—they are linked through the vital relation "role." And when one says, *The prophet always wants the people to observe the law*, we are compressing numerous individual prophets into a single person who has guided the people for centuries.

Cognitive blending, like metaphor, is both a biological action—taking place at the neural level of the brain—and a cultural action—as culturally approved/ accepted/ substantiated blends are appropriated into the cultural fabric. Whether one uses the language of cognitive blending or cognitive linguistics metaphor theory, the phenomenon under study is not confined to language use but rather is a matter of thinking. Human beings use blends and metaphors in order to conceive of one mental domain in terms of another. This allows one to reason about one input in the language and frame of the other input. And like primary metaphors, culturally entrenched blends may form permanent neural pathways in the brain.

Fauconnier and Turner have developed a basic diagram to demonstrate conceptual blending and its essential characteristics. In the example below, we will examine the metaphor GOD IS A SHEPHERD. However, the schema illustrated here can be used as a starting point for any analysis of cognitive blending.

In the basic diagram, there are four circles, each representing a mental space: the generic mental space, the mental space of each input, and the blended mental space.[19] The generic mental space represents what two inputs have in common. This mental space is at the top of an imaginary diamond. Immediately below it, to the left and the right, are the two input spaces representing (in a metaphor) the source domain and the target domain. Below them is the blended mental space. Dotted lines show the connections between the generic space and the inputs, and between the inputs and blended space. Matching and/or cross-space mapping between the two input spaces is shown by solid lines. These solid lines correspond to neural co-activations or bindings, like those discussed above in primary metaphor.

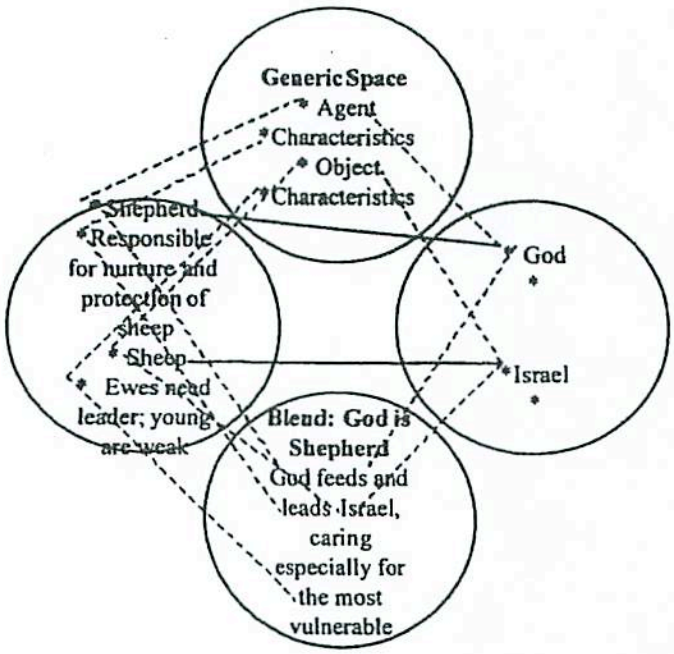
As one can see from the illustration below, the generic space is extremely nonspecific.[20] The elements of agent, agent's characteristics and duties, object, and object's characteristics could be applicable to innumerable input spaces: a man who is diabetic and the insulin he needs to live, a player piano that makes

[19] A more complex integration network may require additional input spaces and even multiple blended spaces.

[20] See below "Existing Similarities," for a more extensive discussion of whether metaphor is motivated by commonalities between source and target domains.

music and the motor needed to work the hammers; a pig that is too hot and the mud that is cool and wet.

The inputs represent two different mental spaces, or "sets of activated neuronal assemblies." (Fauconnier and Turner, p. 40). In this case, one of the inputs is a schematic of a shepherd, his duties, the sheep, and their characteristics.[21] The other input space is God.




## Types of Blends: Simplex and Mirror

Conceptual blends range widely in their creativity and stability. On one end are *simplex networks*, the most stable. In a simplex network, the elements from one input (such as the names George and Leslie) are projected as values of another input that contains a frame with its projected roles (father, daughter). Frames are provided by human culture and biology: these organizing frames delineate a mental space where a particular activity with its members and procedures occurs. An organizing frame could be the biological frame of family, with roles for a father, mother, daughter or son and so on; or the frame of an ancient military offensive, with king, general, army, weapons, etc.[22]

[21] What one maps into a given input space always depends on the context in which a metaphor (or other cognitive blend) is found. In this case, the source is Isaiah 40:11. If the source for our exercise were Pseudo-Philo, the mapping would include a shepherd preparing to slaughter the sheep!

[22] Obviously, any of these frames could be much more complex. For instance, the ancient military offensive could include weapons, terrain, booty, numbers fighting, numbers killed, territory gained, disposition of major players, battlefield, allies, etc.

Slightly more dynamic than simplex blends are *mirror networks*, where both inputs as well as the generic and blended space share the same organizing frame. An example of a mirror network would be a graphic showing the times of all winners of the Big Sur marathon during the last ten years. While there may be clashes at levels more specific than the frame—weather conditions, date, opponents—the blend will resolve these clashes by linking and compressing them.

### Types of Blends: Single Scope (Metaphor) Blends

Fauconnier and Turner categorize metaphors—be they primary, culturally licensed, or conventional—as *single scope blends* (p. 126). A metaphor, or single scope blend, involves a *systematic* pattern of mapping between the first input (*source domain*), which provides language and images (the structure or frame), and the second input (*target domain*), which is the actual concept being considered. The relationships that hold in the source carry over into the blend produced; the language of the source becomes the language of the blend; the structure of the source becomes the structure of the blend.

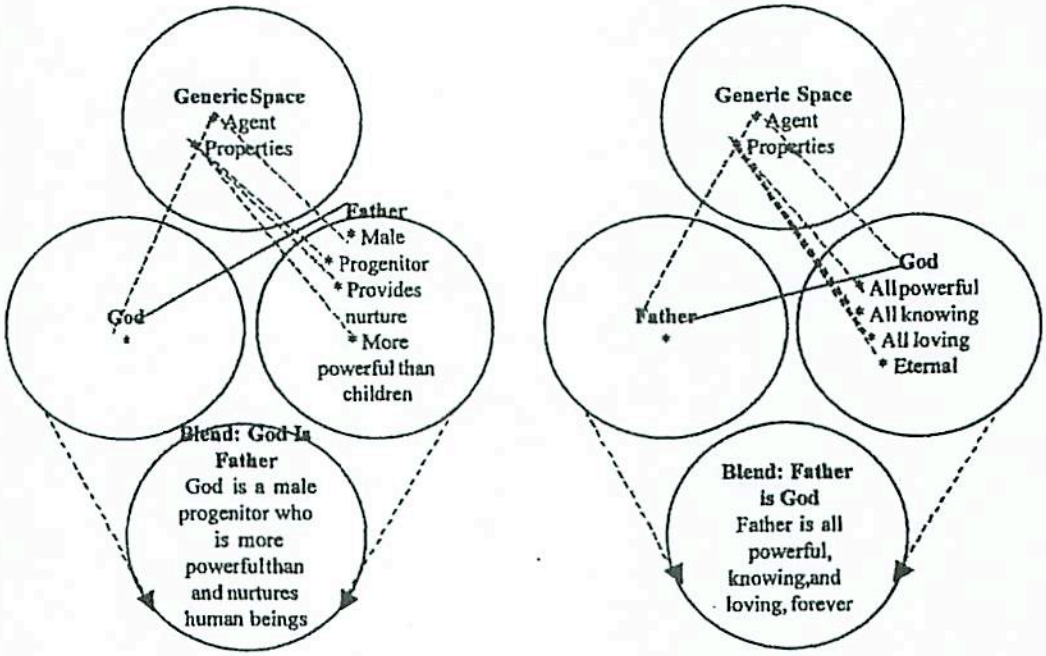
The *systematicity* of metaphorical structures is one of the most robust findings of the last twenty years of metaphor research. A metaphor involves a *regular pattern* of mapping between the source domain, which provides language and images, and the target domain, which is the actual concept being considered. The relationships that hold in the source domain carry over into the target domain; the language of the source becomes the language of the target; the structure of the source becomes the structure of the target. For instance, if the source domain is physical proximity and the target is emotional intimacy (EMOTIONAL INTIMACY IS PHYSICAL PROXIMITY), one speaks of an interpersonal relationship as *close* or *distant*. *We're tight like this*, or *I'm sensing a great gulf between us* are conventional illustrations of how one speaks of the target in source domain language. This preservation of source relationships in the target domain, which is called the Invariance Principle (Lakoff, 1993, pp. 213–216),[23] also holds in more novel applications, and in more complex metaphors. The statement, *You need warp drive to get next to her* would still be understood in terms of the source domain language of physical proximity.

The theologians cited earlier generally accepted the concept that metaphors extend literal meanings. At one level, that argument is accurate: when one uses the structure of the source to speak of the target, one is by definition picking out certain things and suppressing others. For instance, if the predominant cultural metaphor for intimacy is EMOTIONAL INTIMACY IS PHYSICAL PROXIMITY, but one employs the alternative metaphor EMOTIONAL INTIMACY IS TEMPERATURE, the different source domain would highlight entirely different features

[23]Lakoff argues that there is also a corollary to the Invariance Principle, whereby the image-schema structure of the target domain must also maintain its integrity. Hence, the mapping possibilities between source and target are limited by the structure of both domains.

in the target and, in a sense, extend the "everyday" meaning of intimacy. But that everyday meaning is not necessarily literal, nor is it privileged. It is merely culturally common. Very little about the way one thinks about intimacy exists outside of the metaphors used for it.[24]

*Directionality* is the observation that the relationship between the two inputs, the source and target domains, is not symmetrical. Inferences are transferred in one direction only, from the source to the target. For instance, the statement, *The lamp loves the door* does not mean that the lamp is physically close to the door. While the language of physical proximity can be used to describe emotional intimacy, the language of emotional intimacy is not understood to describe physical proximity. Though there are some metaphors where the source and target can be reversed (GOD IS FATHER, FATHER IS GOD), such inversions represent two different metaphors, not a single metaphor which transfers inferences in both directions (Lakoff and Turner, 1989, pp. 131–133). Different inferences are mapped in the metaphorical concept GOD IS FATHER (e.g., *God provides all I need*)[25] than in FATHER IS GOD (e.g., *He thinks he's infallible.*) Below is an illustration of how one would map these two different metaphors.




**God is Father** **Father is God**

[24]The literal mapping for love would include the idea of a relationship between two entities and not much else.

[25]Spoken by a person experiencing comfort from God in a moment of distress. The fact that almost any imagined phrase using this metaphor feels "normal" illustrates how thoroughly the GOD IS FATHER metaphor is imbedded in our culture.

In both diagrams, the characteristics of the concept on the right are mapped onto the concept on the left in the resulting blend.

McFague and others have argued for mutual effect in metaphor—that each domain influences the other. But metaphor at both the primary and the complex level normally involves the suppression of certain features of the target domain. The target is considered by means of the categories present in the source domain, not vice-versa. What Sally McFague calls mutual effect is actually the result of cultural activity.

Feminists have rightly raised the question whether the use of certain metaphors for God changes the cultural understanding of the source domain: to paraphrase Mary Daly, if God is father, then father is God. But examination under the lens of metaphor theory shows us that the truth of the statement does not issue from its metaphoric structure. These two metaphors are not identical. Saying GOD IS FATHER encourages us to think of God as a male progenitor who provides physical nurture, protection, sustenance and instruction; who has the right to punish or reward; and who has a relationship of mutual love but unequal power with his (young) children.[26] But FATHER IS GOD evokes the image of a father who is all-knowing, powerful and loving, and will remain so forever in relationship to the subject.[27]

As one can see from examining the entailments of these two metaphors, they are not identical. The problem is that the frequent use of GOD IS FATHER puts it into the cultural currency, where it can be utilized and re-worked in cognitive blending. The metaphor creates a rich generic space about power relationships and positive authority – as does the metaphor for God as king—that can be, and is, used for other blends (see below). But the target and source do not affect each other or change each other's basic structure in the process of metaphorical construction; no one would argue that these metaphors imply lack of physical progeneration on the part of human fathers, or that human men are capable of creating worlds out of nothingness. And it is still an open question to what extent directional cognitive mappings such as GOD IS FATHER may facilitate mappings in the opposite direction between the same two domains. However, clearly the two sets of mappings are not identical; GOD IS ROCK or GOD IS FORTRESS does not mean that we deify stones or citadels. It is not the presence of the GOD IS FATHER metaphor per se which has led to the deification of fathers; it is the statement's existence as a stable mental concept in cultural currency.

[26] A real father becomes less powerful over time, and may need physical nurture, protection, and sustenance from the subject: this information is usually suppressed in the metaphor.

[27] Again, the information about God's lack of gender and inability to beget children in any physiologically normative way is suppressed in this metaphor.

The authors have no desire to imply that this is not a serious issue for theologians. We merely wish to indicate that the difficulty is cultural, not metaphoric; changing the metaphors we use for God only works in so far as those metaphors begin to exert influence at the level of popular culture. There is no easy way to use new words for God. The long-used metaphors have become cultural currency, exerting influence at pre-cognitive levels.

## Types of Blends: Double Scope

*Double scope blends*, like single scope blends, involve inputs (e.g., context, conventional metaphor, etc.) with different organizing frames. The more one feels that a single input's inferential structure dominates in the final blend, the more a given cognitive construction will feel like a metaphor, or single scope blend. But at times, one feels that a metaphor is somehow off, or quirky: *I'm going to uproot that nest of vipers who mock my scholarship*. When a statement does not exhibit systematicity, suppression, or directionality, or when two unrelated metaphors are being used in concert, the resulting blend will contain frameworks from more than one input.[28] This kind of structure, which is extremely common, should be analyzed as a double scope, rather than single scope blend because both inputs are being activated for the final cognitive construction.

Unlike metaphor, where the structure or frame of the blend comes from a single input (the source domain), in double scope cognitive blends meaning is constructed from two or more input spaces. The resulting cognitive structure of the blend is not dictated by the source (as in metaphor) nor is it a consequence of only the target, but rather the structure develops from the blended space, through elaboration, inference, and completion. The blend will have structure of its own, sometimes wildly original. *My ear is open like a greedy shark to catch the tunings of a voice divine* blends a ravenous shark with the ear's capacity for hearing: the open ear maps onto the shark's open jaws in a startling image.[29]

## Mundaneness and "Dead" Metaphor

Unlike classical theories of metaphor, cognitive linguistics argues that metaphor is really an ordinary, necessary, and regular part of reasoning and language. Because of the makeup of the human body, with its physical and cognitive structures and the way in which the body interacts with the world, metaphor is an

[28]"Uproot" brings in the connotation of removing a tree; nest of vipers invokes a group of snakes, which have no roots. You could flush them out or burn them out, but not uproot them.

[29]Our thanks to the incomparable Dorothy Sayers, who parades this outrageous construction by Keats in *Gaudy Night* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 284.

essential part of cognition, a way to conceptualize everyday experiences. This does not mean that every metaphorical statement is mundane; merely that at the most basic level, human use of metaphor is unconscious, unsophisticated, and regular.

Cognitive linguists agree with McFague and other theologians that the most familiar and unexceptional metaphors are seldom recognized as metaphors: HAPPY IS UP, for instance, or KNOWING IS SEEING. But these are not described as "dead" by cognitive linguists: rather, they are deemed the most lively and powerful of metaphors because of their ability to shape thinking. Their use is unconscious and effortless (Lakoff and Turner, pp. 128–131).

The dead metaphor theory is based on the common misconception that ordinary conventional language is literal. According to this understanding, if a phrase appears to be metaphorical but is part of everyday language, then it must be a dead metaphor. However, "dead metaphor" in cognitive linguistics refers to a form such as "pedigree," in which the original meaning ('crane's foot') is entirely lost, although the image still exists in the mapping of a family tree diagram. The metaphor in such a case has simply lost its original meaning. No such thing has happened to the standard metaphors for God.

Sweetser's study (1990, pp. 23–48) on recurrent patterns of meaning change throughout the history of Indo-European languages gives added support to the theory of conceptual metaphor and the argument against seeing commonplace metaphors as dead. She traces words with a literal meaning of "see," and how they acquired the additional meaning "know," over widely scattered times and places. Her research argues that the so-called dead metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING should be seen as a "pathway" for semantic change; even when conventionalized and unconscious, it continued to exert influence on cognition, and to extend meaning across time and throughout different languages. The data make no sense without the theory of conceptual metaphor.

## "Existing Similarities" Arguments

Because metaphors impose structure on our thinking, because they pick out salient features of a concept and allow one to reason about the "target" in the language and concepts of the "source," and because choosing one metaphor may necessarily preclude the use of another metaphor, the metaphors in a given world view will both highlight and downplay aspects of reality. However, this observation about the cognitive reality of metaphor does NOT imply that the similarities are already present in our conceptual representations, and that the source domain merely allows one to pick them out (Turner, 1987, p. 19). Even though we speak in blending of a "generic space" where the common structure of the inputs is recognized, this is often highly schematic. When we examined the metaphor GOD IS FATHER,

the generic space showed an agent and characteristics. This generic space could serve for any number of metaphors: *She's a real firecracker*, where a woman is metaphorically given the characteristics of an object that is loud and flammable, or *His mouth is a cesspool*, where a man is metaphorically given the characteristics of an object that is bad smelling and abhorrent. In each of these cases, it is the source domain that imposes a structure on the target, which *allows one to reason about it in new ways*. It may highlight, filter, or select certain pre-existing and skeletal aspects of structure, but it can also impose new structure. Whether the composition works as a satisfying metaphor depends on the richness of the domains and the thinker's creativity, not on pre-existing similarity between the two domains.[30]

## Simile vs. Metaphor

Blending theory would argue that the conceptual mappings of *similes* and of metaphors are the same; that is, the cognitive work done between cognitive domains, or spaces, does not vary based on the use or non-use of a preposition of comparison. Frye has argued that the difference between metaphor and simile lies in the fact that similes only point out certain limited correspondences, while a metaphor claims identity between two subjects. But conceptual metaphor, as we have shown above, always suppresses certain features of the source and/or target domains; correspondence is ALWAYS limited.

Frye illustrates the difference between simile and metaphor with two biblical phrases: "We must all die; we are like water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again" (2 Samuel 14:14) and "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19) He concludes "it would misinterpret Scripture to say that humanity is water in the same way that it is said to be dust." (Frye, 1992, pp. 37–38).

But his examples are poorly chosen. The import of the statements is not changed by dropping "like" from the first, or adding "as" to the second. The writer was evoking one particular characteristic of water; the limited correspondence results not from the statement's form as simile but from the author's tag line, identifying a specific characteristic which he or she wants us to consider.

[30]Joseph Grady (1999), argues that there is more than one kind of metaphor, and that some metaphors involve correspondences between concepts of the same type. (He uses the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor to show how the metaphor, ACHILLES IS A LION, is motivated by a perceived resemblance, with both "courageous person" and "lion" mapping as specific examples of "courageous being." But even in what Grady calls "resemblance metaphors," certain features are selected for comparison while others are ignored (the color of the lion and its tendency to sleep all day are both suppressed). Hence the assumption of similarity is only similarity of a certain highlighted part which has been brought to conscious consideration.

### Substance Versus Figure

It should be clear by now that cognitive linguistics considers metaphor to be substantive not figural: a matter of thinking rather than a matter of language. In fact, it appears that new metaphors are not often created. Even the most imaginative writers work primarily with inventive variations on recognizable themes (cf. Lakoff and Turner, 1989). This, of course, makes intuitive sense, since some shared foundation is necessary in order to understand variations from that foundation.

## METAPHORS FOR GOD IN THE BIBLE

### The Research Project

For our research, we analyzed the metaphors for God found in the Bible: 44 separate metaphors from the Hebrew scriptures and 50 from the Christian scriptures. Our working assumption was that because there is so little literal content in our target domain (God), we could learn what characteristics of God were most important to the scripture writers by examining the metaphors they chose to use to describe God. Both in the case of very sparse mappings, such as "Rock," and in rich mappings, such as "Father" we assumed that these metaphors, as all metaphors, would highlight certain aspects of God (and suppress others).

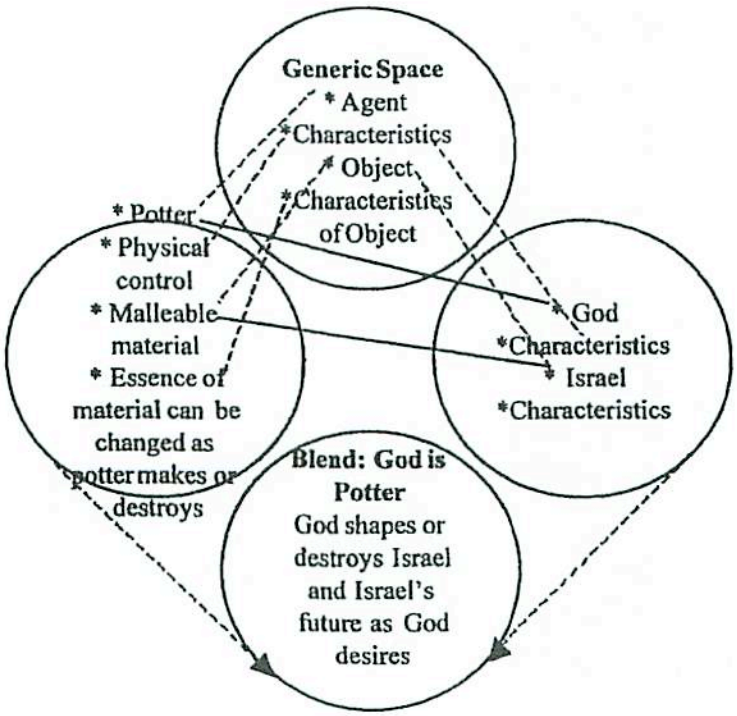
When mapping the entailments of the metaphors, we mapped both the general knowledge assumed to be available (a father is a progenitor, or a rock is an inanimate object) and specific knowledge evoked by the metaphoric use in a particular text (the shepherd delights in saving even the most lost sheep).

### Hebrew Bible Mappings: Selected Metaphors

Because of space constraints, we cannot print the cognitive diagram for every metaphor for God in the Hebrew Bible, nor even a table of every resulting blend. Instead, we show the results of analysis for six representative metaphors.

We begin by showing the full diagram of the first metaphor, and then a chart showing the source domain input and the resulting blend. The elements of the source domain input are on the left, and the elements of the resulting blend are on the right. The target domain input in every metaphor is God, with some undefined characteristics; Israel may also appear in the target domain, along with a space for characteristics. The generic space will show an agent or an object with undefined characteristics, and occasionally an object or subject upon which the agent acts as well as that object's or subject's characteristics.

Here is a full diagram of the first selected metaphor, GOD IS POTTER, followed by charts for that metaphor and five other representative blends.




POTTER (יצר) Genesis 2.7, Jeremiah 18.6

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Agent is Active Human | *God is conscious, active, agentive |
| *Agent Has Physical Control | *God has Ultimate Control |
| *Object is Malleable Material | *Human/Israel is Malleable Object |
| *Essence of Object is Changed (Form, Use, Malleability all changed) | *Mud is Changed Into Humans; Israel's Future is Shaped and Reshaped |
| *Agent Can Make and Destroy | *God Can Change God's Mind about Israel's Fate Depending on Israel's Behavior |

KING (מלך) Ps. 5.1+

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Agent is Active Human | *God is conscious, active, agentive |
| *Mutual, Assymetric Relationship | *Mutual, Assymetric Relationship |
| *Agent has Ownership and Authority over Humans and Other Objects | *God Owns and has Authority over Entire World |
| *Agent has Power and Authority Primarily in Own Realm | *God has Power and Authority over Entire World, but Special Relationship with Israel |
| *Agent has Power to Grant Life or Death Within Own Realm | *God is All-Powerful, in Charge of all Life and Death |
| *Agent Provides Sustenance, Legal System, and Protection for Residents of Realm | *God Provides Land, Law, and Protection for Israel |

ROCK (צור) Deuteronomy 32.4

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Rock is Hard, Passive | *God |
| *Human is Active, Vulnerable | *---------- |
| *Rock is Shelter for Human | *God provides protection |

BEAR (דוב) Hosea 13.8, Lamentations 3

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Agent is Active Animal | *God is active and strong |
| *Subject/Victim is Human | *God Could Hurt Humans/Israel |
| *Agent is Physically Powerful and Destructive | *God is All Powerful |
| *Agent is Enraged Because of Loss of Children | *God is Enraged over Oppression |
| *Action of Agent Results in Change of Essence for Subject (Death) | *God's Actions Can Result in Destruction for Individuals and Israel |

WOMAN (אשה) Isaiah 49.15

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Agent is Active Human Female | *God is Capable, Adult, Nurturant |
| *Human Female has Child | *Israel is Weak, Dependent |
| *Mutual Assymetric Relation | *Mutual Assymetric Relation |
| *Agent Provides Nurture to Child | *God Provides Nurture To Israel |
| *Agent Has Inherent Property of Compassion and Remembrance (i.e., Provide Care) with Regard to Child | *God Has Compassion and Remembers Israel |
| *Agent Has Lost Compassion for and Remembrance of Child | *God Will Never Lose Compassion or Forget Israel |

FATHER (אב) Dtr. 32.6 +

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Father is Active Agentive Human | *God is Active, Agentive, Conscious |
| *Mutual, Assymetric Relation With Children | *Mutual, Assymetric Relation with Humans and Israel |
| *Has Physical Control and Authority over Children: Can Reward or Punish | *Absolute Authority: Can Reward or Punish Humans/Israel As Desired |
| *Provides Protection | *Protects Israel |
| *Provides Physical Nurture | *Provides the Land |
| *Provides Instruction | *Provides the Law and Leaders |
| *Provides Inheritance to First Born Son within specific social system | *Provides Land, Law, Leaders, Freedom, and Special Relation with Self to Israel as "first born son" |
| *Children have Responsibility to Obey and Honor | *Israel is to Honor and Obey |
| *Provision of Sustenance, Training, and Inheritance Allows Children to Live, Grow Up, Support Selves (Change of State) | *Honoring and Obeying God Provides Freedom and Sustenance for Israel (Change of State) |

## Analysis and Discussion

After analyzing all 44 metaphors, we compiled the characteristics that were repeatedly invoked. Using these qualities, we then re-examined the metaphors to see which of them "did the most work," that is, incorporated the highest number of these traits. We found six characteristics that recurred in our mappings at a high rate. The most frequently used (and thus, we would argue, most important) characteristics of God in the eyes of the Hebrew scripture writers were the ability to provide protection and nurture; the ability to maintain mutual but asymmetric relationship; the ability to exert physical control over an entity, as well as the ability to change an entity's state or essence; the capacities of authority and power; and the capacity to destroy. Below are the metaphors that exhibit these traits; notice how certain metaphors appear in every single column.

| Protection and Sustenance | Mutual Assymetric Relationship | Physical Control | Change of State/Essence | Authority | Destructive; Power to Punish |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| father | father | father | father | father | father |
| king | king | king | king | king | king |
| warrior | lord, master | lord | redeemer | lord, master | teacher/disicipliner |
| watcher/keeper | redeemer | master | deliverer | deliverer | judge |
| planter | deliverer | refiner | refiner | teacher | commander/ lawmaker |
| husband | trainer, teacher | smelter | weaver | judge | dry rot |
| rock | healer | weaver | creator | avenger | moth/maggots |
| shield | judge | creator | potter | commander/ lawmaker | devouring fire |
| stronghold | commander/ lawmaker | potter | planter | husbsnd | leopard |
| refuge | husband | planter | builder | | lion |
| fortress | bird | builder | healer | | bear |
| shelter | eagle | shepherd | avenger | | |
| shade from heat | mother | vineyard owner | saanctifier | | |
| horn of salvation | woman | | vineyard tender/owner | | |
| portion | | | bear | | |
| inheritance | | | lion | | |
| light | | | leopard | | |
| bird | | | devouring fire | | |
| eagle | | | month/maggots | | |
| woman | | | dry rot | | |
| | | | eagle | | |
| | | | woman in labor | | |

## Christian Scripture: Selected Metaphors

Turning to the Christian scriptures, our research proceeded in the same way. First, we analyzed each of the 50 metaphors for God found in the New Testament, and identified the characteristics that each highlighted.

Below are six representative metaphor mappings.

FATHER (πατερ) Matthew 5.16, Luke 15.1, +

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Father is Agentive Human Male | *God is Conscious, Agentive, Authoritative |
| *Mutual, Assymetric Relation with Children | *Mutual Assymetric Relation with All Humans |
| *Has Physical Control and Authority over Children: Can Reward or Punish | *Can Reward or Punish All Humans |
| *Provides Physical Nurture, Sustenance, Protection and Instruction | *Provides Physical Nurture, Sustenance, Protection and Instruction through Jesus and Community |
| *Provides Inheritance within Social Structures (Primarily to First Born Son, but Other Natural and Adopted Children Can be Included) | *Provides Inheritance to All who Obey and Honor God |
| *Children Have Responsibility to Obey and Honor | *All Humans Have Responsibility to Obey and Honor God |
| *Provision of Sustenance, Training, and Inheritance Allows for Change of State For Children | *Provision of Grace Allows For Change of State for Humans (Come into Kingdom) |
| *Father's Love For Children Can be Extravagant and Undeserved | *God's Love for Humanity is Extravagant and Undeserved (But possible because of God's limitlessness) |

KING (βασιλεωσ) Matthew 5.16, Luke 15.1, +

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *King is Agentive Human Male | *God is Conscious, Agentive, Authoritative |
| *Subject is Human | *Humanity/Israel is Conscious/Agentive |
| *Mutual, Assymetric Relation | *Mutual, Assymetric Relation |
| *Agent Has Physical Control (Ownership) over Humans and Other Objects | *God Owns Entire World |
| *Agent Has Power and Authority Primarily in Own Realm | *God Has Power and Authority Over Entire World |
| *Agent Has Power to Reward or Punish, to the Point of Death | *God Has Power of All Rewards and Punishments, For All Time |
| *Agent Provides Sustenance, Legal System, Protection for Residents of Realm | *God Provides Inheritance to All Humanity Who Believes |
| *If Residents of Realm Refuse Agent's Hospitality, He Can Choose Others | *God is not in Exclusive Relationship with Israel, Though God's Gifts Are Offered to Them First. |
| *Agent Equates Treatment of Agent's Subjects With Treatment of Self | *God Equates Treatment of Other Humans With Treatment of God's Self |
| *Agent Expects Subjects to Treat Each Other in the Same Way Agent Treats Subjects | *God Expects Humans to Forgive Each Other as God Forgives Humans |

LANDOWNER (ανθρωπω οικοδεσποτη) Matthew 20.1

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Landowner is Agentive Human Male | *God is Conscious, Agentive, Authoritative |
| *Subjects are Active Humans | *Humanity/Israel is Conscious/Agentive |
| *Mutual, Assymetric Relation | *Mutual, Assymetric Relation |
| *Agent Gives Extravagant Compensation to Some Subjects | *God Rewards Humans Limitlessly |
| *Agent Sets Level of Compensation Without Approval of Subjects | *God Rewards Humans As God Sees Fit, Not as Humans Would Desire |

FEMALE HOUSEHOLDER (γυνη) Luke 15.8

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Householder is Active Human Female | *God is Conscious, Agentive |
| *Objects are Inanimate, Valuable Entities | *Humanity/Israel is Non-Agentive but Valued |
| *One of the Objects Becomes Lost | *One Human Leaves Relationship With God |
| *Agent Expends Extravagant Energy Searching for Object | *God Expends Limitless Energy Providing Opportunity for Lost Human to Return to Relationship |
| *Agent Finds Object (Change of State for Both Agent and Object) | *Human Returns to Relationship (Change of State for Human) |
| *Agent Invites Friends and Neighbors to Celebrate | *Angels of God Rejoice When Human Repents |

GATE (θυρα) John 10.7

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Gate is Inanimate Entity | *_____ |
| *Gate Has Inherent Property of Providing an Entrance to a Secure Area | *Jesus Is the Entrance to God's Kingdom |
| *Gate is the Legitimate Entrance | *Jesus is the Legitimate Entrance to God's Kingdom |
| *Movement Through the Gate Provides Access to Both Safety and Sustenance | *Belief in Jesus Provides Eternal Life |

PEARL (μαργαιτης) Matthew 13.45

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Pearl is Inanimate Entity | *Relationship with God can be Acquired |
| *Pearl is Valuable | *Relationship With God is Valuable |
| *Human Seeks Physical Control of Pearl | *Humans Seek Relationship with God |
| *Human Sells All Possessions to Gain Physical Control of Pearl | *Humans Should Risk All Worldly Possessions to be in Relationship With God |
| *Human Gains Physical Control of Pearl (Change of State) | *Those Who Risk All Gain a Relationship With God (Change of State) |

SHEPHERD (ποιμην) Matthew 18.12, John 10.11)

| SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS | BLEND |
|---|---|
| *Shepherd is Active Human | *God is Conscious, Agentive |
| *Sheep is Active Entity | *Humanity/Israel is Conscious/Agentive |
| *Sheep has Inherent Property of Insensitivity to Danger | *Human Beings Are Unable to Keep Themselves Out of Trouble |
| *Shepherd Has Responsibility to Provide Nurture and Protection to Sheep | *God Provides Nurture and Protection to Humans Out of Love |
| *Shepherd Risks Own Life for Sheep | *God, in form of Jesus, Gives Up Own Life for Humanity |
| *Shepherd Is Delighted to Save Even (Especially) the Most Inept Sheep | *God is Delighted in Saving Even (Especially) the Most Lost Human |

## Analysis and Discussion

Once again, we tabulated which characteristics appeared most frequently throughout our metaphorical analyses. These are presented below, with the metaphors in which they appeared listed underneath them. The "preferred" characteristics for God are virtually identical to those in the Hebrew Bible, with one addition—the characteristic of extravagance.

| Protection, Safety, Sustenance | Mutual Assymetric Relationship | Physical Control | Change of State Essence |
|---|---|---|---|
| father | father | father | father |
| parent* | parent* | king | parent* |
| shepherd | king | lord, master | judge |
| king | judge | farmer | witness |
| hen with chicks | lord, master | vinegrower | landowner |
| gate | man going on a | sower | (vineyard) |
| living bread | journey | creator | farmer |
| living water | landowner | one who raises from | vinegrower |
| light | (vineyard) | dead | sower |
| rock | landowner | female householder | creditor |
| armor | creditor | woman | counselor |
| | counselor | net | teacher |
| | teacher | | justifier |
| | hen with chicks | | creator |
| | wisdom | | saviour |
| | vine | | one who raises from dead |
| | | | reconciler |
| | | | redeemer |
| | | | female householder |
| | | | woman |
| | | | treasure |
| | | | pearl |
| | | | dove |
| | | | net |
| | | | consuming fire |

| Authority | Destructive, Power to Punish | Control |
|---|---|---|
| father | father | father |
| king | judge | shepherd |
| judge | king | king |
| lord, master | lord, master | landowner |
| landowner | man going on a | creditor |
| (vineyard) | journey | female householder |
| landowner | landowner | woman |
| teacher | (vineyard) | |
| justifier | farmer | |
| messiah | consuming fire | |
| hen with chicks | | |

*We are using "parent" as the translation for $\alpha\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\text{0}\varsigma$ in Matthew 7:9–10, where the gender of the persons to whom Jesus is addressing himself is unclear and could easily include women.

## FINDINGS

### Conclusions from Analysis

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the data presented above. First, mutual, asymmetric relationship is the ideal form of relationship, and relationship is preferable to no relationship. Viewing God and humans through this lens shows a two-way, loving relationship, with asymmetric power but symmetric love. God has power over human beings, but is vulnerable to them in relationship because of love. Humans, in turn, can freely give love, but cannot exercise power over God.

Second, human-to-human metaphors are generally preferred over metaphors where an inanimate object or animal is the agent. Human metaphors have rich entailments, which follow from an interaction between two animate and volitional entities. A human virtually always bears one side of the responsibility in the relationship, even when there is a vast power differential between the two entities.

The only exception to this preference for human-to-human metaphors appears in the images for protection and those for transformation (change of state or essence). In the protection group, the metaphor speaks to the human need for food and shelter from all kinds of danger. There are a number of metaphors (rock, shelter, gate, light, armor, etc.) in which the primary entity or agent is inanimate, and that entity's very existence is beneficial to the subject in some way. There are also metaphors where the agent is an animal (eagle, hen) engaged in a parent-offspring relationship. This mimicking of the human parent-child relationship calls up anthropomorphic entailments of mutual, asymmetric relationship. Additional metaphors bring in the cultural practice of willing land and goods to children to ensure survival after the parent's death.

In the metaphors for transformation, one often finds a human agent, but the object acted upon has little or no volition—sheep, seed, clay, treasure. In these metaphors, the action of the agent is emphasized; the entity that maps to the human is generally powerless and/or inanimate. This kind of metaphor emphasizes God's (asymmetric) power rather than love. However, in almost every case, the object has innate worth to the agent, which maps to God's love for humans. The object is unable to respond in any way to the agent; hence, the metaphor maps utter lack of human control.

Other metaphors emphasize the capacity of God to exercise authority, and to punish or destroy. These images seem to serve exclusively as reminders that God has ultimate power over humans.

In the Christian Scriptures, we find the additional characteristic of extravagance: the prodigal father, the woman lighting a lamp (using up a precious commodity) to sweep the house, the shepherd chasing after a single sheep. In each case, what seems like extravagance on a human scale is not extravagance for God, because God is limitless. Instead, extravagance in the source domain translates, in the blend, into a distribution of care and attention according to need.

There are two metaphors that incorporate all the preferred characteristics in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures: they are "father" and "king." From the point of view of metaphor theory, these terms do the most "work" of all the metaphors we examined—they are the richest and most complex. Father and king sum up the desired theological entailments for God that have been revealed by our analysis.

## Discussion of Findings

The physical progeneration of children by parents is a metaphor for the creation of humans by God and the ontological dependence of humans on God. Parenthood is arguably the strongest human experience of emotionally close (and emotionally symmetric, in that affection and relationship are mutual) but hierarchically asymmetric relationship. The parent-child relationship has, for most humans, its basis in the earliest physical experiences of nurturance, and is inextricably part of one's self.

For persons of biblical times, "King" would also yield strong experiential ties. Every person had a king, just as every person had a parent; and the conduct and priorities of the king had immediate and central importance to the lives of his subject. Kings in ancient Israel had the power of life and death over their subjects, could command their subjects' participation in war and peace-time labor, had control of virtually all resources except family-owned property, and were the chosen of God.[31] Good kings supported a just legal system which allowed subjects to live in peace with adequate resources.

If parent is such an ideal metaphor for God, then the question must be raised, why is not Mother as powerful a metaphor for the Deity as Father? And if King works so well, why not Queen?

One would have to point to the preferred characteristics listed above. While mother metaphors invoke nurturance, cultural norms mitigated against mothers providing inheritance, at least in the Jewish world. Mothers lacked the ultimate authority of fathers; the only feminine Biblical metaphor that involves punishment or destruction is the female bear rampaging after her children are killed. Mothers simply lacked the cultural power to map onto God, who has ultimate power.

And why not queens? Again, the answer is cultural. While queens had power, most queens did not possess such power in their own right (see, for instance, Jezebel, or Alexandra).

As Aida Besançon Spencer has pointed out, God is not "Father" because God is masculine; rather, "God is Father because 'father' in the ancient world was a helpful metaphor to communicate certain aspects of God's character" (p. 442). She goes on to argue that none of the qualities that describe fathers exclude mothers,

[31]This power could be exerted through the king himself or through agents.

with the exception of what she calls the father-ruler complex. This complex, specific to the ancient world, only applied to certain males, and involved the capacity to have armies, make judgments, and have heirs (pp. 440–441). We would argue that she is mixing her metaphors of king and father together, and that while both kings and fathers can make judgments and have heirs, only fathers who are kings have armies. But no mothers, at least in that cultural context, had the unassailable power to make judgments, direct armies, or endow heirs.

Our analysis supports the first part of Besançon Spencer's argument. As we have shown, *"Father" doesn't just communicate certain aspects of God's character; "Father" communicates the aspects of God's character that the biblical writers considered most important.* As one could see in the charts above for the Hebrew Bible, the mother metaphors do not reflect physical control or authority; in the Christian Bible, the mother metaphors are not used to show destructive capacity or power. In addition, for both scriptures, while the mother metaphors appear in the *Protection and Sustenance* category, they do not include the capacity to transfer goods and property—that is, inheritance—to children for lasting well-being after the death of the parent. It is clear that what makes "father" a richer metaphor than "mother" is at least in part the unqualified ability to exercise control, power, authority, and the capacity to provide for heirs. The same arguments hold true for "King" and "Queen."

## "I Don't Have that Metaphor!"

Much of the research presented above on cognitive linguistics makes it appear that metaphor is an individual thing, all in one's head; and in truth, metaphor theory is based on theories of neural connection. But recent research underscores the fact that culture plays an integral part in metaphor, and that one doesn't have to "own" a metaphor as personally applicable in order for it to apply in one's life. The mere existence of a particular common metaphor in one's culture means that the metaphor affects a person whether he or she likes it or not, or personally believes it or not. For instance, research has been done on the kinds of errors that school children make in adding on mathematics tests. Asian children, who have learned mathematics with the use of an abacus, tend to make mistakes in ways that are shaped by abacus usage—errors of 5, for instance. American children, who learn with paper and pencil, make mistakes in carrying over from one column to another (Stigler, 1984). The conclusion that most researchers draw is that metaphors work at a cultural level, regardless of our personal commitments (Gibbs, R., 1999).

So when someone argues that this is not their metaphor, the authors would reply one may prefer not to use a metaphor because it is personally offensive or theologically limiting, but that does not meant that one is incapable of understanding the metaphor, or incapable of using it in speech or thought with minimal

cognitive work. Neither one's personal distaste nor the creative genius of one's theology change the fact that a given metaphor is powerful and pervasive in one's culture.

## Where from Here?

When one uses any metaphor to speak of God (and the authors contend that one cannot speak of God without using metaphor), the structure of the source domain is used to reason about God. Hence, these metaphors actually constitute our relationship with God in crucial ways. When one calls God "Father," one projects, for instance, both trust and rebellion, love and resentment from the parent-child space into the God-human space. This is neither conscious nor intentional. Theologians should be concerned, at the very least, that persons with abusive or absent father relationships may find "Father God" language counterproductive to spiritual health. At a different level, theologians should be concerned with the repeated use of "father" and "king" because no matter how benevolent those particular metaphors may appear, they nonetheless suppress certain features of God and lead faith communities to inaccurate and inadequate representations.

One point that every theologian examined for this study made—some with delight and others with dismay—was that changing language meant changing the world. As Sally McFague puts it, "the current resistance to inclusive or unbiased language . . . indicates that people instinctively know that a revolution in language means a revolution in one's world" (1982, p. 9). The current resistance to inclusive language does indeed indicate that changing metaphors is revolutionary. A new metaphor means new entailments, new things highlighted, new things hidden, new cognitive structure with which one can reason about God, new implications about God and humans. New metaphors mean changing our licensing stories and deep cultural roots. But using new metaphors also means that we have to deal with the entailments and implications of old metaphors, either by satisfying them or bringing them to consciousness and repudiating them.

Our research above clearly shows that the metaphors which are most common in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures are in use because they do the most cognitive and subjective work—they satisfy the greatest number of characteristics which Jews and Christians have used to describe God. This is a finding that must be dealt with when one seeks to change metaphors. How we speak of God clearly shapes how we think of God, and of God and humans. If we choose new concepts but those concepts do not satisfy us at a cognitive level, we will find them impossible to sustain even if we prefer their political import.

Is the criterion for a good metaphor one that shocks? It would appear not necessarily so. The criterion for a good God-metaphor—at least one which will have staying power within our culture—would seem to be the ability to fulfill the human need to see God in terms of certain salient characteristics. It may be that we don't have available to us metaphors which will satisfy all these characteristics.

It may be that until "mother," for instance, carries the same cultural weight and power that "father" does, it will continue to be an inadequate substitute at the cognitive level. It may be that our best bet for moving toward inclusive language is not to eliminate "father" or "king," but to bring traditional metaphors consciously to mind in order to examine them more closely, and then to use multiple metaphors in juxtaposition, in the manner of Brian Wren's song "Bring Many Names," where mother and father, young and old, stand together as equal ways of evoking the ineffable and gracious power and love which humans have been trying since time immemorial to name.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was funded by a Newhall Fellowship from the Graduate Theological Union in Spring, 2001.

## REFERENCES

Achtemeier, E. (1992). Exchanging God for "No Gods": A discussion of female language for God. In A. Kimel (Ed.), *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (pp. 1–16). Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Besançon, S. A. (1996). Father-ruler: The meaning of the metaphor "Father" for God in the Bible. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, *39*(3), 433–442.

Daly, M. (1973). *Beyond God the father: Toward a philosophy of women's liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York: Basic Books.

Frye, R. M. (1992). Language for God and feminist language: Problems and principles. In A. Kimel (Ed.), *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (pp. 17–43). Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Gibbs, R. (1999). Taking metaphor out of our heads and putting it back into the cultural world. In R. Gibbs & G. Steen (Eds.), *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics: Selected papers from the fifth international cognitive linguistics conference* (pp. 146–166). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co.

Grady, J. (1997). *Foundations of meaning: Primary metaphors and primary scenes*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.

Grady, J. (1999). A typology of motivation for conceptual metaphor: Correlation vs. resemblance. In R. Gibbs & G. Steen (Eds.), *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics: Selected papers from the fifth international cognitive linguistics conference* (pp. 79–100). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co.

Johnson, C. (1996). Learnability in the acquisition of multiple senses: SOURCE reconsidered. In J. Johnson, M. Juge, & J. Moxley (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (pp. 469–480). Berkeley: Berkeley Linguistics Society.

Kimel, A. F. (1992). The god who likes his name: Holy trinity, feminism, and the language of faith. In A. Kimel (Ed.), *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (pp. 188–208). Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Lakoff, G. (1993). The contemporary theory of metaphor. In Ortony, A. (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lakoff, G., & Turner, M. (1989). *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McFague, S. (1982). *Metaphorical theology: Models of God in religious language*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

McFague, S. (1987). *Models of God: Theology for an ecological, nuclear age*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Narayanan, S. (1997). *Embodiment in language understanding: Sensory-motor representations for metaphoric reasoning about event descriptions*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.

Reinhartz, A. (1999). Introduction: "Father" as metaphor in the fourth gospel. *Semeia, 85*, 1–10.

Soskice, J. M. (1985). *Metaphor and religious language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Stigler, J. (1984). Mental abacus: The effect of abacus training on Chinese children's mental calculation. *Cognitive Psychology, 16*, 145–176.

Sweetser, E. E. (1990). *From etymology to pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Turner, M. (1987). *Death is the mother of beauty*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wren, B. (1989). *What language shall I borrow? God-talk in worship: A male response to feminist theology*. New York: Crossroad.