The *Journey Metaphor* in *Old Testament* Texts

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L'essai actuel souligne la centralité de la métaphore dans le discours religieux, aussi bien que sa présence dominante dedans. On insiste en particulier sur la métaphore du voyage (avec le schéma de chemin à son noyau) dans des divers textes de Vieux Testament, pour montrer, comment Jaekel, les neuf principes centraux de la théorie cognitive du métaphore (Jaekel 1997).

Metaphor (in its broadest definition, the representation of a subject matter in terms literally appropriate not to it, but to a different subject matter – or, as it has been called, unself-conscious imagery) should be viewed not as a „secondary" type of language, constructed on the basis of literal speech (the „true" language); cognitive scientists, by issuing a wealth of theories and models of metaphor, have repeatedly emphasized that metaphor is both central to human thought, as well as a central aspect of language, and no less privileged than literal language. Metaphors, moreover, are processed as quickly, and as automatically, as literal language[1].

It is not without interest to mention, by way of introduction, Lucian Blaga's well-known view on metaphor at large, as it provides cogent grounds for pursuing a general argumentation before going on to refer to a particular case study. Blaga (*The Genesis of Metaphor*, 1937) refers to metaphor as pertaining essentially to the very nature of human thought; its genesis, he argues, coincides with man's; it is, as Blaga puts it, „the symptom of a quasi-atemporal permanence", describing the very difference between man and animal and allowing for man's definition as "the metaphorizing animal", or „the animal able to metaphorize [*animalul*

[1] In an 1982 experiment conducted by Glucksberg, participants read three types of class-inclusion statements. The statements were either literally true, literally false and "anomolous" (i.e., they couldn't easily be interpreted metaphorically), or metaphorical. Participants were requested to judge whether the statements were *literally* true, and their reaction time in making this assessment was measured. Participants were quick to judge literally true statements as true, and literally false and anomolous statements as false, but they were significantly slower when rating metaphorical statements as literally false. This demonstrated that the participants were automatically interpreting the metaphorical statements metaphorically, and a subsequent literal interpetation required more time. This rules out the view that the statements must be interpreted literally first, prior to any metaphorical interpretation. Moreover, it also shows how deeply ingrained the metaphorical mode is in human thought.

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metaforizant]". That amounts to saying that the use of metaphor is a manifestation of human nature. It is meant either to compensate for the insufficience of direct expression, or to reveal hidden significances, when it does not happen to be a mere intellectual game. Blaga sees the very substance of culture – and not merely its stylistic aspect – as defined by a „metaphorical" aspect, insomuch as a cultural creation's substance (that is, its content, more or less abstract or sublimated) always implies the transfer or conjunction of terms pertaining to different domains. He distinguishes between two types of metaphors: the "plastic" ones, which simply enrich the meaning of a complex of facts by transferring upon it the terms of another, and are born of the incongruence between the concrete world and that of abstract notions; and the second type, which is called "revelatory" by Blaga. While the former type of metaphors will not alter the significance of the facts they refer to, but rather complete their expression, the latter type is meant to reveal a mystery, a hidden aspect. In other words, they refer beyond themselves. As long as one lives outside the horizon of mystery, unaware of it, one will confine oneself to employing the plastic metaphor; but at the moment of one's becoming truly „human", that is when one perceives the mystical, mysterious dimension, and responds to it, the revelatory metaphor occurs, as peculiar to human spiritual plenitude. (Blaga 1969: 276-277)

In religious texts, then, it is this second type of interpretation that best befits metaphor, given the essential belonging of religious discourse within this "horizon of mystery". One of the main features of religious discourse is the extensive use made of parables, stories, metaphors, or allegory (which is a series of metaphors or a sustained metaphor), in order to articulate subtle insights in a form that can be readily interpreted, due to the propensity of human spirit for grasping the spiritual dimension. When discussing metaphor in religious discourse, a distinction should be made, of course, between the element of imagery and the element of old-fashioned speech, which may sound vaguely figurative to many readers, and also between the discussion broaching the topic of metaphor proper and that of the metaphorical hermeneutic, that is the metaphorical interpretation of a religious text, which is beyond the scope of the present essay and concerns what may be considered the appropriate modes of representation when applied to religious subject matter.

St. Thomas Aquinas addressed the issue of the place of metaphor in religious discourse, by stating:

It is befitting Holy Scripture to put forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparisons with material things. For God provides for everything according to the capacity of its nature. Now it is natural to man to attain to intellectual truths through sensible things, because all our knowledge originates from sense. Hence in Holy Scripture spiritual truths are fittingly taught under the likeness of material things (*Summa theologica,* Q. I, Art. 9).

He answered the charge that it is somehow unfitting to represent higher things by lower, by pointing out that since God is not knowable directly by any sensible

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concepts, we are saved from erroneously supposing that we have literal understanding by the very incongruity of the metaphors employed. Such metaphors have, on the one hand, the advantage of being readily available to "the simple who are unable by themselves to grasp intellectual things" while being, on the other hand, the means whereby „divine truths are the better hidden from the unworthy" (loc. cit.).

The tenets of the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor have been discussed by Lakoff and Jäkel (cf. Lakoff 1993, Jäkel 1995). They are summarized by nine hypotheses. The first one is the *Ubiquity Hypothesis*: according to it, linguistic metaphor is not an exceptional matter of poetic creativity or excessive rhetoric, but it abundantly occurs in perfectly ordinary everyday language (not to mention highly specialised discourse). Therefore, metaphors must be viewed as part of our general linguistic competence. The *Domain Hypothesis* asserts that most metaphorical expressions are not to be treated in isolation, but as linguistic realisations of *conceptual metaphors.* These consist in the connection of two different *conceptual domains*, one of which functions as *target domain* and the other supplying the *source domain* of the metaphorical mapping. One conceptual domain is understood by taking recourse to another domain of experience. Thirdly, the *Model Hypothesis* shows that conceptual metaphors often form coherent *cognitive models*: structures of organised knowledge as pragmatic simplifications of an even more complex reality; they can be reconstructed by means of cognitive linguistic analyses of everyday language. These cognitive models are likely to unconsciously determine the world view of a whole linguistic community. According to the *Diachrony Hypothesis,* even in the historical development of languages, most metaphorical meaning extensions are not a matter of isolated expressions, but provide evidence of systematic metaphorical projections between whole conceptual domains. Therefore a cognitive approach to metaphor can benefit from the integration of the diachronic dimension. The fifth hypothesis – the *Unidirectionality Hypothesis* – states that as a rule, a metaphor („X is Y") links an *abstract* and complex target domain (X) as *explanandum* with a more *concrete* source domain (Y) as *explanans*, which is more simply structured and open to sensual experience. The relation between the elements X and Y is irreversible, the metaphorical transfer having an unequivocal direction. The *Invariance Hypothesis* asserts that in conceptual metaphors, certain schematic elements are mapped from the source domain onto the target domain without changing their basic structure. These preconceptual *image-schemata* provide the experiential grounding of even the most abstract of conceptual domains. The *Necessity Hypothesis* dwells on the *explanatory function* of metaphors. Certain issues could hardly be understood or conceptualised without recourse to conceptual metaphor. Abstract conceptual domains, theoretical constructs, and metaphysical ideas in particular are only made accessible to our understanding by means of metaphor. The *Creativity Hypothesis* shows that the meaningfulness of metaphor does not yield to simple paraphrase. Its meaning cannot be reduced to a nonmetaphorical form without loss. Hence, by its *creativity*

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metaphor can restructure ingrained patterns of thinking, and have a *heuristic function*. The final tenet of the theory – the *Focussing Hypothesis* maintains that metaphors only supply a *partial* description or explanation of the target domain in question, highlighting certain aspects while hiding others. It is this *focussing* that makes the difference between alternative metaphors for the same target domain.

This theoretical framework accounts for the frequency and importance of metaphors in religious discourse. The conceptualisation of metaphysical notions, which are central to the religious domain, is often of metaphorical nature (the necessity hypothesis): „It is not only a highly abstract domain quite removed from sensual experience, but its central issues of *God*, the *soul*, the *hereafter*, and the *freedom* of moral choice have traditionally been regarded as *the* metaphysical ideas par excellence". (Jäkel: www.metaphorik.de:6) The names given to God by means of conventional metaphors (which conceptualise Him as *father*, *lover*, *shepherd*, *craftsman*, *employer*, *landowner*, *lord*, *king*, or *judge)* confirm the hypotheses of necessity and unidirectionality; their source domain is concrete type, open to direct experience, while the relationship between source and target domains is unidirectional; moreover, according to the *domain hypothesis*, these display enough systematicity to be accounted for in terms of conceptual metaphors, which form coherent *cognitive models*.

Countless examples of metaphor may be found in biblical imagery[2]. In images concerned with security and protection, God, for instance, is pictured as a rock, a fortress, a shield, a shepherd, a fountain of living waters, a planter of good seed, a husband, a father, a lion, and so on.

We have chosen to dwell on the particularly interesting journey metaphor. While the „life as a journey" is a common metaphor in ordinary speech and in any language (*to travel down life's path*, or *to have come a long way* – with the meaning of acquisition, or *to choose a certain path*, which relates to the good/bad dichotomy, while counsellors are *guides* that *lead* or *show the way*), it pertains to the religious sphere as well: among others, the spiritual dimension of pilgrimage is worth mentioning, as a religious act of travelling, related to both the earthly and the heavenly ways, offering access to sacred realities and integrating all aspects that pertain to human nature but are also are open to a theological, revelatory significance (Vasilescu 2001: 581). Hence the imagery concerning the notions of *pilgrim* and *pilgrimage*, quite often employed metaphorically in religious discourses. Biblical exegesis refers to wandering as both God's punishment and, starting with Abraham, the sign of election by God; Christians are *strangers* and *exiles* on the earth, they are not „of this world"; the Exodus, Israel's way to the

[2] Interestingly, the Old Testament provides examples of metaphorical expression not only in speech, but also in significant action, through nonverbal imagery: prophet Hosea married a whore as living enactment of his central image, while the prophet Jeremiah publicly broke a potter's vessel and proclaimed "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as the potter has done? says the Lord. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel" (Jeremiah 18:6).

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promised land, has been interpreted by patristic literature as both the progress of the individual Christian and the entire Church.

Existence in its broadest sense is not static, a definitive achievement; reality presupposes change, which is perceived as advancing, progressing, going *along a way*. For a believer, the path to be run is necessarily defined in relation to God: without God (that is, in the absence of faith) man's existential predicament may be expressed as coming from nowhere and heading to nowhere. The path of life ought to be, moreover, travelled in a certain manner in order to lend superior sense to human condition. If reaching the realm of heavens is one's goal – that is, choosing the right path – then the experience of travelling the path of life is, indeed, an ascending path, an *ascension* towards God. Romanian language expresses this by the double meaning of the term *a mîntui* which means not only *to be saved*, but also to *reach an end*, to *finish* an endeavour: thus, the final state to be achieved by leading a righteous life is salvation. The polysemous character of the term *step*, also, as either forward movement or ascensional movement, action taken in order to achieve an end, or stage in a process, emphasizes the same idea. The positive sense of one's action is prerequisite: it does not suffice to act freely, to undertake an action, but as Romanian language has it, by saying „a duce la bun sfîrşit", not any result but only a commendable one ought to be achieved, bringing about spiritual healing and moral progress and presupposing a set of superior values.

The journey model is pervasively present in the scriptural texts. The New Testament provides some of the most remarkable instances of the metaphorical journey model: from the Saviour's assertion „*I am the way, the truth and the life*" which emphasized His paradoxical capacity as a guide along the way and the way itself[3], to the metaphorical conceptualisation present in His moral imperative: „*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and* the road *is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and* the road *is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it*", or to New Testament moments which have entered the common phraseology due to their exemplary value, such as the *way to Golgotha* as a metaphor for both the place of sacrifice and the gateway to glory, or the *road to Damascus* as a metaphor for the conversion experience, or again the *way to Emmaus* as the metaphor for a dramatic turnaround due to one's encounter with the living Christ. St. Paul's words: „*By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called* to go out *to a place which he was to receive as inheritance; and he* went out*, not knowing where he was* to go. *By faith he sojourned in the land of promise,* as in a foreign land" (Hebrews 11, 8-10, emphasis mine) also resort to the journey model.

The present paper, however, focuses on the journey pattern as instantiated by metaphorical expressions in the Old Testament. It has been aptly remarked that of old, travelling was indeed known, but not tourism; in other words, journeys were

[3] As Saint Gregory of Nyssa puts it, "The Only Begotten […] is both the target of those running towards Him, and the path being run", Gregory of Nyssa 1982: 180. Thus, the right path, truth and (eternal) life to which this path leads are inseparable.

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loaded with greater significance and never involved the gratuitous satisfaction of sightseeing. Once one finds oneself on a public way, one's purpose and aims are revealed by the way one takes; hence, besides the literal usage of the term, there is a series of cases where journeying is metaphorically employed. We shall further constantly refer to Olaf Jäkel's study[4], which employs the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor in a semasiological approach to the analysis of the journey metaphor.

The journey metaphor, as Jäkel shows, has as target domain the idea of righteous life, moral choice, hope, and the relation between God and human beings, while its source domain is based on the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema including a starting point, the path and a goal. This basic structure implies other important notions, like progress, motion in a certain direction, landmarks, obstacles along the path, or speed of motion. This religious model lends itself to a number of conceptualizations, as follows: leading a moral life is making a journey on God's way; sinning is swerving from God's way; repenting is returning; moral choice is a choice of path; God's way is a straight path; God's way leads to (eternal) life, while evil ways lead to death; God's way is a level, straight path, while evil ways are crooked and full of obstacles; the righteous take heed to their way, they hold to their way; the wicked trod the old ways; the wicked are ignorant of God's way; the righteous run God's way, while the wicked run to evil; God observes all human ways, He watches over the righteous' way, leads them and teaches them; God obstructs the ways of the wicked.

In the Old Testament context referred to here, the journey metaphor is based on the dichotomy between the righteous life and the immoral one (deliberately chosen). The common model of the journey of life, or life as a journey, acquires the significance of a moral journey: the target domain is moral behaviour, the path to be followed are God's commandments, a moral life is a journey on God's way, while unethical conduct is described as swerving, straying from it. God Himself is the guide on this way. The choice of path is a conscientious one, hence the responsibility entailed by it; since the result of departing from God is following other gods, He sets before people either His blessing – for taking the way of faith – or His curse for their deviation (Deuteronomy 11:28).

You must ***follow exactly the path*** that the Lord your God has commanded you, (Deuteronomy 5: 33);

…keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. (Genesis 18:19)

Blessed are those ***whose way is blameless,*** *who* ***walk*** *in the law of the Lord!* ***(Psalm 119:1-2)***

For I have ***kept the ways of the Lord***, and have not wickedly ***departed from*** my God. (2 Samuel 22:22)

… a curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but ***turn from the way*** that I am commanding you today, ***to follow other gods*** (Deuteronomy 11:28).

[4] Jäkel. O. "Hypotheses Revisited: The Cognitive Theory of Metaphor Applied to to Religious Texts" http://www.metaphorik.de/02/jaekel.htm

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The wrongdoer is a traveller walking along a wicked way; God, however, will punish him, in His capacity of a Righteous Judge, a divine, all-perceiving observer of human ways:

For the Lord knows ***the way of the righteous***, but the ***way of the wicked*** will perish (Psalm 1:6)

For ***his eyes are upon the ways of mortals, and he sees all their steps***. (Job 34:21)

For ***human ways are under the eyes of the Lord, and he examines all their paths***. (Proverbs 5:21)

God's agency is manifest in His committed watch and support of the righteous along their way; moreover, He is their guide and actively involved, by showing them the path to follow, as if holding the righteous traveller by the hand; this very act of leading the faithful is a reward of their behaviour:

In all your ways acknowledge him [God], and ***he will make straight your paths***. (Proverbs 3:6)

He will teach them ***the way that they should choose***. (Psalm 25:12)

Make me to know ***your ways***, O Lord; teach me ***your paths***. (Psalm 25:4)

He leads me in right paths. (Psalm 23:3)

Our steps are made firm by the Lord, when he delights in our way; though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, ***for the Lord holds us by the hand***. (Psalm 37:23-24)

Symmetrically, God may obstruct one's way; it may be a trial, as in Job's case, or divine action taken against those who disobey His commandments; it is equally a means of punishment and an attempt to prevent them to pursue wicked ways.

He has ***walled up my way so that I cannot pass***, and he has ***set darkness upon my paths***. (Job 19:8)

Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the Lord pursuing them. (Psalm 35:6)

Persistence in both good and ill deeds is a matter of man's personal choice of path:

… do not ***walk in the ways of wrongdoing***. (Tobit 4:5)

I have ***chosen the way*** of faithfulness. (Psalm 118:30)

It is, however, still possible for the transgressor to repent and return, as the following of a wrong path is not necessarily irreversible; the path may feature crossroads, and it is possible at such a point to head for the different direction.

Then I will teach ***transgressors your ways***, and sinners will ***return to you***. (Psalm 51)

God's way – the good way to be followed - is a straight path; while man travels it over the span of a human life, in its turn it leads to eternal life, as a metaphysical destination:

Prepare **the way** of the Lord, make His **paths straight** (Isaiah 40:3)

[...] you averted our ruin, ***walking in the straight path*** before our God. (Judith 13:20)

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At all times bless the Lord God, and ask him that ***your ways may be made straight*** and that ***all your paths*** and plans may prosper. (Tobit 4:19)

Evil ways, however, are not only crooked but also devious, metaphorically dark and slippery.

To the faithful his ways are straight, but full of pitfalls for the wicked. (Sirach 39:24)

Those [...] who ***forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness***, [...] those ***whose paths are crooked***, and who are ***devious in their ways***. (Proverbs 2: 15)

Precisely because it is their choice to depart from righteousness, God Himself will deny His assistance to evildoers and drive them along such a path. Conversely, he guildes and protects the steps of the faithful, preventing them from falling:

Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they shall be driven and fall. (Jeremiah 23:12)

But those ***who turn aside to their crooked ways***, the Lord will lead away with evildoers (Psalm 125:5)

LORD, you brought me up from Sheol; you ***kept me from going down to the pit***. (Psalm 30:3)

He will ***guard the feet*** of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be ***cut off in the darkness*** (1 Samuel 2, 9)

Unlike the way of righteousness that takes one to life, all evil ways result in death. Knowledge and moral choice are metaphorically equated with one's taking the right path, therefore following the wrong ways is a fool's option; moreover, one may misguide others into taking the same path.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end ***it leads to death***. (Proverbs 14:12)

The ***way of a fool*** seems right to him (Proverbs 12:15)

Man ***is a guide to his neighbor,*** *but* ***the way of the wicked leads them astray***. (Proverbs 12:26)

Do not those who plot evil ***go astray***? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness. (Proverbs 14:22)

Those leading a correct life take care not to go astray, and to maintain a moral conduct; they fix their eyes on the right path. Moreover, they enjoy their journey and are eager to travel God's way:

I have avoided the ways of the violent. My steps have held fast in your paths; my feet have not slipped. (Psalm 17:4-5)

I delight in ***the way*** of ***your*** decrees as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts, and ***fix my eyes on your ways***. (Psalm 119: 14-15)

Jäkel notes that even *speed* of movement can be involved, again in either one of the alternative directions: the righteous run God's way, while conversely, the wicked run towards evil, which is an indicative trait of those who lead immoral lives:

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When I think of your ***ways***, I ***turn my feet to*** your decrees; I ***hurry*** and **do not delay** to keep your commandments. (Psalm 119:59)

My child, ***do not walk in their way, keep your foot from their paths; for their feet run to evil***, and they hurry to shed blood. (Proverbs 1:15-16)

The wicked will take the "old ways" , wander along the decayed „ancient roads", due to their mental and moral inertia; it is because they not only know nothing of the ways of God, but refuse to know them. The righteous, however, will follow the new ways indicated by God:

My people [...] ***have stumbled in their ways, in the ancient roads, and have gone into bypaths, not the highway***. (Jeremiah 18:15)

They say to God: "Leave us alone! We do not desire to know ***your ways***." (Job 21:14)

He pursues them and moves on unscathed, ***by a path his feet have not traveled before*** (Isaiah 41: 3)

Saint Seraphim of Sarov pointed out that salvation is the ultimate goal of Christian life – the end of one's journey, so to say. What this presupposes is a conscientious choice of lifestyle: therefore the journey metaphor is a valuable conceptual tool which mediates the arrival at a sense of man's responsibility for his own salvation.

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