

## LOGOS ENDIATHETOS AND METAPHOR IN THEOLOGY

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### The spoken and the unspoken Word

T. S. Eliot in his poem *Ash-Wednesday* gives a very cogent description of the hidden logos, that the Stoics called the *logos endiathetos*:

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent  
If the unheard, unspoken  
Word is unspoken, unheard;  
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,  
The Word without a word, the Word within  
The world and for the world;  
And the light shone in darkness and  
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled  
About the centre of the silent Word.

We can read “the Word within the world” in the poem analogically to the *logos spermatikos* (generative word) of the Stoics that in turn is reflected in the *logos endiathetos* (the word residing in the mind). This *internal reason* makes humans different from animals.<sup>1</sup> *Logos prophorikos* is an expression that the Stoics used for human speech. Philo, under the influence of Stoicism, used this difference in an allegorical way when Moses is for him the *logos endiathetos* and Aaron the *logos prophorikos*. His allegory illustrates the familiar problem of the speech-thought relationship. Moses has the word from God, but he cannot communicate it. Here comes in Aaron’s mediation although he is not receiving direct words from God, he is able to put the the rational nature (λογικὴ φύσις) represented by Moses into the uttered words of human speech. By “rational nature” Philo means those attributes of human character that arise under the influence of the Divine Logos. For the Stoics the divine logos was the creative principle that has given reason and meaning to the passive matter. Philo goes so far as to identify the rational

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<sup>1</sup> “Man does not differ in respect of uttered reason (τῷ προφορικῷ λόγῳ) from the irrational animals (for crows and parrots and jays utter articulate sounds), but in respect of internal reason (ἀλλὰ τῷ ἐνδιαθέτῳ).” Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians* (London: William Heinemann, 1967), 382-3.

principle in nature (ὁ τῆς φύσεως λόγος) with truth.<sup>2</sup> The Logos of the Gospel of John 1:1 was explained by Trinitarian thinking developed later in Church history. But even if we do not take Trinitarian theology into account, we can sense that there is more in the Logos of the first verse,<sup>3</sup> than the Old Testament can explain.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that the understandings of the *logos* in Greek philosophy and in John's gospel differ substantially in their attributes. Nevertheless, in both cases a world-power or reason governing reality is meant that seeks expression in human speech, in concrete words and intelligible sentences. The human mind gains access to the *logos spermatikos* and the *logos endiathetos (ratio)* through the *logos prophorikos* – the spoken word (*oratio*). But how can it be realized? Especially when some philosophers deny the existence of the “unspoken word”.<sup>5</sup>

### Translating the unspoken Word

The problems connected with translating Eliot's “unspoken Word” or “the Word within the world” (*logos endiathetos*) into human language (*logos prophorikos*) are massive. Gadamer compared them to the relationships between the Persons of the Trinity.<sup>6</sup> Talking of such matters we have to use analogical language described by Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*.<sup>7</sup> Bertrand Russell in his article *On Denoting* analyzes the difference between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. By acquaintance we know things that we have presentations of. There are also things we do not know directly but only by means of denoting phrases. But everything we know by denoting depends on our knowledge by acquaintance: “All thinking has to start from acquaintance; but it

<sup>2</sup> “For the rational principle in nature is true, and sets forth all things clearly [...]” (Philo, *De vita Mosis II*, 25:128.)

<sup>3</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (ESV).

<sup>4</sup> “The Λόγος of Jn 1:1 cannot therefore be understood on the basis of the O.T.: for the Λόγος here is not an event recurring within the temporal world, but is eternal being, existent with God from the very beginning. This being so, the only thing that could be designated simply his ‘Word’ would be God's revelatory will, in so far as it stands behind, and works in, all to individual ‘words’ of God.” (Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971, 21.)

<sup>5</sup> “By the inner word, however – and this should be made emphatically clear – is meant no private or psychological inner world existing prior to its verbal expression. Rather, it is that which strives to be externalized in spoken language.”

<sup>6</sup> “[...] for the human relationship between thought and speech corresponds, despite its imperfections, to the divine relationship of the Trinity. Trinity. The inner mental word is just as consubstantial with thought as is God the Son with God the Father.” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2006), 420.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.13.1-6, 12.

succeeds in thinking about many things with which we have no acquaintance.”<sup>8</sup> Both Aquinas and Russell, although very different in their worldviews, speak of an inaccessible reality, unknowable by the direct sensory contact that can be made known by language. We may metaphorically say, the inaccessible thing is carried over – translated<sup>9</sup> – from the hidden realm into language.

But discussing translation we naturally come across with the idea of metaphor. Not only the Greek word *metafora*, literally means “transference” (*translatio* in Latin) but all human language is indelibly dependent on metaphorical expressions. And although in the past,<sup>10</sup> metaphorical speech was viewed as the domain of poetic language, newer linguistic theories argue that all language depends on the use of metaphor:<sup>11</sup> Philosopher Owen Barfield writes:

“[...] the first things that a student of etymology, even quite an amateur student, discovers for himself is that every modern language, with its thousands of abstract terms and its nuances of meaning and association, is apparently nothing, from beginning to end, but an unconscionable tissue of dead, or petrified, metaphors.”<sup>12</sup>

A similar statement comes from C. S. Lewis: “All language, except about objects of sense, is metaphorical through and through.”<sup>13</sup> The same can be said about religion: “Religious language constructs models which are extended metaphors.”<sup>14</sup> In the above quoted article by Russell, metaphor is not mentioned but what he says about denoting may, with some reservations, be applied to metaphor as well: metaphor in non-poetical language “denotes” things with which we have no direct acquaintance. If metaphor is used to denote a thing or describe a reality that can be known by direct perception, it is probably poetry.

If all language is metaphorical we may surmise that metaphor must be quite easy to recognize. But this is far from being true. The problem may be well illustrated by the

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<sup>8</sup> Bertrand Russell, “On Denoting”. *Mind*, 14:56. (1905), 480.

<sup>9</sup> “Translatio” - the action of moving (a thing) from one place to another [...] (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon press, 1968.)

<sup>10</sup> “[...] for the major part of our philosophical history, the idea that metaphor lies at the heart of human conceptualization and reasoning has been rejected [...]” (Raymond W. Gibbs (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 39.

<sup>11</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “metaphor” as “the figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 63.

<sup>13</sup> Clive Staples Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 71.

<sup>14</sup> Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 27.

complications researchers encounter when they try to develop methods that extract metaphors from corpora.<sup>15</sup> Traditional ways of defining metaphor can be found in dictionaries and theoretical works on poetry. Edward Hirsch says that:

“Metaphor is a device for seeing – for experiencing – one thing in terms of another. [...] A transfer of energies, a mode of energetic relation, of interpenetration, a matter of identity and difference. A collision, or a collusion, in the identification of unlike things. [...] Meaning emerges as an intimate collaborative process between writer and reader.”<sup>16</sup>

Next we shortly explore the attitudes of some thinkers towards poetry and metaphor.

### Metaphor, Poetry and Truth

The language of poets “[...] is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of thing and perpetuates their apprehension.”<sup>17</sup> By analogy, we may say that our attitudes towards poetry include also an opinion on metaphor. Poetry awakens our emotions only if we admire “[...] the genius or talent of the author.”<sup>18</sup> If we do not allow ourselves to be “displaced” in our minds and emotions by the ingenuity of poetic transposition we may find poetry and metaphor quite a nuisance. So metaphor may be either a “pleasure of ulteriority”<sup>19</sup> or a “perspective by incongruity”.<sup>20</sup>

Empiricists and analytic philosophers tend to look at metaphor with suspicion. Donald Davidson calls it “the dreamwork of language” and insists that “[...] its interpretation reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator”.<sup>21</sup> For others, metaphor is a “form of irrelevance”<sup>22</sup> or poetry is even an object of hatred.<sup>23</sup> The reason?

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<sup>15</sup> The problems are succinctly described in *Corpus-based approaches to metaphor and metonymy*. Anatol Stefanowitsch and Stefan Th. Gries (eds.) *Corpus-based approaches to metaphor and metonymy* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 1-6.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem* (San Diego: A Harvest Book, 1999), 289.

<sup>17</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Selected Poems, Essays and Letters* (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1944), 532.

<sup>18</sup> Eugène Véron, E. *Aesthetics* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1879), 336.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Frost, *The Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: The Modern Library, 1946), xvi.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* (New York: New Republic, 1935), 95.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean”. *Critical Inquiry*, 5:1 (1978), 31.

<sup>22</sup> Yvor Winters, *In Defense of Reason* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947), 537.

<sup>23</sup> “Je crois n'avoir rien tant haï que la poésie.” (I believe I have nothing hated more than poetry.) Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 421.

It produces illusion and according to Plato it exposes its audience to the corruption of self. Poets, according to Plato, produce phantoms not realities.<sup>24</sup>

On the positive side, Aristotle says that “the apt use of metaphor [...] is the true hall-mark of genius”.<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, against Plato, held, that the emotions should not be starved or repressed, but should be given expression in a controlled manner that leads to *katharsis*. He also maintained that poetry is more philosophical than e.g. history.<sup>26</sup>

Horace who greatly influenced western attitudes to poetry, reminds poets in his *Ars Poetica* (given that title by Quintilian) that they should not “deceive themselves by the semblance of truth”.<sup>27</sup> This work has been shaping positive views of poetry in the West to the present day.

Shelley famously said “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world”.<sup>28</sup> Poetry in this view gives power to the abstract theories of the philosophers. Poetry has it in its power to become a substitute for religion.

Heidegger in his *Poetically Man Dwells* says: “Poetry first causes dwelling to be dwelling [...] Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building”.<sup>29</sup> He also says “The point is not to listen to a series of propositions, but rather to follow the movement of showing.”<sup>30</sup>

Such contradictory evaluations of poetry and poetic imagery is related to the problem of truth, because “[...] we may be led to believe all sorts of truths or falsehoods by some particularly arresting metaphorical image [...] In any case, we should be suspicious about the claim that there is something special about poetic metaphor as regards truth”.<sup>31</sup> As metaphor is “the most conspicuous point of contact between meaning and poetry,”<sup>32</sup> the problem of truthful communication of meaning is the same.

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<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Republic X*, 599A.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1459a5.

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451b5-7.

<sup>27</sup> Horace, *Ars Poetica* 25.

<sup>28</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry,” in *Selected Poems, Essays and Letters*, ed. Ellsworth Barnard (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1944), 568.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), 213.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Guttenplan, *Objects of Metaphor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 16.

<sup>32</sup> Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 63.

## Metaphorical Language and the Logos Endiathetos

In western philosophy the idea of scientific exactness and truth has been closely related to the objectivist rejection of metaphor.<sup>33</sup> From the 18<sup>th</sup> century natural sciences have been immensely popular because of their success at explaining reality. If theology desired to become respectable in a similar way to the natural sciences it had to dismiss metaphorical language and replace it with literal descriptions of theological subjects. The project has failed as we know now.<sup>34</sup> The admission we cannot speak or think without metaphors is almost universal today.<sup>35</sup>

After the positivistic attempts to make theology a “hard science” have failed, theologians are returning – some cautiously, some enthusiastically – to the “fold of metaphorical language”. For example, Walter Brueggemann wrote: “After the scientist and the engineer, ‘finally comes the poet’ (which Israel calls prophet) – to evoke a different world a new song, a fresh move, a new identity, a resolve about ethics, a being at home.”<sup>36</sup> We may also quote Hans Urs von Balthasar (quoting Fritz Medicus): “God needs prophets in order to make himself known, and all prophets are necessarily artists. What a prophet has to say can never be said in prose.”<sup>37</sup>

But long before the arrival of modern natural sciences Augustine was aware of the fact that “[...] the ambiguities of metaphorical words (*verborum translatorum*) [...] require no ordinary care and attention”<sup>38</sup> in their interpretation. The reason should be obvious: metaphor is closely related to metaphysics without which theology can hardly exist.<sup>39</sup> That means that theology is inevitably bound with poetry. At the same time we must take seriously the caveat that “the poetic is irreducible to the mode of signification”.<sup>40</sup> On the

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<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche complains: “Ah, how I am weary of all the inadequate that is insisted on as actual! Ah, how I am weary of the poets! – Ach, wie bin ich all des Unzulänglichen müde, das durchaus Ereignis sein soll! Ach, wie bin ich der Dichter müde!” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (New York: Random House, 1917), 140.

<sup>34</sup> “But today we know that not only poetry is made of metaphors, but “[...] also philosophy - and science, too, for that matter, if it will take the soft impeachment from a friend”.” (Frost, *The Poems of Robert Frost*, xvi.)

<sup>35</sup> “[...] metaphor is pervasive in everyday life [...] Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 10.

<sup>37</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theological Aesthetics I* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 43.

<sup>38</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 141.

<sup>39</sup> “The idea of “transposing” and of metaphor is based upon the distinguishing, if not complete separation, of the sensible and the nonsensible as two realms that subsist on their own. [...] The metaphorical exists only within metaphysics.” Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 48.

<sup>40</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: SAGE Publications, 1993), 198.

one hand, we are unable to access the *logos endiathetos* without using metaphors, on the other hand, metaphors are ambiguous and we cannot be certain they convey truth. Their interpretation depends too much on the expectations on the part of the receiver.<sup>41</sup>

We may come to terms with the situation by accepting uncertainty and taking theology to be a human construct.<sup>42</sup> Some theologies propose to exploit the psychological and emotional side of the metaphorical language to change the ways we think and respond to God.<sup>43</sup> In such case the hidden logos is simply left inaccessible and theology is more or less a construction of arbitrarily chosen metaphors that suit best the author and/or the contemporary thought.

It is also possible to theoretize that although metaphors do not provide us with unmistakable clues for accessing the *logos endiathetos* there are epistemological methods to reach it. Such a method could be the intuition described by Bergson. In his opinion the absolute cannot be given a name, it must be intuited before it can be analyzed and expressed in words. Intuition according to Bergson is “[...] the sympathy by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it.”<sup>44</sup> Metaphysics developed by such intuition does not need symbols to access the absolute reality.<sup>45</sup>

Theology can hardly dispense with symbols but the idea of intuition can be treated as analogical to the spiritual discernment (1Cor 2:14) which apostle Paul posits in those who are to understand “the things of the Spirit of God” (τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος θεοῦ). We can quote von Balthasar again:

“If Jesus was the ‘expositor’ of the divine Father (Jn 1:18), it is the ‘Spirit of truth’ who will initiate human beings into this truth of Jesus, who called himself ‘the truth’,

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<sup>41</sup> Viktória Šoltésová, “Kultúrny rozmer prekladu Novej zmluvy a Relevance Theory,” in *Chápať a vysvetľovať*, ed. Albín Masarik (Banská Bystrica: KTaK, 2013), 131.

<sup>42</sup> “The image/concept of God, a human construct like all other symbols, is, and always has been, built up through extrapolation or development of certain finite metaphors or models, in such a way that it can serve as the ultimate point of reference for understanding and interpreting all of experience, life, and the world.” Gordon D. Kaufman, *God, Mystery, Diversity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 45.

<sup>43</sup> “But I would like to suggest very briefly an alternative to the picture of the world as the king's realm: let us consider the world as God's ‘body’.” Sally McFague, “The World as God's Body,” *The Christian Century* (July 20-27, 1998), 671-673.

<sup>44</sup> Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 190.

<sup>45</sup> It is the opinion of Bataille, that “[...] literature (fiction) took the place of what had formerly been the spiritual life [...]” Georges Bataille, “On Nietzsche: The Will to Chance,” in *October 36* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 56. (“Spiritual life” means direct access to reality we describe as the *logos endiathetos* in this article.)

meaning the right exposition of God. This introduction into the God-man's exposition initiates the human spirit into the rightness of the logic of the Logos."<sup>46</sup>

This is why belief is so important to the interpretation of metaphorical language. For Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana* the use of a sign as a "thing" instead of what is signified by it is a mark of servile weakness.<sup>47</sup> What Augustine says about signs can be said about metaphors as well. The apostle says we have no way of accessing it (neither through the senses nor through imagination 1Cor 2:9) but the Spirit gives us understanding. This may show itself in emotional response to the logos of God in addition to the rational understanding of it.<sup>48</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Metaphorical language about spiritual realities means comparing the empirical world with the spiritual realm. This is what Jesus did in his parables. But the parables were both revealing and hiding the reality they described (Mat 13:11-13). To correctly understand them required the guidance of the Spirit of God. To bring the *logos endiathetos* out from its "hiding place", theology cannot dispense with metaphor. The problem of ambiguity is unavoidable and requires a special hermeneutical attention and the gift of guidance by the Spirit of God. A scientific proof of it is impossible to give. It becomes what philosophy calls private knowledge that can be communicated only in the form of testimony.

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<sup>46</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Truth of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 18.

<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 147.

<sup>48</sup> Jaroslav Maďar, *Dejiny slovenského pietizmu* (Banská Bystrica: Belianum, 2017), 161.