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## METAPHOR AND METONYMY AS TOOLS FOR DESCRIBING GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The present paper analyses metaphor and metonymy describing God in The Old Testament. Instances of these phenomena are approached from the cognitive perspective, suggested by Lakoff and Johnson (2003). The aim of this article is to show that the metaphorical and metonymical references to God in The Old Testament do not function as merely rhetorical devices, but are conceptualizations of God, grounded in people's everyday experiences. This fact plays an important role in the process of understanding the notion of *God*. The discussed metaphors and metonymies are classified into personifications as instances of ontological metaphor, structural metaphors, orientational metaphors and metonymies.

### 1. Introduction

The Bible constitutes the basics of faith for millions of Christians of different denominations, as well as for the Jews who were the first authors and readers of the Bible. The Holy Scripture, and especially its oldest part, The Old Testament, is also respected by numerous Muslims, and by believers of other religions. Also, those who do not believe in the God of the Bible read it and describe its various literal, linguistic, or philosophical merits. The history of the Chosen Nation described in The Old Testament is a history of a dialogue between God and the People. The notion of God seems to be central to the Bible. Biblical authors use different strategies to describe Him, and among others, metaphors and metonymies. The object of this article is to analyse these phenomena with reference to the cognitive theory of conceptual metaphor and metonymy by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003). In this view metaphor and metonymy are not merely ornamental devices used for rhetorical or poetic purposes, but they hold a fundamental function in our cognition and understanding of reality. The New Testament is not analysed as the idea of God in it is extended into three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

The first part of this paper analyses the notion of God and the problems it creates for linguists. The second part focuses on the cognitive theory of metaphor and metonymy and on the research in the field of biblical metaphor. Next, the metaphors and metonymies referring to God are analysed, according to the classification suggested by Lakoff and Johnson.

## 2. The notion of *God*

The word *God* is unique because God is transcendent by His nature. This means that He is beyond human empirical cognition, and is different from anything people know. Dictionaries differentiate between the word God spelt with a capital letter, meaning the being worshipped in Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and a god or gods used as a common noun referring to male spirits in some other religions<sup>1</sup>. In the Bible God introduces His name YHWH (pronounced Yahweh or Yahveh) which can be interpreted as «He exists» and wants people to call Him in this way<sup>2</sup>. This shows that the nature of God is His existence, and that is all we learn about God's name (Guillet 1985: 330–331).

From the linguistic point of view it is impossible to attribute to God any common or general names: He cannot be classed as He is not a member of a class of objects. Actually, it can be said that God is a «class» for himself. No properties can adequately describe God since being transcendent He is by His very nature indescribable. However, despite this fact theology attempts to describe God in a few ways. Authors write about *revealed attributes* of God, found in the Bible, and about *natural attributes*, which are all possible positive properties in the utmost possible degree. Among the revealed attributes there are such as being omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient or immutable. Natural attributes are deduced by theologians in their discourse, for instance the property of being infinite or the holiest (Huber 2000: 42–54; Krzeszowski 1997: 71).

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<sup>1</sup> For instance: *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (2000): **god** noun 1 (God) [sing.] (not used with *the*) (in Christianity, Judaism and Islam) the being or spirit that is worshipped and believed to have created the universe: *Do you believe in God? / Good luck and God bless you. / the Son of God (=Christ)* 2 [C] (in some religions) a being or spirit who is believed to have power over a particular part of nature or who is believed to represent a particular quality: *Mars was the Roman god of war. / the rain/sky god / Hindu gods*

<sup>2</sup> *Moses then said to God, «Look, if I go to the Israelites and say to them, „The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,” and they say to me, „What is his name?” what am I to tell them?» God said to Moses, «I am he who is.» And he said, «This is what you are to say to the Israelites, „I am has sent me to you.” «God further said to Moses, «You are to tell the Israelites, „Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.” This is my name for all time, and thus I am to be invoked for all generations. (Exodus 3: 13–15)*

### 3. Metaphor and metonymy in cognitive linguistics

In cognitive linguistics metaphor is defined as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 5). In metaphor inference patterns from one conceptual domain (source domain) are used systematically to reason about another conceptual domain (target domain). This phenomenon is called *conceptual metaphor*: This means that metaphor is fundamentally conceptual, not linguistic, in nature. Metaphorical language is only a surface manifestation of conceptual metaphors. The linguistic expressions for metaphors are varied: they can be simple sentences, relating to different states or actions, longer descriptive passages, similes or they can even involve whole texts, which happens in the case of allegory. What matters is the fact that metaphor is mostly based on correspondences in our experiences, rather than on similarity. It is not an aberration from common language, used on special occasions, but it prevails in our everyday thought and language. What is important, metaphorical understanding is grounded in non-metaphorical understanding. In this way metaphor allows people to understand relatively abstract matters in terms of more concrete subject matters (Lakoff 1993: 244–245; Gibbs 1999: 148; Tabakowska 2001: 53–57). Authors refer to this phenomenon as a kind of sense allowing people to perceive and experience reality or as an instrument of gaining knowledge that is inaccessible in other ways (Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 239; Krzeszowski 1991: 84). Lakoff and Johnson differentiate between three kinds of metaphors. In ontological metaphors an abstraction, such as an activity, emotion, or idea, is represented as something concrete, such as an object, substance, container, or person. In structural metaphor one concept is understood and expressed in terms of another structured, sharply defined concept. In orientational metaphors concepts are spatially related to each other.

*Conceptual metonymy*, on the other hand, involves only one conceptual domain, whereas metaphor involves two conceptual domains. Metonymy can be defined as “using one entity to refer to another that is related to it” (Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 35). In metaphor one domain is understood in terms of another, but in metonymy the mapping or connection between two things is carried within the same domain (Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 36–37; Gibbs 1993: 258; Tabakowska 2001: 64). Both metaphors and metonymies are grounded in experience. They are not random or arbitrary, but systematic and active in culture. According to metonymic concepts people organize their thoughts and actions. These concepts allow humans to conceptualize one thing by means of its relation to something else (Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 39–40).

Metonymy can interact with metaphor. Louis Goossens calls this phenomenon *metaphtonymy* (2002: 369). There are two patterns for this process: when the experiential basis for metaphor is metonymy (metaphor within metonymy), or when metonymy functioning in the target domain is embedded into a metaphor (metonymy within metaphor).



#### 4. Religious applications of metaphor and metonymy

Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 40) state that “the conceptual systems of cultures and religions are metaphorical in nature”. Authors writing about metaphor and metonymy from the cognitive point of view claim that one of the most important applications of these phenomena is illuminating, clarifying or explaining concepts in a way that cannot be done with literal language (Katz 1996: 5; Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 193–194). Definitely, religion and the notion of God belong to this area of human culture which reaches beyond the ordinary.

Mary Gerhart and Allan Melvin Russell (1984: 13) prove that experience and its relationship to knowledge is a fundamental issue in religion. Moreover, it is only a profound experience that gives content to any concepts of religious language. Religious concepts without any relationships to experiences can be considered empty. However, the problem is that the specific content of religious language cannot be experienced directly, and thus people need something to mediate between their experiences and religious concepts (Huber 2000:69). The role of the medium can be fulfilled by metaphor and metonymy. It means that metaphor provides humans with the understanding of religious experiences.

All these rules can be successfully applied to the problem of describing God. Because God is inaccessible to human sensory experience, people create God in their own likeness by metaphor (Krzeszowski 1997: 71–72). What is more, other authors (Brow 1999) claim that metaphor is the only way to understand the concept of God. People usually do this without knowing it because they are told about God with the metaphors already included in the name. In fact, however, the word *God* is a proper name and it has no meaning till some connections with a network of ideas are made in order to explain this name. Theologians say that religious language needs metaphors that can be understood, imagined, experienced, and practiced. That is so because God cannot be empirically verified or rationally demonstrated. It is impossible to talk about God in a neutral and objective way. The images or concepts of God that humans hold in their minds are personal, emotional, and embedded in concrete life experiences (Mertens 1994: 25–29; Huber 2000: 74–81).

When it comes to metonymy in religious context, Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 40) point to religious symbolism as a special case of metonymy. This symbolism is not arbitrary, but reasonable and deeply grounded in culture. Symbolic metonymies can be called links between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterize religions and cultures. Ian Barbour (1984: 23–24) claims that religious symbols, which usually become part of the language of a religious community, often express human feelings and experiences, and thus make the believer actively involved in religion. They do not come from impersonal observation but from personal engagement of a human being.

Using metaphor and metonymy for religious discourse results in creating new meanings from ordinary, everyday meanings. In this process the lay significance of human language can be expanded to the infinite, the absolute or total, and on the transcenden-

tal level it acquires new meaning and new significance (Gerhart, Russell 1984: 124–125; Huber 2000: 59–61).

## 5. Metaphor and metonymy in the Bible

What is characteristic of the biblical metaphor is the fact that abstract ideas are replaced by something more specific and concrete. The understanding of the metaphors and metonymies is based on everyday experiences of the audience of the Bible. Today's culture is also close enough to that of the biblical world. Thus, today's readers may appreciate the force of the biblical metaphors as well as the original audience could (Gabel, Wheeler 1990: 25–26).

The reason for the use of metaphor and metonymy in the Bible is also connected with the specific character of the Scriptures: the Bible refers to God and supernatural reality, a reality that is transcendent and surpassing any reality that is known to humans, to their experiences, knowledge and thoughts. The biblical authors seem aware of the fact that in such circumstances literal notions are useless: the only way to describe what is transcendent is by means of analogy, image, and metaphor (Frankowski 1983: 159–172). Metaphors constitute a medium for the biblical message thanks to their history, associations they evoke, and reactions they produce in the readers (Leon-Dufour 1985: 21).

A very similar approach to metaphor in the Bible is represented by Thomas Aquinas, who has been one of the most outstanding Catholic theologians and writers, and an authority to many since the Middle Ages to the present days. In his *Summa theologiae* (I, 1, 9) the author asks a question if the Holy Scripture should make use of metaphors. In the answer Saint Thomas writes that indeed it is appropriate to describe the divine and the spiritual using analogy of the mundane. Moreover, it is natural for human cognition to move from what is cognizable through the senses to what is cognizable through the mind. Thus, the Bible should present the spiritual messages in the shape of physical metaphors. Using metaphor for this purpose has many advantages: the simpler the metaphor the better the understanding of God and spirituality (Olszewski 2001: 415).

Janusz Frankowski (1983: 154) points to the fact that though the Bible is treated with respect by believers, this text was presented by use of human language. As a consequence, only when the reader understands the human words will he understand the true divine message. Moreover, when reading the Bible, it is necessary to realize that a particular metaphor or metonymy does not tell everything about God, but shows some aspects of the divine.

The next part of this paper analyses examples of metaphors and metonymies used for describing God in The Old Testament. All the quotations from the Bible are given from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, published in 1985. This translation of the Holy Scripture is one of the most popular English versions of the Bible in English-speaking communities worldwide, especially among Catholic Christians.

## 6. Metaphors for God in The Old Testament

### 6.1. Personifications

Personifications, which are instances of ontological metaphor, seem to dominate when the biblical metaphors describing God are concerned. They follow the general schema: GOD IS A HUMAN BEING. There are eleven models for God as a person in The Old Testament. God is presented as a Creator-Artist, Father, Friend, Judge, King, Lover, Mother, Provider, Shepherd, Teacher, and Warrior. Barbour (1984: 24) defines the notion of *model* as “a metaphor that is frequently used and extensively developed”. Models are very detailed and used systematically. As such they provide general schemas for interpretation and can be used in different contexts. These personifications are both anthropomorphisms when they present God’s physical features, and anthropopathisms when they present His feelings and behaviour (Szlaga 1986: 202–203). As all of them are used frequently in the Bible, and to avoid showing any of them as more important than the others, they are presented in alphabetical order.

#### 6.1.1. GOD IS A CREATOR-ARTIST

In The Old Testament God is often referred to and described as the Creator: everything that exists in the visible world as well as everything in the invisible world comes from God. The Jews believed that there was someone or something, a person or a force, responsible for making or creating the world and the whole universe. This responsibility was easily attributed to God. In theology this metaphor is developed into the theory of God as the first cause of everything. Especially the first chapters of the first biblical book, *Genesis*, presents God acting as the Creator or even Artist who creates and admires His works, which He assesses as «good».

- God creates the universe (*Genesis* 1:16):  
*God made the two great lights: the greater light to govern the day, the smaller light to govern the night, and the stars.*
- God creates the earth (*Genesis* 1:1):  
*In the beginning God created heaven and earth.*
- God creates plants (*Genesis* 1:11–12):  
*God said, «Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants, and fruit trees on earth, bearing fruit with their seed inside, each corresponding to its own species.» And so it was. The earth produced vegetation: the various kinds of seed-bearing plants and the fruit trees with seed inside, each corresponding to its own species. God saw that it was good.*
- God creates animals (*Genesis* 1:20–21):  
*God said, «Let the waters be alive with a swarm of living creatures, and let birds wing their way above the earth across the vault of heaven.» And so it was. God created great sea-monsters and all the creatures that glide and teem*



*in the waters in their own species, and winged birds in their own species. God saw that it was good.*

- God creates human beings (*Genesis 1:26–27*):  
*God said, «Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep along the ground.» God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.*

### 6.1.2. GOD IS A FATHER

Fatherhood belongs to people's common experiences. The way God treats the Chosen Nation is similar to the way a father treats his children so people often perceive Him as a Father. The Old Testament presents God as a Father for both the whole nation and for individual believers.

- He is described as the one who gives life to His children (*Deuteronomy 32:6*):  
*Is this the return you make to Yahweh? O people brainless and unwise! Is this not your father, who gave you being, who made you, by whom you subsist?*
- God brings up children (*Isaiah 1:2*):  
*Listen, you heavens; earth, attend, for Yahweh is speaking, «I have reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.*
- God also takes care of His children (*Ezekiel 36:29*):  
*I shall save you from everything that defiles you, I shall summon the wheat and make it plentiful and impose no more famines on you.*
- He is a tender father (*Hosea 11:3–4*):  
*I myself taught Ephraim to walk, I myself took them by the arm, but they did not know that I was the one caring for them, that I was leading them with human ties, with leading-strings of love, that, with them, I was like someone lifting an infant to his cheek, and that I bent down to feed him.*
- He punishes His children (*Exodus 20:5*):  
*You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God and I punish a parent's fault in the children, the grandchildren, and the great-grandchildren among those who hate me; ...*

### 6.1.3. GOD IS A FRIEND

Friendship, like fatherhood, also belongs to those relationships that are important for people. God seems to be a friend in His attitude towards people. Thus, the Bible describes Him as a Friend of all the people or of special people from the Jewish nation, for example, of Abraham or Moses.

- As a Friend, God tells people his secrets (*Genesis 18:17*):  
*Now Yahweh had wondered, «Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am going to do, ...*

- God is close to people (*Exodus 33:11*):  
*Yahweh would talk to Moses face to face, as a man talks to his friend, and afterwards he would come back to the camp, but the young man who was his servant, Joshua son of Nun, never left the inside of the Tent.*

#### 6.1.4. GOD IS A JUDGE

In the history of the Israeli people judges were very important figures. Not only did they make judgements, but they were also leaders and rulers of the nation. Thus, it was natural for the Hebrews to depict God as the perfect and powerful Judge.

- People in the Bible often call for God's judgement (*Psalms 82:8*):  
*Arise, God, judge the world, for all nations belong to you.*
- God judges justly (*Psalms 9:7–8*):  
*Yahweh is enthroned for ever, keeping his throne firm for judgement; he will himself judge the world in uprightness, will give a true verdict on the nations.*
- He leads trials (*Psalms 9:19*):  
*Arise, Yahweh; human strength shall not prevail. The nations shall stand trial before you.*
- God pronounces sentences (*Hosea 6:5*):  
*This is why I have hacked them to pieces by means of the prophets, why I have killed them with words from my mouth, why my sentence will blaze forth like the dawn ...*
- God as a Judge punishes criminals (*I Samuel 24:16*):  
*May Yahweh be the judge and decide between me and you; may he examine and defend my cause and give judgement for me by rescuing me from your clutches!'*
- He also rewards the righteous (*Psalms 33:1–2*):  
*Shout for joy, you upright; praise comes well from the honest. Give thanks to Yahweh on the lyre, play for him on the ten-stringed lyre.*

#### 6.1.5. GOD IS A KING

The Jews had many kings in their history and these figures played a very important role in their culture and religion: not only did they rule over the country and made laws, but they were also representatives of the Chosen Nation before God. In The Old Testament God is referred to as the King of the Israeli people. He is the most powerful ruler, and His power reaches beyond the Jewish nation and territory.

- God rules over the whole world (*Psalms 97:5*):  
*The mountains melt like wax, before the Lord of all the earth.*
- God rules over people (*I Samuel 12:12*):  
*But when you saw Nahash, king of the Ammonites, marching on you, you said to me, „No, we must have a king to rule us” – although Yahweh your God is your king.*



- God sits on the throne like a monarch (*Isaiah 6:1–2*):  
*In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; his train filled the sanctuary. Above him stood seraphs, each one with six wings: two to cover its face, two to cover its feet and two for flying; ...*
- God has His own court (*I Kings 22:19*):  
*Micaiah went on, «Now listen to the word of Yahweh. I saw Yahweh seated on his throne with the whole array of heaven standing by him, on his right and on his left».*

#### 6.1.6. GOD IS A LOVER

Having an intimate relationship with another person is also an experience used for conceiving of God in the Bible, as well as in religion in general. Especially mystics or people devoting their lives to prayer and spiritual life describe their understanding of God and relationship with Him as if they were talking about a lover. In The Old Testament the Hebrew people is called God's bride or wife (*Jeremiah 2:2*):

*Go and shout this in Jerusalem's ears: «Yahweh says this: „I remember your faithful love, the affection of your bridal days, when you followed me through the desert, through a land unsown”».*

A special attention should be paid to *The Song of Songs*, a biblical book which can be interpreted as a dramatized allegory of love between God and the Chosen Nation or between God and an individual human being. The whole book is about romancing and dating between two lovers: a bride and a groom, and about their wedding. The dialogues are full of compliments paid by the lovers to each other, and in many instances they express a strong desire to be with the beloved person.

#### 6.1.7. GOD IS A MOTHER

The experience of motherly love is perhaps one of the first experiences a person has in their life. A mother is the first to feed her child, comfort it and defend against any difficulties, and the relationship one has with their mother is very profound and important. This was the way people in the times of The Old Testament understood their relationship with God. In the Bible He is presented not only as a Father, but also as a good Mother.

- God comforts His children like a mother (*Isaiah 66:13*):  
*As a mother comforts a child, so I shall comfort you; you will be comforted in Jerusalem.*
- God is a perfect Mother and never forgets about His children (*Isaiah 49:15*):  
*Can a woman forget her baby at the breast, feel no pity for the child she has borne? Even if these were to forget, I shall not forget you.*
- God calms children down like a mother (*Psalms 131:2–3*):  
*No, I hold myself in quiet and silence, like a little child in its mother's arms, like a little child, so I keep myself. Let Israel hope in Yahweh henceforth and for ever.*

### 6.1.8. GOD IS A PROVIDER

Another important experience of the relationship with God is that He takes care like a guardian, host, or provider. God of The Old Testament is the mighty Provider and caretaker of the entire world and of the people.

- He takes care of His people (*Psalms 121:4–5*):  
*You see – he neither sleeps nor slumbers, the guardian of Israel. Yahweh is your guardian, your shade, Yahweh, at your right hand.*
- In many pictures God gives food (*Psalms 145:15–16*):  
*All look to you in hope and you feed them with the food of the season. And, with generous hand, you satisfy the desires of every living creature.*
- God watches the order in the world (*Genesis 8:21–22*):  
*Yahweh smelt the pleasing smell and said to himself, «Never again will I curse the earth because of human beings, because their heart contrives evil from their infancy. Never again will I strike down every living thing as I have done. As long as earth endures: seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.»*
- He takes care of the earth (*Psalms 65:9*):  
*You visit the earth and make it fruitful, you fill it with riches; the river of God brims over with water; you provide the grain.*
- God decides about everything (*Sirach 11:14*):  
*Good and bad, life and death, poverty and wealth, all come from the Lord.*

### 6.1.9. GOD IS A SHEPHERD

Shepherds constituted an important group of people in the Israeli culture. Thus, the metaphor for God as a Shepherd seems to be very natural.

- God is a good Shepherd who leads sheep (*Psalms 78:52*):  
*He brought out his people like sheep, guiding them like a flock in the desert, ...*
- He gathers sheep together (*Jeremiah 23:3*):  
*But the remnant of my flock I myself shall gather from all the countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; they will be fruitful and increase in numbers.*
- God pastures sheep (*Jeremiah 50:19*):  
*I will bring Israel back to his pastures to browse on Carmel and in Bashan, on the highlands of Ephraim and in Gilead, and he will be satisfied.*
- He takes care of His sheep (*Isaiah 40:11*):  
*He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes.*
- God guards sheep (*Jeremiah 31:10*):  
*Listen, nations, to the word of Yahweh. On the farthest coasts and islands proclaim it, say, «He who scattered Israel is gathering him, will guard him as a shepherd guarding his flock.»*

### 6.1.10. GOD IS A TEACHER

Teachers in the Jewish culture were special people who taught about God's laws and had to show how to live properly. God of The Old Testament is the Master and Teacher for His people. He is the highest authority in all matters.

- God teaches wisdom (*Proverbs 8:10–11*):  
*Accept my discipline rather than silver, and knowledge of me in preference to finest gold. For Wisdom is more precious than jewels, and nothing else is so worthy of desire.*
- God teaches law (*Psalms 119:7–8*):  
*I thank you with a sincere heart for teaching me your upright judgements. I shall do your will; do not ever abandon me wholly.*
- He gives lessons (*Jeremiah 35:13*):  
*Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of Israel, says this, „Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Will you never learn the lesson and listen to my words, Yahweh demands?“ ...*
- Sometimes God punishes His pupils (*Psalms 94:10*):  
*Shall he who instructs nations not punish? Yahweh, the teacher of all people,...*

### 6.1.11. GOD IS A WARRIOR

Wars belonged to the Hebrew people's common experiences: they fought against other nations who lived in the land promised them by God. Sometimes God in The Old Testament is described as a wrathful but brave warrior who defends the good ones and fights against the evil ones.

- He is a wrathful warrior (*Psalms 38:1–2*):  
*Psalms Of David In commemoration Yahweh, do not correct me in anger, do not discipline me in wrath. For your arrows have pierced deep into me, your hand has pressed down upon me.*
- God strikes His enemies (*Exodus 3:20*):  
*... he will not let you go until I have stretched out my arm and struck Egypt with all the wonders I intend to work there.*
- As a Warrior God supports people's armies (*II Samuel 5:24*):  
*When you hear the sound of footsteps in the tops of the balsam trees, advance, for that will be Yahweh going out ahead of you to defeat the Philistine army.*
- God is victorious in His battles (*Psalms 118:10*):  
*Nations were swarming around me, in the name of Yahweh I cut them down;*
- God is vengeful (*Psalms 9:11–12*):  
*Sing to Yahweh who dwells in Zion, tell the nations his mighty deeds, for the avenger of blood does not forget them, he does not ignore the cry of the afflicted.*



## 6.2. Structural metaphors for God

According to theologians and biblical scholars God in the Bible is very often described by means of some other concepts, for instance, LOVE or A HIDEOUT. They help us to explore and understand the notion of God.

### 6.2.1. GOD IS LOVE

Although the concept of God as Love is expressed explicitly and prevailing in The New Testament (*I John* 4:8), it is possible to notice such an understanding of God also in The Old Testament. This idea is further developed in Christian theology and constitutes a very important model for describing God. Bogusław Bierwiazzonek analyses the biblical love of God to people and points at some aspects of it (2000: 88–91). According to the author, these Old Testament characteristics of God perceived as love are His jealousy, generosity, mildness, protectiveness, mercy, and tenderness.

- God is jealous (*Exodus* 34:14):  
*... for you will worship no other god, since Yahweh's name is the Jealous One; he is a jealous God.*
- God is generous (*Genesis* 1:31):  
*God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good. Evening came and morning came: the sixth day.*
- God is mild (*Psalms* 86:5):  
*Lord, you are kind and forgiving, rich in faithful love for all who call upon you.*
- God is protective (*Psalms* 145:14):  
*Yahweh supports all who stumble, lifts up those who are bowed down.*
- God is merciful (*Psalms* 145:8–9):  
*Yahweh is tenderness and pity, slow to anger, full of faithful love. Yahweh is generous to all, his tenderness embraces all his creatures.*
- God is tender (*Hosea* 11:4):  
*... that I was leading them with human ties, with leading-strings of love, that, with them, I was like someone lifting an infant to his cheek, and that I bent down to feed him.*

### 6.2.2. GOD IS A HIDEOUT

People experience God as the one who helps them in dangers or difficult situations. God sometimes is described as a hiding place. In such descriptions metonymic equivalents of a hiding place are used very often. Thus, God can be called a rock, a wall, a shield, a tower, or a refuge.

- God is a hiding place from violence (*II Samuel* 22:1–3):  
*David addressed the words of this song to Yahweh, when Yahweh had delivered him from the clutches of all his enemies and from the clutches of Saul.*

*He said: Yahweh is my rock and my fortress, my deliverer is my God. I take refuge in him, my rock, my shield, my saving strength, my stronghold, my place of refuge. My Saviour; you have saved me from violence;*

- God is a trustworthy hideout (*Isaiah 26:4*):  
*Trust in Yahweh for ever; for Yahweh is a rock for ever.*

### 6.3. Orientational metaphors for God

In The Old Testament there are two orientational metaphors used as tools for describing God. He is either far from people or up in heaven.

#### 6.3.1. GOD IS FAR

God is far from people because He is beyond the visible world: He cannot be seen or experienced in any other natural way.

- God is far from people, and therefore they have to call to Him to come to them (*Psalms 80:2*):  
*... over Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh; rouse your valour and come to our help.*
- Also, people's prayers must go over a distance to reach God (*Psalms 88:2*):  
*... may my prayer reach your presence, hear my cry for help.*
- God stands away from people (*Psalms 10:1*):  
*Why, Yahweh, do you keep so distant, stay hidden in times of trouble?*

#### 6.3.2. GOD IS UP

The orientational metaphor based on the opposition of UP and DOWN plays an important role in culture and is connected with the values people attribute to the described reality (Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 14–21; Krzeszowski 1997: 137). Usually, things that are positive are generally UP, and those that are negative are DOWN. The associations connected with the notion of God are positive, and thus the Bible employs this metaphor for God.

- God is up and therefore He comes down to help people (*Psalms 40:1*):  
*For the choirmaster of David Psalm I waited, I waited for Yahweh, then he stooped to me and heard my cry for help.*
- People look for God's help upwards (*Psalms 121:1*):  
*Song of Ascents I lift up my eyes to the mountains; where is my help to come from?*
- God watches the world from above (*Psalms 80:14*):  
*God Sabaoth, come back, we pray, look down from heaven and see, visit this vine; ...*

## 7. Metonymies for God in The Old Testament

There are several examples of metonymy used for describing God in The Old Testament. They are based on the personification of God, thus according to Goossens's theory (2002) these should be called metaphonymies: God is perceived by the biblical authors as a human being, and the Holy Scripture refers to a part of His body in *the God's Right Hand metonymy*, one of His qualities in *the Wisdom of God metonymy*, an instrument of His actions in *the Word of God metonymy*, or His place of living in *the Heaven metonymy*.

### 7.1. God's Right Hand

This metonymy is an instance of the PART FOR THE WHOLE metonymy, in rhetorics called *synecdoche*. In addition, it is based on the personification of God, who is understood as a human being and has a human body. This idea is based on people's experiences: a person's right hand is an important part of the body, often used symbolically in different situations: for instance, for shaking hands with others, for writing, for giving anything to other people.

- God's Right Hand performs righteousness (*Psalms* 48:10):  
*Both your name and your praise, God, are over the whole wide world. Your right hand is full of saving justice, ...*
- God's Right Hand supports and helps people (*Psalms* 18:35):  
*You give me your invincible shield (your right hand upholds me) you never cease to listen to me.*

### 7.2. The Word of God

The Word of God metonymy is an example of the INSTRUMENT FOR THE AGENT metonymy. The Word, which is an instrument of God's actions, stands for God Himself. At the same time God is personified: He is a human being who can speak and perform actions that are typical of people. The symbolic value of *word* is also present in culture: words are used to make decisions or agreements.

- The Word of God performs God's will (*Wisdom* 18:14–15):  
*When peaceful silence lay overall, and night had run the half of her swift course, own from the heavens, from the royal throne, leapt your all-powerful Word like a pitiless warrior into the heart of a land doomed to destruction. Carrying your unambiguous command like a sharp sword, ...*
- The Word of God is the messenger of God (*Psalms* 107:20):  
*... he sent out his word and cured them, and rescued their life from the abyss.*
- The Word of God is effective (*Isaiah* 55:10–11):  
*For, as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return before having watered the earth, fertilising it and making it germinate to provide seed*



*for the sower and food to eat, so it is with the word that goes from my mouth: it will not return to me unfulfilled or before having carried out my good pleasure and having achieved what it was sent to do.*

- The Word of God creates the world (*Psalms 33:6*):  
*By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made, by the breath of his mouth all their array.*
- The Word of God feeds people (*Wisdom 16:26*):  
*... so that your beloved children, Lord, might learn that the various crops are not what provide nourishment, but your word which preserves all who believe in you.*

### 7.3. The Wisdom of God

Definitely, wisdom belonged to those qualities that were most desired by the Jews in their culture. The Wisdom of God metonymy is an instance of the QUALITY FOR THE PERSON metonymy. Wisdom is one of the many qualities of God. As in the cases of the Word of God and God's Right Hand metonymies, also here God is personified. In addition, in The Old Testament texts the Wisdom of God becomes personified as well: very often The Old Testament writers refer to the Wisdom of God as a woman. It is also worth noticing that this metonymy dominates in such books as *Baruch*, *Wisdom*, and *Sirach*, which belong to the so-called deuterocanonical books, and which do not appear in some versions of the Bible.

- The Wisdom of God is eternal (*Sirach 24:9*):  
*From eternity, in the beginning, he created me, and for eternity I shall remain.*
- The Wisdom of God teaches people (*Proverbs 8:4*):  
*I am calling to you, all people, my words are addressed to all humanity. Simpletons, learn how to behave, fools, come to your senses.*
- The Wisdom of God feeds people (*Sirach 15:3*):  
*She will give him the bread of understanding to eat, and the water of wisdom to drink.*
- The Wisdom of God lives in heaven (*Sirach 24:3–4*):  
*I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and I covered the earth like mist. I had my tent in the heights, and my throne was a pillar of cloud.*
- The Wisdom of God sits on the throne together with God (*Wisdom 9:4*):  
*... grant me Wisdom, consort of your throne, and do not reject me from the number of your children.*
- The Wisdom of God is close to God (*Wisdom 8:2–3*):  
*Wisdom I loved and searched for from my youth; I resolved to have her as my bride, I fell in love with her beauty. She enhances her noble birth by sharing God's life, for the Master of All has always loved her.*
- The Wisdom of God governs the universe (*Wisdom 8:1*):  
*Strongly she reaches from one end of the world to the other and she governs the whole world for its good.*

- The Wisdom of God dwells among people (*Baruch* 3:37–38):  
*He has uncovered the whole way of knowledge and shown it to his servant Jacob, to Israel his well-beloved; only then did she appear on earth and live among human beings.*
- The Wisdom of God is a treasure for people (*Wisdom* 7:7–8):  
*And so I prayed, and understanding was given me; I entreated, and the spirit of Wisdom came to me. I esteemed her more than sceptres and thrones; compared with her, I held riches as nothing.*
- The Wisdom of God provides safety (*Proverbs* 3:21):  
*My child, hold to sound advice and prudence, never let them out of sight; they will give life to your soul and beauty to your neck. You will go on your way in safety, your feet will not stumble.*

#### 7.4. Heaven

The metonymy of Heaven can be classified as an example of the PLACE FOR ITS INHABITANT metonymy. Heaven in the Jewish culture is perceived as the place where the personified God lives. This metonymy originates in people's experience: heaven or sky was a mysterious place for the Jews, a place not accessible for people, but perfect to be a home for someone like God.

- People praise Heaven (*I Maccabees* 4:24):  
*On their return, the Jews chanted praises to Heaven, singing, «He is kind and his love is everlasting!»*
- People pray to Heaven (*I Maccabees* 4:10):  
*And now let us call on Heaven: if he cares for us, he will remember his covenant with our ancestors and will destroy this army confronting us today; ...*
- Heaven makes decisions (*I Maccabees* 3:60):  
*Whatever be the will of Heaven, he will perform it.*
- Heaven helps people (*II Maccabees* 8:20):  
*... that time in Babylonia when in the battle with the Galatians the Jewish combatants numbered only eight thousand, with four thousand Macedonians, yet when the Macedonians were hard pressed, the eight thousand had destroyed a hundred and twenty thousand, thanks to the help they had received from Heaven, and had taken great booty as a result.*
- Heaven pronounces sentences (*II Maccabees* 9:4):  
*Flying into a passion, he resolved to make the Jews pay for the disgrace inflicted by those who had routed him, and with this in mind he ordered his charioteer to drive without stopping and get the journey over. But the sentence of Heaven was already hanging over him. In his pride, he had said, «When I reach Jerusalem, I shall turn it into a mass grave for the Jews.»*
- Heaven scourges people (*II Maccabees* 3:34):  
*As for you, who have been scourged by Heaven, you must proclaim to everyone the grandeur of God's power. So saying, they vanished.*

## 8. Conclusions

In this paper four groups of biblical metaphors and metonymies were analysed: personifications, which are instances of ontological metaphor, structural metaphors, orientational metaphors and metonymies. These phenomena seem to be widespread in The Old Testament since they appear in different biblical books. They definitely do not function only as stylistic figures, but allow the readers to learn about God and help understand Him. Thanks to grounding the process of conceiving of God in people's everyday experiences, the reader of the Bible receives a multifaceted and complex picture of God. Moreover, not only do these metaphors and metonymies prevail in the Bible, but they are also present in today's religious language and our culture. Conceptual metaphor and metonymy have influenced the way people conceive of God and speak of Him. Most of the examples analysed in this article have implications in the theological language: God is frequently perceived, for instance, as a CREATOR-ARTIST, FATHER, KING, and JUDGE in religious discourse, and as a FRIEND or LOVER by mystics; believers pray to God – the HIDEOUT when in trouble or raise their eyes UP to HEAVEN, where He «lives». It would be also very interesting to analyse in what ways the understanding of God changes in The New Testament, in which the notion of God is extended into Three Divine Persons and the system of metaphors and metonymies seems to be more complex than in The Old Testament.

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