

# **The Tacit Dimension in Biblical Metaphor: "The Kingdom"**

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## **I. Introduction: shifting interpretative frameworks, to understand biblical metaphor**

As a ground-breaking philosopher of science, focusing on the principles of scientific discovery, Michael Polanyi's presentation of his core ideas shows surprising resonances with the language of biblical texts. These resonances include his pointed use of terms like: the scientist's *calling* to pursue inquiry;<sup>1</sup> a *hidden reality* which he or she becomes intent on finding, based on a hunch or intimation that a discovery is just ahead (*PK*, 265 and passim); *indwelling*<sup>2</sup> the particulars in an existing framework of knowledge, spurred by *heuristic vision* (*PK*, 196, 280, 283, 285); and the *fiduciary nature* of our being in the world.<sup>3</sup> As David Rutledge points out, William Poteat's specific aim in *Polanyian Meditations* is "to show that Polanyi's thought is sustained by images that are 'at bottom biblical in derivation.'"<sup>4</sup> And according to Richard Gelwick, Polanyi himself agreed that his theory of tacit knowing restores the Augustinian principle that knowledge and understanding are preceded by faith.<sup>5</sup> If Polanyi's thinking has roots in biblical and theological principles, I take this as a hint that his ideas may help readers to understand how the language of biblical texts works, and how to derive new kinds of meaning from them. In this paper I'd like to show that when reading becomes a contemplative practice, leading from the experience of "indwelling" to "heuristic vision," biblical metaphor can spark discovery of new kinds of coherence in individual and collective experience—like the claims in scripture about the possibility of experiencing *grace*.<sup>6</sup>

At the center of Polanyi's thinking is the idea of *the tacit dimension of knowing* or simply *tacit knowing*, his attempt to overturn the objectivist and dualist premises enshrined in modern thought

since Descartes. Starting from these premises, any new knowledge in science or elsewhere is by definition knowledge of objective fact. Because objectivist premises are so embedded in our culture, they tend to be taken uncritically for granted in reading biblical and poetic texts. In this paper I explore the thesis that the principles of tacit knowing show how poetic metaphors work in the consciousness of the reader of biblical texts, leading not to objective knowledge, but to experiences similar in pattern to those involved in scientific discovery. I make a case that the contemplative reading of biblical texts can lead one to a process of discovery, and that Polanyi's explication of the phenomena of discovery offers a guide to understanding what happens when we make meaning from biblical texts.

Major discoveries in science like those of Copernicus and Einstein that result in new knowledge of order in the universe, can have revolutionary effects, overturning an accepted worldview or "conceptual framework" (*PK*, 196-197, and *passim*). Here I would like to argue that interpreting metaphor by the theory of tacit knowing can undo the influence of objectivist assumptions on our understanding of how language works. The theory is an especially powerful lens to see how biblical metaphors work, calling in extraordinary ways upon the reader's ability to access the tacit dimension of language. Approaching texts this way shifts one's perspective from objectivist premises inherited from the Enlightenment to forms of interpretation based on new post-critical premises. These conform more closely to the way the ancient languages of biblical texts work to engender meaning.

What Polanyi calls an "interpretative framework"<sup>7</sup> is the set of assumptions, conscious or unconscious, that a person makes in interpreting or developing a method of interpreting texts. When we create meaning from our own or others' language use, we do so within a framework of interpretation. If our interpretative framework is out of sync with the semantic framework of the text, we miss a lot, or worse, distort its meaning. From the perspective of tacit knowing, such distortion happens in some aspects of both literalist interpretation as well as historical criticism of biblical texts. By switching allegiance from an objectivist framework to one based on principles of tacit knowing, the

reader of biblical texts may avoid some of the errors involved in reductionist approaches. Tacit knowing enables one to make closer contact with the visionary world of scripture, where new dimensions of experience such as grace, transformation, and the kingdom of God are presented not as forms of supernaturalist hope, but are offered to us as the end-points of discovery. To practice tacit knowing in the interpretation of biblical texts is to participate in the process of discovery, using the texts themselves as guides into the same stream of heuristic thought and vision that was practiced by the prophets and authors of the texts. To become a participant in the meanings of texts implies a shift from an objectivist interpretative framework to an altogether new framework based in tacit knowing. When a conceptual and interpretative framework expands to include everything in one's world, we call it a *Weltanschauung* or worldview. In this sense, interpreting biblical metaphors by switching frameworks from objectivism to tacit knowing brings one in a real sense into a new view of the world, or simply a new world.

By rejecting modern objectivism, the theory of tacit knowing puts us in touch with the premodern literary frame of mind that produced many New Testament texts in first-century Palestine. In this premodern framework, there is no fixed opposition of subject and object, no modern sense of subjectivity or objectivity. Instead in the ancient biblical contexts thought tended to function more holistically, forming a relation to language in which words were not detached from the objects they named, but were thought to bring a writer or listener into living touch with the phenomena the words represented.<sup>8</sup> The paper shows that biblical metaphors, especially in the parables and sayings of Jesus, seen through the lens of tacit knowing, reveal what Polanyi calls an "ontological aspect of tacit knowing."<sup>9</sup> This way of knowing refers to a radical ontology that overturns conventional notions of the self, and the relation of the self to the larger reality of being named in scripture "kingdom of God."

By relying on the mind's tacit dimensions—e.g. its intimation of coherence among disparate phenomena, or intuition that a word or sentence gives us access to a reality—the individual develops a

capacity to discover previously unknown order in the world and in his or her own currents of thought. Unlike the presuppositions of either objectivism or supernaturalism, this theory offers a powerful model for interpreting texts that rely integrally on metaphors, symbols, and other figurative language to convey meaning. The parables in the synoptic gospels display an implicit intent, not to persuade by reason, and not simply to illustrate by analogy something that can be known or told in other ways. They are structured to provoke the reader into discovering, within or behind the words of the text, hidden coherences in the reality of experience. Many texts appear to be designed to elicit a heuristic response, and offer contents that are not reducible to static dogma. In light of the theory of tacit knowing, the parables and metaphoric sayings of Jesus, and those of Paul, are a rich field of clues to deeper coherences in experience than are widely known. Reading from the point of view of tacit knowing, we find the groundwork for a new hermeneutic that sees *interpretation as a form of discovery*.

In the new framework of interpretation derived from the theory of tacit knowing, old words take on new meanings. The new wine of tacit knowing requires new wineskins, new definitions of words. Theological terms like *revelation* and *spirit*, within the objectivist framework either represent supernatural phenomena or are empty transcendental signifiers. But from the standpoint of tacit knowing the same terms become names for different aspects of discovery, the opening of a new framework of inquiry that is willing to look into the kinds of experience traditionally called spiritual. And common biblical images like *dwell*, *seed*, and *kingdom*, and *God* take on dramatically different meanings as well. At a certain stage of understanding, conventional objectivist standards for judging the truth or falsity of statements are no more applicable to scripture than they are to literary texts. To treat reading scripture or literature as discovery is in Polanyi's terminology to allow its metaphors to *carry us away* to other levels of understanding, a process that ideally leads to discovery. What standard then shall we apply to the truth of revelation expressed in the gospel? If we turn to Polanyi, the answer is not a doctrinal platform, but a method of *knowing*, one of whose elements is named by the metaphor,

*indwelling*. In Polanyi's system the heuristic impulse to a degree sets the scientist free from traditional standards of what counts as real, to explore hidden dimensions of reality that carry with them their own criteria for understanding.

The heuristic impulse, which guided the searches of revolutionary scientists like Einstein and Copernicus, entails activating the imagination and intuition.

. . . the latency of the principles entailed in a discovery indicates how we can change our standards and still uphold their authority over us. It suggests that while we cannot decree our standards explicitly, in the abstract, we may change them covertly in practice. The deliberate aim of scientific inquiry is to solve a problem, but our intuition may respond to our efforts with a solution entailing new standards of coherence, new values. In affirming the solution we tacitly obey these new clues and thus recognize their authority over ourselves, over us who tacitly conceived them (*PK*, 105).

To understand discoveries like those of Copernicus and Einstein in their respective times required (and still requires) deep adjustments in people's criteria for understanding. To make those adjustments demands the parallel activities of imagination and intuition, not only to develop understanding, but to find the proper criteria for understanding a new way of seeing the world. "External experience may be indispensable" to validate the truth of statements in science, according to Polanyi, but "to a person prepared to inhabit their framework" all "articulate systems," including art, science, mathematics, or the highly metaphoric and symbolic expressions of scripture, "convey their own internal thought, and it is for the sake of this internal experience that [the investigator's] mind accepts their framework as its dwelling place" (*PK*, 283). Metaphor uses a word or phrase (here, Polanyi's "dwelling place") to form a mental image or figure, which by the nature of the signification process points to some other field of knowing, more abstract, more complex, or otherwise more difficult at first to understand. In ordinary language the word acts as a *signifier*, pointing a reader to a definable *signified*. To "dwell" denotes

everyday living, esp. in a physical place or home. But to the reader on a path of discovery, to "dwell in the secret place of the Most High" (Psalm 91) will mean taking a leap across a "logical gap" (*PK*, 123-30) provoked by their metaphors (*dwell* and *secret place*, as well as *Most High*) to inhabit the appropriate mental framework which alone makes the experience of revelation (or the experience of discovery in science) possible.

In *Personal Knowledge* Polanyi cites a passage from Paul Tillich that implicitly recognizes the correspondence between the theory of the tacit dimension of knowing, and Tillich's ideas of the "depth dimension" of reality and "revelation":

Science, psychology, and history are allies of theology [writes Tillich] in the fight against the supranaturalistic distortions of genuine revelation. Scientific and historical criticism protect revelation; they cannot dissolve it for revelation belongs to a dimension of reality for which scientific and historical analysis are inadequate. Revelation is the manifestation of the depth of reason and the ground of being. It points to the mystery of existence and to our ultimate concern. It is independent of what science and history say about the conditions in which it appears; and it cannot make science and history dependent on itself. No conflict between different dimensions of reality is possible. Reason receives revelation in ecstasy and miracles; but reason is not destroyed by revelation, just as revelation is not emptied by reason. . . . Knowledge of revelation, . . . does not imply factual assertion . . . Its truth is to be judged by criteria which lie within the dimension of revelatory knowledge" (from *Systematic Theology*, cited in *PK* 283, n. 1).<sup>10</sup>

The quote from Tillich, in the context of Polanyi's discussion of "Religious Doubt" (*PK*, 279-286) implicitly supports the validity of applying the theory of tacit knowing to theology and to biblical texts.

## **II. Metaphor takes static and dynamic forms**

The two essential elements of metaphor (named *vehicle* and *tenor* by literary theorist I.A.

Richards)<sup>11</sup> correspond to the two aspects of knowing in Polanyi's theory: the *explicit* point of focal attention, and the *tacit* awareness that lies in its background. The **vehicle** is a word that brings focal attention to an already comprehensible thing—e.g. "seed" or "kingdom." As a *signifier* the word connects the reader to an objective *signified*. But as an element of metaphor its potential meaning is more expansive, hinting at something else, some other dimension of reality and more complex or difficult to comprehend. The "something else" to which it points is the tacit "drift" of meaning, the **tenor** of the metaphor. This, we say, is what the metaphor *means*. But in biblical metaphor, the meaning (referent) of the tenor is multivalent, and can lead a searching reader to many possible discoveries. As Polanyi and Prosch explain in *Meaning* (1975), a *metaphor*, by its explicit image, has an uncanny "power" to "carry us away" to new understandings of reality.<sup>12</sup> This carrying power of language pertains more specifically to poetic metaphors than to those used more simply as illustrations or indications of things that can be known in some other way. In *Personal Knowledge* (1958) and *The Tacit Dimension* (1966), Polanyi examines how the mind works in the process of scientific discovery. This, he argues, happens not mainly by linear or empirical logic, but by the scientist's personal holistic engagement, or "indwelling" the framework and particulars of his investigation. From personal commitments and the experience of indwelling, the scientist comes to see particulars and their relationships as "clues" to unforeseen patterns in reality. The particulars in scientific inquiry are at a certain point perceived by the scientist as a new *gestalt*, an emergent theoretical model that makes a new coherent meaning out of a mass of details. This was the case for example with Copernicus's discovery of the heliocentric system. Coherent understanding emerges when subsidiary (tacit) dimensions of the scientist's awareness coalesce in demonstrable (explicit) theory and practices.

The language of metaphor works by a similar process, in which the mind moves between tacit and explicit awareness in the process of discovering meaning. While some metaphors can be relatively inert, and simply illustrate a point, in sayings like "time is money" or "house of cards," others are

dynamic, expressing what novelist Joseph Conrad called "the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel, to make you see."<sup>13</sup> All figurative language works by creating a semantic polarity between two terms, one of them standing for or signifying the other. In metaphor, the explicit vehicle (a word-image) names a concrete or well-known thing; the tacit tenor may be articulated (e.g. "the seed is the word of God") or unstated, but typically is *indeterminate* in meaning.<sup>14</sup> By looking at the language of scripture as a manifestation of tacit knowing, we see the indeterminacy at the tacit edge of metaphor not as a static predicament for the reader, but rather as a call—to curiosity, commitment, and inquiry. The reader's sense of indeterminacy is an inner signal, or *clue*, to the multiple dimensions of its meaning. In the search for meaning, the *semantic polarity* becomes an *energy polarity*. Something happens to the reader that he recognizes as *understanding*—like the mental "click" when the grammatical parts of a sentence fit together. But understanding metaphor may have larger implications. When study evolves into contemplative inquiry, along a path of holistic understanding, the effort to resolve the tension in metaphor releases the dynamic energies of imagination and intuition that for Polanyi are principal ingredients of tacit knowing.<sup>15</sup>

Writing in poetic images in the sixth century B.C.E, Heraclitus offers two verses that by analogy explain how the tension of opposites in metaphor generates meaning. John Burnet offers this translation: "The hidden harmony is better than the obvious. Men do not know how what is at variance agrees with itself. It is an attunement of opposite tension, like that of the bow and the lyre."<sup>16</sup> The tautness of the cord, when the bow is drawn back, generates the power of the arrow's flight. And as the tautness of its strings enables the lyre to produce harmonic sounds, just so the tension of opposites in metaphor finds "attunement" in the reader's inner ear. By approaching reading contemplatively, rather than objectively, the reader hears inwardly the musical aspects of language—such as rhythm, tonality, dynamics, overtones—infused in the imagery and form of metaphor. In music we hear dissonance resolved in consonance. Just so, we "hear" in biblical metaphor the tension between opposites as a kind



of dissonance, resolved in the struggle to understand by intuitively making connections between *explicit image* and *tacit meaning*. Though some figures of speech are relatively static, serving mainly as illustration (argument is war),<sup>17</sup> literary metaphors (daybreak, the sun, seed, the bow and the lyre) have a dynamic structure demanding that the reader become a participant, interpreting them from a creative frame of mind that includes dynamic intuition.

### **III. Biblical metaphor as tensive language**

In the following brief narrative from the gospel of Luke, the speaker addresses indirectly the need to shift allegiances from objectivist assumptions to a way of seeing things, based on tacit knowing.

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21).<sup>18</sup>

The word "kingdom" is implicitly taken by Jesus' listeners as a system of governance with a king at its head, promising to bring "material and political benefits."<sup>19</sup> In this literal sense, when they got wind of it, the Roman authorities in the province of Judea would almost certainly have taken Jesus' teaching about the kingdom as sedition, an assertion of political power contrary to the authorities in Rome. And this message, repeated many times in the gospel records of Jesus' ministry, is likely a key reason he was arrested and executed by Pilate, the Roman prefect. But as the passage makes clear, Jesus' use of the word refers to something else entirely—some quality "within" the individual listener ("in the midst of" or "among" the community of his followers, depending on how the Greek preposition *entos* is translated). While the assertion of a coming kingdom in this way was a capital crime, in its metaphorical meaning, by contrast, it is a key element in a new teaching about the spiritual life. As metaphor it is intended to tell immediate listeners (and later readers of Luke's gospel), those willing to get on to the path of discovery, about a different order of reality, a kind of coherence in experience quite different from what any hypothetical worldly kingdom with rules of governance and a king might offer.

In physical chemistry *valence* is the capacity of an atom to unite in specific proportions with other atoms; in linguistics *valence* refers to the number of grammatical elements with which a particular word, often a verb, may unite to form a sentence. As applied to biblical interpretation, the term *multivalent* suggests that a word has power to connect thought to different dimensions of reality. And a concrete word may refer to something quite different from the word's explicit meaning. In this narrative as elsewhere in the New Testament, "kingdom" embodies within itself both explicit and tacit dimensions of meaning. The capacity of a word to paint a picture, and by analogy to intimate to reader or listener a different kind of reality, or different approach to the real, is one aspect of its tacit dimension. The *valence* of the word "kingdom," is its ability to unite, or connect the mind of the reader with a referent that, apart from the metaphor, remains to a degree inexpressible. The word *can* refer to an objective fact, or a prediction of the coming of an objective kingdom, but also may refer to an inner state of the listener or reader. These different valences imply the possibilities of the reader's bonding to different meanings, which are emergent properties in his relation to the text.

In his classic study *Metaphor and Reality*, Philip Wheelwright distinguishes between two kinds of symbolization. In "steno-symbols" or "steno language" there is an exact, one-to-one relation between two terms in polarity, as with the mathematical symbol *pi*, which never varies in its meaning. The other type of symbolization is found in "tensive language," in which there is a "semantic motion," a "double imaginative act of outreaching and combining [that] marks the metaphoric process."<sup>20</sup> In the above narrative, the word "kingdom" asks the reader to reach out from a literal conception of kingdom, and combine this image with the idea of "God." Where the prefix "steno" means narrow, "tensive" means stretching or causing tension. As Norman Perrin argues, in New Testament contexts like the above, the word "kingdom" is an expression of tensive language. The reference "kingdom of God" in ancient Judaism, he says, is fundamentally "a tensive symbol and . . . its meaning could never be exhausted, nor adequately expressed by any one referent."<sup>21</sup> It has multiple valences, expansive rather than restrictive

in connotative meanings, or tacit implications. To see this "semantic plenitude"<sup>22</sup> depends on the reader's capacity to make the switch from a static to a dynamic framework of interpretation. The reason many people interpret biblical metaphors and symbols as having one publicly recognizable meaning (steno-language) is due in part to the influence in our culture of objectivism as our dominant interpretative framework. Freedom from this dominance, and from the limits it puts on our understanding of language, is found in the principle of tacit knowing, the core idea of an alternate framework. From this new framework of understanding we more clearly see the difference between steno and tensive language, thereby gaining greater access to the larger range and dynamics of meaning present in poetry and scripture.

As if aware that he is speaking from the tacit dimension of knowing, the sense that we know more than we can tell, Jesus' reference to the kingdom is an intimation that it is possible to find greater coherence (grace) in experience than previously known. He disabuses his listeners of their predilection for objectivist understanding, telling them not to "look" (objectively) "here" or "there" for this new kingdom. Deliberately overturning a conventional understanding of *kingdom*, he invites his immediate listeners (as well as present-day readers of Luke) to lend allegiance to the new conception. But to what do the words "kingdom" (Greek *basileia*), and the mysterious preposition "within" (Greek *entos*) refer? Both are metaphors. They make reference to something in order to draw attention to something larger than the words can tell explicitly. They implicitly acknowledge a form of "personal knowledge" which here includes a spiritual sense of intuition and imagination. In their context the words give tacit intimations of a new reality—or new conception of reality. What are the properties of this new reality called "kingdom of God"? What the text does tell us is that whatever this reality is, we can discern its properties can only inner faculties of mind. These are, I would argue, what Polanyi means by the powers of intuition and imagination active in the tacit dimension of knowing.

What is not made explicit in the text, but is natural to Jesus as teacher, is the tacit

understanding that the word *kingdom* refers, not to a physical place, but to a different kind of fact, received in faith, that we understand only as we relinquish the compulsion to see things exclusively in objective terms. As metaphor, the word is designed by the speaker to open a new world picture to his listeners, based on different values, and having a different ontological structure, than what we normally conceive of as objective fact. By presenting the "semantic aspect" of tacit knowing, the words also give expression to its "ontological aspect" (*TD*, 13). The word kingdom demands of readers a commitment not unlike that of the scientist engaged in heuristic vision. It invites the reader to activate the tacit dimension of his or her own thought, and turns reading into a search, based on commitment in faith, in which reading becomes a process of vision and discovery. The word connects the reader to multiple referents. By indwelling this word, the reader sees it as having power (as Polanyi and Prosch say) to carry us away to new knowledge or a new perspective. Aside from the conventional sense of a physical place—an idea rejected by the speaker—the word "kingdom" points us to some larger hidden meaning. The text challenges readers to discover its existential implications, as something subjective "within" themselves. A third possible meaning of the word kingdom is a condition of being that includes both objective and subjective aspects of experience. In this sense the word hints not only at a new condition of coherence in experience, but also at a principle of being—a new ontological premise for thought. "Kingdom of God" in Jesus' usage is a poetic metaphor, a form of tensive language that intimates a range of characteristics—such as power, authority, order—all to be found "within" the core of one's own being. In its "ontological aspect" the metaphor intimates the presence of an ordering principle of being, paradoxically above oneself, yet at the same time "within" the self.

Biblical metaphor requires the reader to detect the opposition between explicit and tacit elements. The search for their attunement then activates imagination, which from words creates a mental picture, and intuition makes the connection to its tacit referent.

A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was

trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew it produced a hundredfold.

(Luke 8:4-15)

Jesus' own exegesis guides the listener, or later readers of Luke's gospel, to see the tacit meaning of the seed image as pertaining to "the mysteries of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:10); and he further explains, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). But the image does not automatically connect the mind with the range of implications of the metaphor's tacit aspects—either word of God, or mysteries, or kingdom of God. To understand how the terms are related requires the reader's intuitive participation, by which he makes from the relation of explicit and tacit terms an existential meaning. By intuition he sees himself, not simply as an observer, but as a participant in the transformation intimated by the parable, which only becomes clear as its existential ramifications unfold. The act of making connections between image and referent, like the release of the arrow from the bow, is a release of energy in the imagination and intuitive faculties of the reader. Here the word doesn't have clear and distinct rational meaning; it doesn't make a simple bridge to something outside the text. In tacit knowing, Polanyi argues, "a true knowledge of a theory can be established only after it has been interiorized and extensively used to interpret experience" (*TD*, 21). Similarly, in interpreting biblical metaphor, meaning can emerge only by "interiorizing" its words, entering in to the dynamic energy it conveys.

By interiorizing words, the reader leaps the "logical gap" (PK, 240) between the semantic elements of metaphor, releasing the energy that leads to knowing more of its hidden dimensions. This release may be best understood as an infusion in the reader of what the New Testament calls "spirit." But this word may be best interpreted in terms of the metaphor embedded historically in it. The English word "spirit" is from the Greek *pneuma*,<sup>23</sup> and its Hebrew counterpart, *ruah*, which both originally meant "wind" or "breath." When turned into metaphor, this spirit-breath was transmuted to refer

tacitly to an ineffable power both outside and within the person. As Jesus intimates in the previous citation from Luke, this is a power that lies dormant *within the reader's personality*. The etymological allusion in the word *pneuma* ("spirit") to "breath," with all its internal and physiological implications, hints at the interiorizing required to get its tacit implications. In another passage from Luke, Jesus in the synagogue reads a passage from the Isaiah scroll,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

When reading becomes contemplative study in passages like this, the tacit dimension of the word speaks to the tacit dimension in the reader's mind, inviting him to leap the gap between a word such as "Spirit" and the tacit knowledge of something that can't be formulated explicitly in words. By indwelling the word, and getting in touch with the dynamics of metaphor embedded in it, attention is called to our own physical breathing. In this way, the word "Spirit" is interiorized as metaphor, and can be felt internally as new energy, like new breath, infused into the mind of the reader, but extending to the whole personality. The act of study, developing into spiritual inquiry, moves from words to tacit knowledge of possibilities in experience, like a sense of the possibility of "release" from "captivity"—whether an external prison or personal neuroses. Though not the same as scientific discovery, pragmatic consequences resembling discovery, such as inner release, can follow from sensing this tacit dimension of metaphor in the inner ear.

#### IV. Reading as contemplation: dissolving the screen of objectivism

In *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi's comments about the experience of contemplation in science, and its bearing on tacit knowing, help us understand the experience of contemplative reading.<sup>24</sup> In a section on "The Tacit Component," subsection "Dwelling in and Breaking Out," he writes,

As observers or manipulators of experience we are guided by experience and pass *through* experience without experiencing it *in itself*. The conceptual framework by which we observe and manipulate things being present as a screen between ourselves and these things, their sights and sounds, and the smell and touch of them transpire but tenuously through this screen, which keeps us aloof from them. *Contemplation dissolves the screen*, stops our movement through experience and pours us straight into experience; we cease to handle things and become immersed in them. Contemplation has no ulterior intention or ulterior meaning; in it we cease to deal with things and become absorbed in the inherent quality of our experience, for its own sake (*PK*, 197, italics mine).

Citing Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* as an example, Polanyi continues,

. . . as we lose ourselves in contemplation, we take on an impersonal life in the objects of our contemplation; while these objects themselves are suffused by a visionary gleam . . . [T]he impersonality of intense contemplation consists in a complete participation of the person in that which he contemplates . . . not in . . . detachment from it, as would be the case in an ideally objective observation. . . . The impersonality of contemplation is a self-abandonment . . . (*PK*, 197).

This sense of self-abandonment is especially true for the religious mystic who "achieves contemplative communion as a result of an elaborate effort of thought . . . . By concentrating on the presence of

God, . . . the mystic seeks to relax the intellectual control which his powers of perception instinctively exercise over the scene confronting him." Polanyi draws a significant parallel here between the experience of the mystic and that of the scientist whose "intellectual passion" for discovery incites "heuristic vision," the "most radical manifestation" of which is the "urge to break through all fixed conceptual frameworks" (*PK*, 197). This Herculean task of breaking out from tradition or a fixed conceptual framework starts by entering in to the mental closet of contemplation.<sup>25</sup> Then, says Polanyi, like the astronomer in the grip of heuristic vision, "when we abandon ourselves to the contemplation of the stars we attend to them in a way which is not an astronomical observation" (*PK*, 196). Contemplation is the mental matrix for discovery.

As contemplative experience opens itself to tacit knowledge in science, the contemplative reading of scripture, for some readers, can involve the effort to "break through the accepted frameworks of thought" (*PK*, 199). Religious practice, in Polanyi's view, like worship or contemplative reading of scripture, "sustains, as it were, an eternal, never to be consummated hunch: a heuristic vision which is accepted for the sake of its unresolvable tension" (*PK*, 197). By the effort to resolve the unresolvable tension of his experience, Paul discovered a "peace of God that passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7) that had not been apparent to him before. The reader of scripture is being asked by the power of metaphor to abandon old or conventional frameworks of understanding, including his own sense of identity. The call in scripture to deny oneself (as in Luke 9:23) in order to "follow" Christ is a counterpart to what Polanyi calls "self-abandonment" in the scientist's experience. Our understanding of the inner "logic" of these scriptural themes emerges by entering into contemplative experience.

Contemplative reading may occur spontaneously, but one highly evolved method (described by Thomas Keating as a "methodless method") of reading scripture is the Benedictine monastic practice of *lectio divina* (or sacred reading). This method can show us ways to go behind the words to the root experience in literary or biblical texts. It involves holding the attention on a passage of scripture or



another text for extended periods. In this way moments of encounter that Martin Buber calls "actual presentness"<sup>26</sup> may occur. By becoming actually present, not simply with the text as physical artifact but with the tacit dimension of meaning which the words of the text make palpable, the reader relaxes intellectual controls, and entering a contemplative state, dissolves (to use Polanyi's word) the "screens" of prior assumptions that keep him or her at a distance from the text as object. Unlike conventional approaches to reading, as spiritual writer Parker Palmer explains, in the Benedictine tradition, "the monks dwell on a page or a passage or a line for hours and days at a time." Because it is done "at a contemplative pace," the method of *lectio divina* "allows reading to open, not fill, our learning space." The contemplative reading of brief texts, in Palmer's words, "is not only to create a space for learning but to bring the reader into obedient dialogue with the person behind the words." In this way contemplative reading works as "a personal exchange" between oneself and the text,<sup>27</sup> involving what Polanyi calls in the passage above "a complete participation of the person in that which he contemplates." When the object of contemplation is a biblical text, the same principles are operative as in "the contemplation of the stars." A similar "heuristic passion" for discovery (PK, 142) can activate new modes of vision in the reader, and starts the dissolution of the objectivist screens that tend to block awareness of the tacit dimension of meaning in biblical metaphor.

#### **V. "The kingdom": *semantic and ontological aspects of metaphor***

Many parables in the synoptic gospels begin with the phrase, "The kingdom of heaven is like . . . ," making the sentence in which it appears grammatically a simile, while its semantic structure is identical to metaphor.<sup>28</sup> It consists of two juxtaposed terms, an image from ordinary life (such as a seed), that everyone (in Jesus' audience as much as today) would recognize, in tension with a new idea (kingdom of God) beyond one's normal frame of reference, having extensive implications that can't be reduced to formulaic meaning.

How shall we picture the kingdom of God, [he asks] or by what parable shall we describe it? It is like the mustard-seed, which is smaller than any seed in the ground at its sowing. But once sown, it springs up and grows taller than any other plant, and forms branches so large that the birds can settle in its shade (Luke 4:30-32).

The parable is a complex metaphor.<sup>29</sup> The tiny mustard-seed seems at first irrelevant to something as vast as a "kingdom" and less relevant still to the visionary "kingdom of God." The terms of the metaphor are mental pictures (seed and kingdom), one more abstract than the other, which in juxtaposition point to something larger and less determinate from an ordinary point of view than the images themselves. What the metaphor does is ask us to expand the horizons of our mental framework, to move from an ordinary frame of reference to an extraordinary one. The semantic tension between "seed" and "kingdom" generates a spark of energy in the reader that could be called, in Polanyi's terminology, *self-giving*. From the energy evoked by the language the reader sees in imagination the disparate mental pictures, which in turn call upon intuition to get from them an integrated pulse of meaning, by which some new "seed" of grace and harmony is implanted in the mind. How does the text do this?

As if by the design of a great teacher, the metaphor seeks to transform awareness from a normal state to a different state in which the depth and scope of our understanding are evolving. Starting from a simple visual reference (mustard-seed) readers are guided not just to a static connection with the idea of a mythical kingdom, but into a new framework of understanding that is both open and dynamic. The genius of metaphor demands that the reader willingly give him- or herself to the words of the text and follow (at least to a degree) the trail in which they lead. We step from a relatively stable to an unstable condition—the *tacit dimension*—of thought, where we hear more of the music of language, becoming aware not only of new ideas but a new poetic "logic" of personal relationship to words. Destabilized by the tension of disparate ideas, the mind of the reader is being asked to reach out beyond its normal limits, and "carried away" (*M*, 74-75) to the edge of a new mental horizon. When "dynamic

intuition" lifts the reader out of his or her normal frame of reference—where mustard seeds are just mustard seeds—she enters an extraordinary framework of understanding. In this new framework, the tenor of the metaphor refers to the smallness of the ordinary human self, but also its capacity to grow, mentally and spiritually, towards an unforeseen kind of maturity, as if the process of growth were as natural as the seed's growth into a mature tree. As the mustard seed "springs up and grows taller than any other plant" so the *semantic aspect* of metaphor (words and their explicit referents) points the reader to its *ontological aspect*. Ontology is concerned with understanding the nature of *being itself*—not just particular beings, but the principles by which entities come into being and find their places in the larger systems of being. In its "ontological aspect," the parable offers in a few words an understanding that the potential for inner growth is not an accident or anomaly, but a natural characteristic of *being itself*. The metaphoric structure of the parable tacitly guides the reader's understanding to "spring up and grow" "taller" (more comprehensive) than ordinary knowledge of the nature of being. It asks us in other words, to grow into a new interpretative framework of concepts and *fiduciary commitments*, where we actually understand, not just speculate upon, what is ordinarily considered inexpressible: being itself, expressed in metaphor as "kingdom of God."

Like the scientist on his quest, the reader of scripture at a certain point crosses a commitment boundary where a "comprehensive conversion" (PK, 318; see also 151, 267) from a moribund framework to a vital one may take place. In each case a process of inquiry that is not entirely intellectual works by a holistic method that includes reason and ordinary sense perception, but also lays radical claim to the tacit dimension of knowing, the organizing energy that makes the disparate elements of experience cohere, just as the mind works in gestalt-formation. As a quantum of semantic energy, the metaphor activates a power within the mind that Polanyi calls "dynamic intuition" (CI, 98), the gestalt-forming agency within the mind. While for Polanyi this special brand of intuition is essential to scientific discovery, the same power enables the reader to see the link between the image in metaphor and its

message. Then we interpret the message in terms of a new (non-objectivist) framework of understanding. In the course of its work, intuition perceives that the message in metaphor is not propositional. It is only the semantic power of the metaphor that makes it possible to engage in the experience about which the words tell us. As it manifests in new forms of coherent thought and action, this experience is identified in scripture by the word *grace*.

## **VI. Indwelling metaphor evokes dynamic intuition**

In another passage, the author of the Gospel of Matthew writes,

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in the three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (Matt. 13:33).

To what does the yeast (leaven) refer? Like the mustard seed, it is a realistic image from everyday life that points to a larger principle. If interpretation of the parables is a discovery process, it may become what Polanyi calls a "quest . . . guided throughout by feelings of a deepening coherence." And "we may recognize [in ourselves] the powers of a dynamic intuition" telling not simply of orderliness in some part of the world, but of coherences within the self (CI, 101). To the listener in first-century Palestine, living in a world of religious corruption and brutal political domination, the parable came as an introduction to a new world, or a new view of world. As Polanyi argues, the scientist "must rely on his sense of deepening coherence to guide him to discovery. He must keep his imagination fixed on these growing points and force his way to what lies hidden beyond them" (CI, 101). To the first-century Jew, as to the twenty-first century reader of Matthew, the parable presents itself as a clue to discovering a path to some new level of existential order. By the indirection of metaphor it articulates dimensions of reality unknown to ordinary experience. Like the scientist in his or her search for truth, the reader of scripture as spiritual searcher relies on his sense of a "deepening coherence to guide him to discovery." By their metaphoric structure, behind explicit denotations of the words, parables give intimations of deepening coherence in the world than what normally meets the eye. "This vision [writes Polanyi], the vision of a hidden reality,

which guides a scientist in his quest, is a dynamic force" (CI, 93). A similar sense of dynamic force is operative in the language of biblical metaphor. The words become a call to explore meanings and directives that may not be apparent on the surface. The reader gets the sense of deepening coherence in reality by indwelling the words. In the process, the tension of opposites in metaphor, like that of the bow and the lyre, releases the energy of the word to empower intuition. But when intuition has started the process of understanding, Polanyi asks, "where does this leave the *creative imagination*?"

It is there [he argues]; . . . not displaced by intuition but imbued with it. When recognizing a problem and engaging in its pursuit, our imagination is guided . . . by our dynamic . . . intuition; it ransacks our available faculties, guided by creative intuition. The imaginative effort can evoke its own implementation only because it follows intuitive intimations of its own feasibility. . . . (CI, 103).

Though not the same as the creative activity of the writer or speaker of the parables, the reader-as-inquirer nevertheless does perform a creative act, employing imagination to form images, and engaging intuition to perceive the connection between the image and the reality, however diffuse, to which it points. Though expressly realistic, each of the parables creates a frame of thought where surrender to the aesthetic features of the text, especially the power of metaphor, carries thought away from the explicit into the tacit (or depth) dimension. "The honors of creativity are due . . . in one part to the imagination [Polanyi writes], which imposes on intuition a feasible task, and, in the other part, to intuition, which rises to this task and reveals the discovery that the quest was due to bring forth. *Intuition informs the imagination which in its turn, releases the powers of intuition*" (CI, 104). By the power of dynamic intuition, the reader of scripture understands the metaphor as disclosing previously unknown order in reality, which has a bearing on immediate experience.

Polanyi's original use of the term *indwelling* (itself a metaphor) to explain scientific practice, has significant resonance with the word "dwell" and its cognates in New Testament texts. In the Gospel of

John, Jesus is reported as saying, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31). The Greek word translated "continue" is *meinete*: abide, stay, remain, dwell. Its resonance with Polanyi's sense of *indwelling* becomes clearer in the New English Bible's "if you dwell within the revelation I have brought, you are indeed my disciples; you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free."<sup>30</sup> The Greek *logos* means "word," with a strong connotation of *teaching*, from which the translators of NEB derive "revelation." The "word" in the "new tongue" of the New Testament tacitly implies the revelation of a new sense of intelligence, and a new understanding of order in the fabric of existence itself. To "continue in [Christ's] word" is to dwell within the new framework of understanding it reveals. It suggests the unveiling of a higher level of mental organization made possible by immersing oneself (dwelling) "in" the "word"—the centerpiece of Christ's teaching according to John. The words of Jesus can't be taken literally within our modern sense of logic, but as metaphors both the words "dwell" and "in" may be understood more fully as explicit terms from which we are asked to leap the logical gap to another kind of meaning. This is the knowledge that to dwell in the word is to live within a different framework of understanding than what is available to ordinary understanding.

In *Personal Knowledge* Polanyi argues that just as "indwelling" the particulars and theoretical framework of his subject is a crucial part of the scientist's path of inquiry, "religion, considered as an act of worship, is an indwelling" as well (*PK*, 279).

Scientific discovery, which leads from one . . . framework to its successor, bursts the bounds of disciplined thought in an intense if transient moment of heuristic vision. And while it is thus breaking out, the mind is for the moment directly experiencing its content rather than controlling it by the use of any pre-established modes of interpretation: it is overwhelmed by its own passionate activity. (*PK*, 196)

Today, as for the first-century reader of the gospel, the act of "continuing" in the "word" is a mental *indwelling* of the text. What is revealed or discovered is the possibility of breaking out of an objectivist

framework of understanding, thereby coming to understand the tacit dimension of the word, as well as more of the inexhaustible tacit dimensions of being itself, to which biblical metaphors point. This discovery of the possibility of breaking out of an exhausted conceptual framework is followed by another discovery: faith, commitment to a fiduciary claim, and its power to order consciousness from within.

As Polanyi writes,

The indwelling of the Christian worshipper is . . . a continued attempt at breaking out, at casting off the condition of man, even while humbly acknowledging its inescapability. Such indwelling is fulfilled most completely when it increases this effort to the utmost. It resembles not the dwelling within a great theory of which we enjoy the complete understanding, nor an immersion in the pattern of a musical masterpiece, but *the heuristic upsurge which strives to break through the accepted frameworks of thought, guided by the intimations of discoveries still beyond our horizon*. . . . Music, poetry, painting: the arts—whether abstract or representative—are a dwelling in and a breaking out which lie somewhere between science and worship. . . . *Art, like mysticism, breaks through the screen of objectivity and draws on our pre-conceptual capacities of contemplative vision*. Poetry 'purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being', it breaks into 'a world to which the familiar world is chaos' (Shelley) (PK, 198-99, italics mine).

To take Polanyi's exposition of *indwelling* and *breaking out* as principles of interpreting scripture is to begin by dropping conventional interpretations, recognizing in them the "screens" of an objectivist interpretative framework, and exposing ourselves directly to the word. As "contemplation dissolves the screen," in Polanyi's words, and "stops our movement through experience," it paradoxically "pours us straight into experience." In contemplative thought "we cease to handle things and become immersed

in them" (see above, p. 11). By becoming immersed in metaphor and its call for the release of psychic energy we realize the ability to break down presuppositions and enter into the experience of the word of scripture as an artistic event, not unlike immersion in a literary or musical masterpiece. But indwelling the word evolves into heuristic vision, its path is a leading to discovery, of greater mental and existential coherence within individual life and extending to the community. Grappling with the meaning of metaphor promotes the mind's evolution, from simple realism (in which language ideally is a clear and distinct representation of objective things) to a new understanding of the tacit dimension of words.

## **VII. "Self-giving" as transformation in New Testament texts**

"The self is never carried away in indication; it is never surrendered or given to the focal object. . . . Indications are always *self-centered*" (M, 74). Whether philosophically sophisticated or not, when encountering the forms of language Polanyi and Prosch call "indication," the self in the modern age tends to remain in its own Cartesian shell. This is essentially the way analytical discourse works for most readers. The analytical frame of mind distrusts metaphor whenever it seeks to explore aspects of experience that lie beyond the objects of empirical observation and reasoning. The "I" as subject, separate from the word as "object," holds itself back from living engagement with words and their meanings. When, by contrast, tacit knowing is implicitly recognized as central to language, "symbolizations are *self-giving*." That is, the explicit reference in symbol or metaphor, "as an object of our focal awareness, is . . . established by surrendering the diffuse memories and experiences of the self *into* this object (M, 75). The metaphor is the power of the word that leads to self-surrender, and from there to the higher organization of experience Polanyi calls "self-giving integrations" (M, 75).

The teachings in many passages in scripture call directly for surrender of the self in order to get the spiritual meaning embodied in them. "If any want to become my followers, [says Jesus to his inner circle of disciples] let them deny themselves, and take their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). In a similar vein Paul exclaims, "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh



I live by faith in the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20). In these passages, Jesus' reference to the self and Paul's to a personal "I" have both literal and metaphoric valences. As literal reference, "self" or "I" for us today signifies the body and the layered thoughts and emotions comprising the stream of personal consciousness. In modern idiom, the stream of thought and emotion is a *closed system* that may fall easily into turmoil, fear or other entropic patterns. Implicitly acknowledging the potential for disorder within the self, the above lines offer a way out. But this way out of entropy is a paradox, as it entails not expansion but submersion of the self in something beyond self.

The "cross" was a prevalent literal reality in first-century Palestine. When it became an icon of spiritual teaching in the gospels, it took on an added metaphorical dimension, tacitly disclosing the idea of an ultimate self-discipline, denying validity to the personal "self" in favor of something larger than self. Yet the transcendental referent of the image "cross" paradoxically leads to "self-giving integration." By his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts chap. 9), stepping out of a self-centered frame of reference, Paul discovered *something else*, the "more" that is difficult to "tell." This is expressed tacitly by the paradoxical "not I." He articulates his personal transformation by giving the word "Christ" (historically a reference to the *anointing* of kings) a metaphoric valence as well. If *the anointed one* is a vehicle embedded in the etymology of the Greek *Christos*, its tenor is the tacit sense of a different kind of identity that for Paul now lives "in" him. By transferring allegiance to this new sense of identity, Paul's change of heart is a move from *self-centered* to *self-giving integration*. As metaphors the images intimate that there is a way out of the chaos of personal thoughts, by "denying" the ordinary sense of "self." By acts of self-giving in a contemplative approach to scripture, for modern readers the word "serves as a focal point for the integration of [the] diffuse aspects of the self into a felt unity, a tacit grasp of ourselves as a whole person, in spite of the manifold incompatibilities existing in our lives as lived. Instead of being a *self-centered* integration, a symbol [or biblical metaphor] becomes rather a *self-giving one*, an integration in which not only the symbol [or the tacit and explicit parts of metaphor]

become integrated, but the self also becomes integrated as it is carried away by the symbol—or given to it” (M, 75). As metaphor or symbol, the words in a biblical text do their work by enabling (or demanding) *self-giving* activity on the part of the reader, the self-surrender of one's ordinary perspective, in order to discover this new integrated self. In light of Polanyi's theory of knowing, when engaged with scripture, finding that one is capable of self-giving, the very act of *self-giving* is a significant existential *discovery*. The metaphor asks us to make an existential choice: to either accept a static objectivist interpretation of self and world, or surrender the ordinary sense of self and world to the dynamics of the word, as in metaphor. The act of surrender, self-giving, can lead one into the path of heuristic vision and discovery, of new levels of order in the self. "A true metaphor is one whose power creates the participation whereby its truth is experienced."<sup>31</sup> The act of study is not a matter of reading dispassionately, e.g., *about* the metaphor of the "seed," or the "yeast." Instead it is a matter of becoming a *participant* in its meaning, that is, to "grow taller" or "rise" into a different stage of maturity by the spiritual energy incited by the metaphor.<sup>32</sup>

What is the unnamable something beyond self that gives readers reason to "deny" the self? It is a tacit call to evolve in self-giving integration. For reasons that are difficult to tell, this call must be articulated through the indirection of metaphor and expressions that emphasize what this "something" *is not*, rather than *what it is*. In the second letter to the Corinthians (drawing on Isaiah 64:4) Paul says,

. . . as it is written,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,

nor the human heart conceived,

what God has prepared for those who love him"—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God (I Cor. 2:9-10).

Part of Jesus' teaching was to instruct his followers "not" look to at things objectively—"The kingdom of God is *not* coming with things that can be observed" (see above, p. 5). Similarly, Paul's lines claim that to find the hidden reality of "the things God has revealed to us" you need to sense what "*no eye* has seen, *nor ear* heard." Stated in Polanyi's vocabulary, this negative way, the Christian way beyond suffering, is found through the channels of tacit (unspoken, from Latin *tacitus*, silent) knowing. The "things" of God, and "the depths of God" are to Paul *real* (not imaginary) *things*. "To trust that a thing we know is real is, in this sense, to feel that it has the independence and power for manifesting itself in yet unthought of ways in the future. I shall say, accordingly, that minds and problems possess a deeper reality than cobblestones. . . ." writes Polanyi (*TD*, 32-33). The things Paul speaks of, more real than cobblestones, are only known as such by coming into "I-Thou" relations with them, that is, becoming acquainted with them through "heuristic passion" and "vision" (*PK*, 196), to access the tacit dimension of knowing.

For readers, looking into the tacit aspects of the language of scripture leads to knowing more about the what Tillich calls "the depth dimension" of reality ("depths of God" in Paul's words). Through contemplative study "the I-It situation," in which the reader as subject is separated from the word as object, is "gradually transformed into an I-Thou relation" (*PK*, 346). The transformation of our relation to words changes our way of knowing what they mean. Knowing a thing or person or word as a "thou" instead of an "it" opens the inner receptors of mind to the "deeper reality" (*TD*, 32) conveyed by them, enabling us to know intersubjectively "more" about the inner workings of others, whether people, or words, or things. "Our knowledge of reality" is for Polanyi of the same sort as "foreknowledge which guides scientists to discovery" (*TD*, 33). The experience Polanyi describes as "discovery" is, in the world of Paul and Jesus, experienced as "revelation" of a previously un-comprehended form of existence called *the kingdom of God*. When we take the phrase in its metaphoric sense, we see it as a comprehensive semantic entity: its verbal components conveying not just information but energy to the reader and

foreknowledge about a reality not seen, or not yet seen. Such a comprehensive entity is recognized only by methods that involve tacit knowing.

Paraphrasing Isaiah 40:13, Paul writes further,

" . . . who has known the mind of the Lord  
so as to instruct him?"

But we have the mind of Christ. (I Cor. 2:16)

To make this disclosure of such a new dimension of "mind," Paul has passed through the self-surrender of saying "not I, but Christ lives in me." This denial of the "I" is the surrender of a self-centered orientation in favor of a self-giving one, in which the "I" becomes a different, more comprehensive, kind of entity. In the words of Martin Buber, "the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primary word *I-It*."<sup>33</sup> Having lived for some years by indwelling the oral teaching about Christhood that originated with Jesus, following his visionary encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, at the time of writing the letters to the Corinthians Paul had entered in to a new I-Thou relation to Christ. In this new relation he could say "not I," and answer the question about what it is that stirs the human mind to self-giving surrender, by saying "we have the mind of Christ."

#### **IX. Conclusion: biblical metaphors as the outlines of being**

In his great poem "Large Red Man Reading" Wallace Stevens tells a narrative of a man "reading, aloud, the great blue tabulae" of the sky, offering his listeners "the outlines of being and its expressings, the syllables of its law: / *Poesis, poesis*, the literal characters, the vatic lines. . . "<sup>34</sup> The language of metaphor in scripture is the language of poetry. It may come to us as "a voice from outside logical space,"<sup>35</sup> offering its readers in prophetic moments "the outlines of being and its expressings" including "the syllables of its law." In reading poetry or scripture, to see these invisible "outlines" and barely audible "syllables" of "being," requires us to move with the dynamic movement of metaphor, from the semantic to the ontological aspects of tacit knowing. The role of metaphor is to make us feel

and see more directly than any form of ordinary language, or any logic, the reality of the things it portrays.

All interpretation of language involves integration of verbal clues to form understanding. Some metaphors may be used simply to give information or to clarify things that can be known by other ways of speaking. But, as John Dominic Crossan argues, "metaphor can also articulate a referent so new or so alien that this referent can only be grasped within the metaphor itself."<sup>36</sup> This is a radical way of understanding metaphor that resonates with Polanyi's view of tacit knowing and my argument that the interpretation of biblical metaphors is a form of discovery. The metaphor "kingdom of God" delivers just such a new and alien referent in the literature of the New Testament. And if Crossan is correct, the words represent the vision of an entity that cannot be comprehended in paraphrase or analysis, but *can* be known by participating in the experience that the metaphor evokes. The theory of tacit knowing makes clear how the tension of opposites in the metaphor offers knowledge of its new and alien referent. The metaphor is a means of altering the reader's sense of present reality, but also of instilling in him or her a new framework by which to understand the altered worldview it presents. According to Crossan, as extended metaphors, the parables and other images of the kingdom of God, present a new worldview. The metaphor "contains a new possibility of world and of language so that any information one might obtain from it can only be received after one has participated through the metaphor in its new and alien referential world."<sup>37</sup> Not by objectifying its language, or analysis, but by participating in the metaphor "kingdom of God," we see it as a clue to a new world picture, a new understanding of existence itself.

"We know more than we can tell." This "more" is an aspect of knowing that is less subject to critical scrutiny than the empirical objects of focal attention. Yet approaching literary metaphors in scripture with discipline, the "more" to which they point us can be experienced. The means is contemplation, and the effect of contemplative reading of biblical texts is to enter into I-Thou relations

with them. Thinking within the objectivist framework tends to keep attention fixated on so-called objective facts, to hold reality at a distance as an "It." But the tacit dimension of knowing, invested with the complementary energies called *imagination* and *intuition*, is inherently motivated to seek "the more" that can't be easily told. By its use of metaphor, scripture invites the reader, at times into mythical worlds, but more importantly into a frame of thought that favors the possibility of discovering this *more*, not as myth but as new understanding of self and world.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1958), 322. Hereafter cited in text as *PK*.

<sup>2</sup> See *PK*, Part Two: The Tacit Component, chap. 6 "Intellectual Passions," part 13 "Dwelling in and breaking out," pp. 195-202, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> David W. Rutledge, "Who was Michael Polanyi? A Primer for Poteat Scholars," *Tradition and Discovery*, XLII, number 1, Oct. 2015, 14-16.

<sup>4</sup> Rutledge, 15. William Poteat, *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 136-46.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Gelwick, "From Tacit Knowing to a Theory of Faith," *Tradition and Discovery*, 41:1 (2014-15):10-20.; on fiduciary character of knowing, see Gelwick, *The Way of Discovery: An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 49, 151.

<sup>6</sup> See for example John 1:14, where we're told that "the Word [Greek *logos*] became flesh and lived among us . . . full of grace and truth"; and Paul's account of the voice telling him "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

<sup>7</sup> See *PK*, "The Re-interpretation of Language," 104-117, and *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> For an applicable analogy with Pre-Socratic Greek thinkers, see Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984, orig. publ. 1975), 63 and *passim*. In Heidegger's view words in early Greek thinking, are the "presencing" of "being," and understanding is "unconcealment" of or what is.

<sup>9</sup> Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (London: Penguin, 2009, orig. publ. 1966), 13 and *passim*, hereafter cited in text as *TD*.

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (vol. 1) *Reason and Revelation, Being and God*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 130, 144.

<sup>11</sup> See I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936, 1964), chap. 5, "Metaphor," 89ff., and chap. 6. "The Command of Metaphor," 115ff.

<sup>12</sup> Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 71 and passim; hereafter cited in text as *M*.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Conrad, Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (New York: Doubleday, 1930).

<sup>14</sup> For related discussion, see Stanley Scott, "Metaphors for Consciousness: William James and the Arts of the Twentieth Century," in *Frontiers of Consciousness: Interdisciplinary Studies in American Philosophy and Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991, 1994) 55-73.

<sup>15</sup> See Polanyi, "The Creative Imagination" in *The Concept of Creativity in Science and Art*, ed. Denis Dutton and Michael Krausz (The Hague, Boston, London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981) 91-108, orig. publ. 1966, hereafter cited in text as CI; and *M*, chap. 4 "From Perception to Metaphor," 66-81.

<sup>16</sup> John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1965), fragment 51. See also Richard C. Lattimore translation: "Men do not understand how what is divided is consistent with itself; it is a harmony of tensions like that of the bow and the lyre," *Selections from Early Greek Philosophy*, fourth ed. Milton C. Nahm, (Des Moines, IA: Meredith, 1964); and Guy Davenport, tr., "We do not notice how opposing forces agree. Look at the bow and the lyre," in *Herakleitos and Diogenes*, (Bollinas, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1979), 31.

<sup>17</sup> George Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3-13.

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all citations from the Bible are from The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> *Oxford Annotated Bible*, New Testament, 130, note.

<sup>20</sup> Philip Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 73.

<sup>21</sup> Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 30-32.

<sup>22</sup> Wheelwright, 57.

<sup>23</sup> See Paul's letter to the Romans (8:14-16), "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. . . .When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

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<sup>24</sup> See my discussion of contemplative reading of literary and biblical texts in "Poetry and Meditation: Going Behind the Symbols" *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, 11 (winter 2005-06): 76-85.  
(<http://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1130&context=jaepl>.)

<sup>25</sup> See Thomas Merton, "What is Contemplation?" in *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 2007), 1-6.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, tr. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 12.

<sup>27</sup> Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 76, 101, 45, 45.

<sup>28</sup> See Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean" *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Special Issue on Metaphor (Autumn, 1978), pp. 31-47. Published by The University of Chicago Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1342976>.

<sup>29</sup> See Robert Funk, "The Parable as Metaphor," in *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology*, (New York: Harper, 1966), 133-162.

<sup>30</sup> The New English Bible, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>31</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 18.

<sup>32</sup> On *participation* as a breaking out from the conceptual framework of Cartesian dualism and modern objectivism, see Stanley Scott, "Conclusion: Participating Consciousness—A Way Beyond Authoritarianism" in *Frontiers of Consciousness*, 130-143.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, second ed., tr. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Wallace Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, ed. Holly Stevens, (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1972), 320-321.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Rorty, "Metaphor as the Growing Point of Language" section 2 in "Philosophy as Science, as Metaphor, and as Politics" (1989), *The Rorty Reader*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 214.

<sup>36</sup> Crossan, 12-14.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.