

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON: A COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS*

AUREL ONISIM LEHACI
University of Bucharest, Romania
lehaciaurelonism@gmail.com

Rezumat: Acest articol explorează *Parabola fiului risipitor* (Luc. 15:11-32) din perspectiva lingvisticii cognitive. Este vorba despre o analiză prin care încercăm să aflăm în ce măsură această parabolă este un vehicul „potrivit” pentru transmiterea mesajului lui Iisus și pentru evocarea domeniului conceptual al „divinității”, adică a spațiului Împărăției lui Dumnezeu. Cu alte cuvinte, prin parabolă oamenii au acces la „concepțiile transcendente”, cum este ‘divinitatea’, prin utilizarea „conceptelor umane” (“human-sized notions”), care proiectează domeniul conceptual al divinității

Cuvinte-cheie: Biblie, parabole, *Parabola fiului risipitor*, lingvistică cognitivă.

1. Introduction

Over the past few years there has developed an interdisciplinary type of analysis, which uses a cognitive linguistic approach in the analysis of biblical and theological texts. This approach is suitable to the extent to which biblical texts which are typically non-literal¹ are the object of the analysis, since it is widely known that the cognitive linguistics has developed a comprehensive theory of figurative language. Therefore, in order to examine the non-literal form of discourse from the *Parables of Jesus*, we will use the concepts of cognitive linguistics (introduced by Fillmore 1985, Johnson 1987, Lakoff/ Johnson 2003 [1980], Lakoff 1987, Kövecses 1990, etc.), such as frames, domains, scenario, idealized cognitive models, conceptual metaphors, and metonymies. Also, Barcelona (2003), DesCamp (2007), Erussard (1997), and Kuczok (2010) are among the most important works for our study.

This paper is part of a larger research project which analyses the “epithets of Jesus”. These epithets, such as *Teacher, Master, Lord, Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah*², denote

* „*Parabola fiului risipitor*”. O analiză din perspectiva lingvisticii cognitive.

¹ Lakoff/ Johnson (2003, p. 40) shows that “the conceptual systems of cultures and religions are metaphorical in nature.”

² Other epithets we have found: *Prince of Life, Prince and Saviour, Prince of Salvation, eternally blessed God, True God and eternal life, Our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of his love, Jesus Christ the Righteous, The Lion of the tribe of Judah, The Shepherd and Bishop of our Soul, The Apostle and High Priest, The Author of Life, The Beginning* (Col 1:18); *The Judge of the*

certain attributes of Jesus and certain of his social roles. Our preoccupation arises from the hypothesis that, viewed as an individual, Jesus is the centre of a “radial frame” (in Lakoff’s sense) which is constituted by the superposition of several other central epithets and their subordinate ones, which are hierarchically structured. The whole frame aims at progressively constructing his dual human-divine nature as subsumed under the generic epithets *Son of Man* and *Son of God*, as seen in the next scheme.

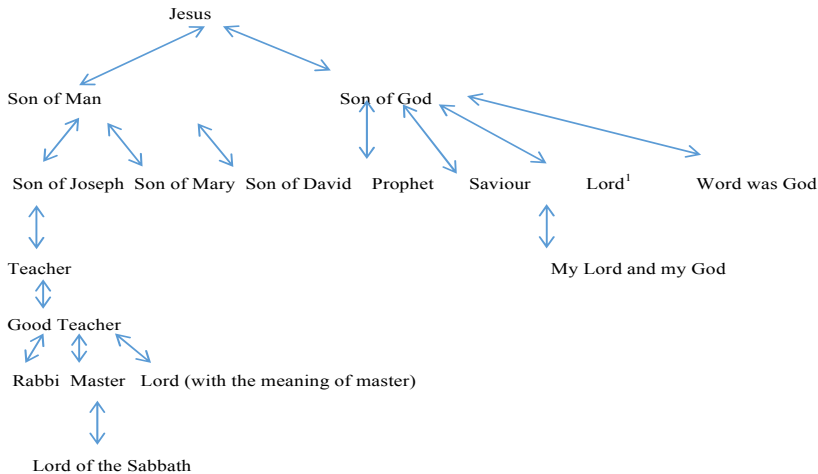


Fig. 1: The radial frame proposed for Jesus

In other words, our hypothesis is that from whatever initial point we choose, we will be constructing the same radial frame³. In our work so far, we have concentrated on the role *Teacher*, and its multiple attributes showing how it overlaps with other significant roles such as *Master*, *Lord*, *Messiah*, *Prophet*, *King*, etc. We have also found that Jesus is conceptualized as teacher through the content of his lessons and his relation to his disciples.

An important observation is that Jesus uses specific forms of discourse in his teachings. In this sense, critical exegesis (Liebenberg 2001; Dillon 1995; Lee 1999;

living and the dead (Acts 10:42); *Spiritual Rock*; *The Head of the Church* (Eph 5:23); *The Image and Invisible God, the firstborn of all creation* (Col 1:15); *The one mediator between God and humankind* (1Tim 2:5); *The blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of lords* (1Tim 6:15); *The Righteous Judge* (2Tim 4:8); *The shepherd and guardian/bishop of your souls* (1Pet 2:25; cf. 1Pet 5:4; John 10:11-14); *The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation* (Rev 3:14; cf. 3:7); *The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the root of David* (Rev 5:5); *The root and the descendant of David, The Bright Morning Star* (Rev 22:16); *The Representation of his Essence*, (Heb 1:3, NET); *An Unblemished and Spotless Lamb* (1Pet 1:19, NET), etc.

³ We have found that any role of Jesus we take as a starting point we get to the other epithet and role.

Estes 2013) has amply noticed the following as characteristic forms of Jesus' speech, namely illustrations, parables, aphorisms, proverbs, riddles, prophecies, etc.

In this paper, we will debate on the most characteristic genre used by Jesus, that of the *parable*, which, as will be seen, is a quite appropriate genre for progressively revealing the existence of God's realm, without literally talking about it. Because the revelation which is given in parable is indirect, only some of Jesus' hearers are able to understand and draw the appropriate inferences.

2. Definitions of the Term *Parable*

For defining Jesus' parables, we have used the theological literature which provides a cultural and theological background as well as the linguistic literature which is used in our analysis. The *parable* is defined according to ODE, s.v. as a "literary term", which "is said to be the expression of one story through another"⁴. From another perspective, the parable is considered as a metaphor which does not "look at everydayness, but through it" (Funk 1966, p. 145). In this sense, the parables are defined "as pieces of everydayness that have an unexpected 'turn' in them which looks through the commonplace to a new view of reality. This 'turn' may be: a surprising development, an extravagant exaggeration, a paradox; or it may lurk below the surface in the so-called transference of judgment" (Funk 1966, p. 159). The same perspective is shared by Boucher (1977, p. 22), who considers the parable as a "structure consisting of a topical narrative, or a narrative having two levels of meaning" because "it involves the shift of meaning from one to another"⁵. Moreover, Barclay (1999, p. 12-13) goes even further defining a parable as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning", since through them Jesus uses familiar language to lead people's minds towards heavenly abstract concepts. The parable uses "the image borrowed from the visible world" for transmitting (projecting) a "truth from the invisible (spiritual) world" in which "the internal analogies" represent "a witness for the spiritual world" (Lisco 1846, p. 13).

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the parable is considered as a projection of another conceptual domain. In this sense, we mention the foregoing work of Lewis (1936, p. 44), who defines the parable as "understanding one story by figural projection", arguing that this "belongs not principally to expression and not exclusively to literature but rather to mind in general as a basic cognitive instrument". Another cognitive linguist who have studied the parable is Turner (1996, p. 43). He argues that the parable "blends two quite opposed stories into one story that gives us deeper insight". In other words, he defines the notion of parable as projecting one story onto another one:

⁴ CDL, s.v. defines the parable as "a story told to illustrate some doctrine or moral principle, especially the stories set out in the Bible as told by Christ. Parables relate to everyday events but have a deeper interpretation".

⁵ Sider (1995, p. 18) states that "not all parables are stories, but every parable is an analogy".

Parable conveniently combines story and projection [...] it begins with narrative imagining – the understanding of a complex of objects, events, and actors as organized by our knowledge of *story*. It then combines story with projection: one story is projected onto another. The essence of parable is its intricate combining of two of our basic forms of knowledge – story and projection. (Turner 1996, p. 5)

Therefore, these definitions emphasize that the parable uses a concrete conceptual domain for projecting another conceptual domain that is imperceptible and beyond the space of ordinary experience. The second domain is created based on the analogy with the first. In Lakoff's (1987) sense, this is created by mapping the source domain onto the target domain, or, in Turner's (1996) sense, the first domain projects another conceptual domain that gives rise to an "emergent meaning".

3. The Aim of the Paper

The aim of this paper is to offer a cognitive analysis of the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*, showing to what extent it is a "suitable" vehicle for transmitting Jesus' message. The properties of the parable are evident in analysing any parable, but for the present paper, we have chosen this parable. Our main concern is to find out the mappings of "human-sized notions" onto the divine notions. In this sense, we claim that through parables humans have access to the "transcendental notions", such as divinity. In our analysis, we will also consider the way Jesus adapts this parable to his interlocutors and audience.

The parables of the *Gospel of Luke* have certain specific features and characteristics presenting different than the *Parables of the Kingdom from the Gospel of Matthew*. The most important parables of Luke are example stories. This category of parables considered example story which does not only establish an implicit analogy, but also gives an example illustrating an abstract truth. For example, the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:29-37) illustrates how to manifest the love for your neighbour; the *Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector* (Luke 18:9-14) portrays the humble and repentant sinner; the *parable of the Rich Fool* (Luke 12:16-21) gives a negative representation of what a person should not like to be. These parables are specific to Lucan style and have the purpose of creating and teaching a moral lesson which functions as an example to be followed, at the end of which, Jesus concludes by saying: "Go and do likewise".

The most important lukian parables are: (1) *The Parable of the Good Samaritan* (Luk 10:25-37); (2) *The Parable of the Prodigal Son* (Luk 15:11-32); (3) *The Parable of the Dishonest Manager* (Luke 16:1-14); (4) *The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus* (Luk16:16:31); (5) *The Parable of the Ten Pounds* (Luk 19:11-27), etc. For our study we have selected the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* (Luke 15:11-32), which is not from the category of example stories, but is typical for projecting the conceptual domain of divinity.

4. The Parable of the Prodigal Son

The *Parable of the Prodigal Son* is considered “a story drawn from life”. It is a story of “a father’s forgiving love for his two lost sons” (Alles 2008, p. 14). Besides, it has been entitled: “the Father of the Two Lost Sons” (Young 1998, p. 130). Through it, Jesus gives an answer to the religious leaders who grumble and complain about the fact that Jesus eats and drinks with the tax collectors and sinners. Jesus responds to their critic attack with a set of parables which explains that his mission is to save the lost and sinners. Actually, “the main point of the parable is to teach the Pharisees and scribes that the offer of salvation is extended even to the outcasts”, those who are considered lost by his opponents (Alles 2008, p. 21-22).

Therefore, the parable is addressed to those who were offended by Jesus’ teaching. In fact, it is a polemic against the Jewish religious leaders, especially the Pharisees who opposed Jesus who offered forgiveness and salvation to the worst sinners, *i.e.* tax collectors, adulterous women, Samaritans, etc.

4.1. Textual Observations

The first part of the story of the prodigal son, especially the first lines from verses 11 to 19 is a story about a father who has two sons, *i.e.* a younger and an older son. The younger son requests his share of property, since he decides to go away and live on his own. After receiving his inheritance, the younger son travels to a far country living a reckless life squandering his father’s wealth, and finally he spends all his money living an extravagant life. Then, the younger son finds refuge at a pigsty which belongs to an employer. Immediately, a famine strikes that country, and he is affected by a terrible famine which left him desperately poor, and made him suffer terribly from starvation. This tragic situation forced him to work as a swineherd. It was only after having wasted his fortunes and suffered terribly from starvation that he came to his senses and acknowledged his sin. He decided to return to his father, having in mind a plan in asking for forgiveness as well as to being hired as a servant. Here is the parable:

¹¹Then Jesus said, “A man had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, «Father, give me the share of the estate that will belong to me.» So he divided his assets between them. ¹³After a few days, the younger son gathered together all he had and left on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth with a wild lifestyle. ¹⁴Then after he had spent everything, a severe famine took place in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and worked for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He was longing to eat the carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to his senses he said: «How many of my father’s hired workers have food enough to spare, but here I am dying from hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father and say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am

no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired workers»'. (Luke 15:11-18, NET)

Up to this point, the story of the prodigal son resembles in some respect with the stories of rebellious sons who go in far countries wasting all the money of their parents. Therefore, for this part of the story we can find an equivalent in the daily reality. But from the verse 20 on, the story takes the same unexpected “turn” specific to parables signalling the non-literality. What is striking is the unexpected attitude of the father who was waiting for his son’s return and recognized him from the distance: “while he was still a long way from home his father saw him”. Even more striking is the fact that the father did not blame his son for what he had done, but instead he ran “down the road, forgetful of his dignity” and of his “old age” and showed his compassion and love by embracing and kissing his rebellious son (Hosein 2001, p. 363). Then, his father asks his slave to bring “the best robe, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet” and celebrates for his son’ return:

²⁰So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way from home his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; he ran and hugged his son and kissed him. ²¹Then his son said to him: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son”. ²²But the father said to his slaves: “Hurry! Bring the best robe, and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it! Let us eat and celebrate, ²⁴because this son of mine was dead, and is alive again— he was lost and is found!” So, they began to celebrate. ²⁵“Now his older son was in the field. As he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the slaves and asked what was happening. ²⁷The slave replied: “Your brother has returned, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he got his son back safe and sound”. ²⁸But the older son became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and appealed to him, ²⁹but he answered his father: “Look! These many years I have worked like a slave for you, and I never disobeyed your commands. Yet you never gave me even a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends! ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!” ³¹Then the father said to him: “Son, you are always with me, and everything that belongs to me is yours. ³²It was appropriate to celebrate and be glad, for your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found”. (Luke 15:20-32, NET)

The father is compassionate and forgiving and, instead of blaming and punishing his son, he rehabilitates him by putting “the best robe” on him, “a ring on his finger” and “sandals on his feet”. Thus, from a realistic point of view, the attitude of the father is irrational and contrary to common sense.

Therefore, the entire passage signals the fact that we should look for more than just a literal understanding of the text. This incongruity between this story and our expectations based on our reality requires a non-literal interpretation. Thus, in trying to give meaning to these unusual acts of the father, the listener or the reader

is forced to construct another conceptual space, in which the attitude of the Father is reasonable. In other words, there is a way to interpret the unreasonable acts and attitude of the father by constructing another conceptual space, namely God's realm, in which the attitude of the father makes sense and is totally reasonable. Thus, in Turner' (1996) sense, the father of the two sons projects the forgiving attitude (and the way of granting forgiveness) of God the Father towards humans. Therefore, from this story we infer that Jesus transmits a message about another father who is God the Father.

4.2. The Correspondences of the Domains

We establish that the source space, i.e. the space of ordinary experience, is given by the father frame, the family frame, the scenario of the younger son traveling to a far country, the inheritance frame, and the forgiveness frame which structures the story, etc.

Firstly, the family frame evokes the schematic representation of a family, i.e. the father, his two sons, his duties and different characteristics (the family life, fatherly authority, affection and love). Besides, it also includes the participating agents who explicitly designate self-evident roles as "father, older son, younger son", and "slaves", which contain stereotypic information as well as relations among elements, properties and knowledge relating to this family frame. Thus, the father is the head of the family and has authority over any other member of the family. He himself exercises his authority or delegates it to a son, servant or slave. And each member of the family has to know his role and behave according to it. Therefore, each role has specific characteristics, attributes and proprieties: a) the father is characterized as strong, strict, honourable, nurturing, generous, powerful, high status, wise, responsible, kind, compassionate, or it has the opposed qualities; b) the son, especially the first son, the older one has the highest status in the family and is the principal heir; strong, obedient, etc.; c) the slave is loyal, obedient, honest, hard-working, strong having different ranks. However, a stereotypical father is authoritarian, strong, disciplinarian and strict, but this clashes with father frame projected in the parable, i.e. a loving and compassionate father. As we will see, when discussing every element of the parable, the idealised cognitive model for father in this parable is not the strict father model, but the nurturant model.

Secondly, the Jewish legal frame entails that the younger son's request for his share of estate was contrary to the legal practice and Jewish law, since he was still very young, and his father was still alive. Actually, a son was supposed to get his inheritance at his father's death. This legal frame implies that a rebellious son who disobeys the father will be punished, cast out and disinherited, because the father is the ruling authority in the family and his sons have to submit, honour and obey him. According to the same legal frame, the father has the role of protecting the family honour, as well as the responsibility to punish and maintain order in his family. Moreover, the same Jewish legal frame stipulates that the tending of swine is

the most degrading and repulsive occupation for a Jew, because the pigs were considered unclean animals. According to the same cultural and religious frame, it was forbidden to raise pigs, to eat and even to tend pigs. Therefore, this frame implies that the act of the younger son to tend the pigs is detestable to Jesus' Jewish audience, creating a frame clash at the conceptual level, since it includes this stereotypic information.

Therefore, the scenario constructed by these frames does not fit with our realistic point of view, because it is out of the ordinary experience. From this we infer that the family relations, the human acts and the son's rebellious behaviour are informations which come from the source space, the space of experiential accessibility, while the father's love, his compassion and forgiveness are beyond common sense and resemble with divine fatherly acts, such as God's attitude towards humans. These are characteristics which project the transcendental reality of God. Because, from our realistic point of view, common human fathers do not forgive their rebellious and disobedient sons in such a way, without even rebuking them. In other words, it is evident that this incongruity and unexpected elements create the conceptual space of divine father, along with its specific features: divine forgiveness, unconditional love for the disobedient and immoral human beings.

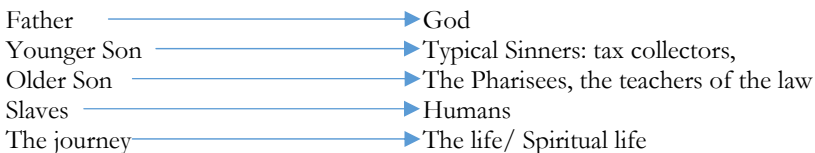
The attitude of the father goes beyond legal Jewish frame which suggests that such a disobedient son should be stoned to death for the disgrace brought to his father. All these create an alternative world by means of the metaphoric mapping on the assumption of an isomorphic structure of the two worlds, which establishes a set of correspondence between the elements of a frame and another frame.

Having this source domain inferences, we propose the following set of correspondences between the familiar conceptual domain and the imperceptible domain, as shown in the table-chart below:

GENERIC SPACE: family life

SOURCE SPACE A: family life

TARGET SPACE: God's realm



BLENDED SPACE: the virtual world of Jesus

As evident, the experiential domain creates a second transcendental domain, which is entailed from the uncommon acts of the father and his incommensurable love for his sons. The justification for this proposed correspondence comes from:

a) the uncommon scenario which signals the non-literal meaning suggesting a figurative sense; b) the structural metaphors which are idealised cognitive models well-grounded in the religious thought and frame.

4.3. The Significance of the Elements of Correspondence

In this subsection, we will discuss every element of the correspondence providing the linguistic arguments from the text, because every element of the structure of the parable has a certain significance. The most significant characters are: the father, the younger son and the older son.

4.3.1. Father

The human-sized notion “father” is the source domain projecting the transcendental notion “God”. This is inferred from the prototypical “father” which has the following characteristics and attributes: “a male progenitor who provides physical nurture, protection, sustenance and instruction; who has the right to punish or reward”, to discipline; “and who has a relationship of mutual love but unequal power with his (young)” sons (DesCamp/ Sweetser 2005, p. 221).

Moreover, according to Lakoff (2004), there are two cognitive models for father, namely the strict father model and the nurturant father model. Each model presupposes a set of assumptions. For example, on the one hand, in the strict father model, the father as a parent values the strict discipline; the world is a dangerous place, since evil is in the world, and the father has to protect the family in “the dangerous world” as well as to support his family by teaching his children “right from wrong”. Therefore, the father requires obedience from their children, because he is the moral authority. When his children are disobedient and do wrong, the father punishes them. On the other hand, the nurturant father model does not value the strict discipline, but puts on emphasis on empathy and responsibility. The father offers freedom; the discipline is a matter of respect and compassion, which is taught by example. Thus, the strict father and the nurturing father frames implies a type of behaviour and a “certain logic” (Lakoff 2004, p. 6-13).

Given these two models, it is evident that the idealised cognitive model for “father” in the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* is not the strict father model, but the nurturant father model. It is not the strict father frame, because a strict father will not “divide his assets between” his sons and offer the liberty to the son to go off on a journey in another country, after taking half of the inheritance. Therefore, according to this model, the father is permissive, offering freedom to his son, even though, according to the legal frame, a son does not have the right to do this. Because, as shown, “according to Jewish customs in Palestine, a father could

dispose of his property either by a will to be executed after his death⁶ or by a gift to his children during his lifetime” (Fitzmyer 2008, p. 1087).

So, the father of the prodigal son does not fit to the strict father frame, since he receives his son back with compassion and love, forgiving his rebellious son: when “his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; he ran and hugged his son and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). Thus, it is evident that he is a nurturant father who shows unconditional love.

From this, we infer that the father is a compassionate, merciful, affectionate, and tolerant, since he receives his rebellious son with forgiveness. Moreover, the father is still the authority and the owner of his remained property commanding his slave to “bring the best robe” to put it on him”, and “to put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet”. In this way, the loving father rehabilitates the reputation of his son. Then, he asks his servants to “bring the fattened calf and kill it” for eating and celebrating. These are gestures which show the father’s generosity, by treating him not as he asks to be treated, i.e. like a “hired workers”, but like an “honoured guest”.

Therefore, it is evident that the frame of the forgiving father introduced in this parable goes beyond the common conceptual frame of human father. It actually projects for our understanding the attitude of the transcendental God, who does not fit the strict father frame, but is illustrated by the attributes, features, and the characteristics discussed so far. This father frame helps us to reason about the abstract concept “God”.

In other words, the “fatherhood is a source domain to gain some understanding about the nature” of God and evokes the conceptual domain of divinity (Barcelona 2003, p. 11). Thus, the “prototypical attributes of a father: protection from danger, provision for material needs, moral guidance”, as well as the prototypical attributes of a son, such as “dependency, seeking protection, needing material and spiritual guidance etc.” map that “the relationship between God and mankind is *as* that of a father to a child” (Charteris-Black 2004, p. 175). In this way, to the imperceptible and transcendental God are attributed some of these characteristics, less the gender features.⁷ But on the other hand, the fatherly attributes and features (authority, affection, protection, guidance, responsibility, leadership) within this family frame projects for us the ontology of the divine being. Moreover, the notion “father” is a complex metaphor for God which is well-known to Jesus’ audience, since it occurs 20 times in the Old Testament and 230 times in the New Testament. Therefore, it was easy for Jesus’ audience to recognise the unreasonable scenario of story and associate it with God.

Therefore, this metaphorical “father” frame projecting God presupposes an overlapping of other attributes including: Creator, that is the One who fathered the

⁶ See Num 36:7-9; 27:8-11.

⁷ “The information about God’s lack of gender and inability to beget children in any physiologically normative way is suppressed in this metaphor” (DesCamp/Sweetser 2005, p. 221).

world, and the universe; the Originator, the Source, the Life-giver, the Almighty, Omnipotent, All-powerful, the Most High. These give rise to the metaphor “the humans⁸ are the children of God”. In this sense, the human sized-notion father is used “to refer to the relationship between God and his other creatures” (Barcelona 2003, p. 11). Thus, the uncommon “father” metonymically stands for God, who is a cause, creator, progenitor, etc. contrasting with the stereotypical human “father”, who does not have these characteristics and features.

As seen, the frame “father” for God implies a great range of “source domain entailments” which projects the frame for “God the Father”, as evident from the following table-chart with the basic characteristics highlighted (adapted from DesCamp/ Sweetser 2005, p. 230).

SOURCE DOMAIN ENTAILMENTS	BLEND
(1) Father is agentive human male	(1) God is conscious, agentive, authoritative, nurturing
(2) The father is in a mutual and loving relationship with his children	(2) God is in a mutual and loving relationship with humans.
(3) There is also an asymmetrical relationship between father and children	(3) There is also an asymmetrical relationship with all humans
(4) Father has physical control and authority over children: can reward or punish	(4) God can reward or punish all humans
(5) Father provides physical nurture, sustenance, protection and instruction	(5) God provides physical nurture, sustenance, protection and instruction through Jesus and community
(6) Father provides inheritance within social structures (primarily to first born son, but other natural and adopted children can be included)	(6) Provides inheritance to all who obey and honour God
(7) Children have responsibility to obey and honour	(7) All humans have responsibility to obey and honour God
(8) Provision of sustenance, training, and inheritance allows for change of state for children	(8) Provision of grace allows for change of state for humans (come into kingdom)
(9) Father’s love for children can be extravagant and undeserved	(9) God’s love for humanity is extravagant and undeserved (but possible because of God’s limitlessness)

This metaphor is used for conceptualising “God’s incommensurability”, which is comprehended analogically from our experience with human fathers and their love for us. In this parable, the conceptualisation of God as “Father” map certain aspects of the transcendent God. As well, it implies the fact that God as a father shows love for the rebellious, disobedient people and sinners who are still the children of God. In other words, the human notion of “fatherhood” is a source domain to get “some understanding about the nature of the First Person of the Holy Trinity”, and about His relationship to humans (Barcelona 2003, p. 11). Therefore, the “fatherhood” frame “is organizing the concept for God”. It is used for projecting “onto the realm of the divine in an effort to grasp some important truths about God or a least their essential aspects” (Barcelona 2003, p. 20).

⁸ Which are finite human beings.

4.3.2. The Younger Son

The kinship term “younger son” is defined in relation to the discussed term “father”, who represents the transcendental notion for God. Therefore, we infer that “the younger son” represents the category of humans who are disobedient and are conceptualised in the parable, as being away from God. It refers to sinners, wrongdoers, transgressors who in Jesus’ terms are designating the category of those who are “lost”, but are “found”, such as: the tax collectors, adulterous women, and Samaritans.

4.3.3. The Older Son

The other kinship term “the older son” represents the category of humans who are offended by Jesus’ teaching, namely, the Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees who criticised the message of Jesus, i.e. that God offers forgiveness and salvation to the worst sinners.

4.3.4. The Journey Maps the Spiritual Journey

The journey of the Younger Son, which is the concrete domain, creates a spiritual domain in which “the spiritual life is a journey”. This metaphor inherits the structure of the higher metaphor “life is a journey”. It includes the script of journey with the information: a) starting the journey; b) making progress or regress on the way; c) overcome difficulties or not; arriving at the destination (Kuczok 2014, p. 91). Moreover, it includes “alternative paths of good and evil through life, and death hanging over us” (Lakoff/ Turner 1989, p.).

The metaphor involves different conceptual projection of structure from one domain (the source) onto another (the target). For example, the traveller projects the person living the life, “the beginning of the journey projects his birth; the end of the journey projects his death; the distance travelled projects the amount of the time lived; obstacles project the difficulties; guides project the counsellors; fellow-travellers project the people with whom life is shared” etc. (Turner 1996, p. 88).

In this way, the scenario of the younger son going on a journey in a country far away from his father, is structured⁹ around “life is a journey”¹⁰ metaphor. It derives from our own ordinary metaphorical understanding of life as a kind of physical journey and it extends to spiritual life as another instance of journey, i.e. the spiritual journey. Therefore, the journey of the prodigal son maps the spiritual journey of sinners onto the conceptual domain of the Kingdom of God. In other words, the scenario of the story constructs analogically the journey from the

⁹ Many stories are structured around the “life as journey” metaphor.

¹⁰ Kövecses (2010, p. 71) claims that “creativity of literature is constrained by our everyday metaphorical conceptual system.”

immoral and sinful life to the spiritual life. The justification for this comes from the metaphorical expression uttered two times by the father fits to this metaphorical frame: “because this son of mine was dead, and is alive again – he was lost and is found!”.

Thus, the journey away from his father is conceptualised as physical death and loss, while his coming back, as rebirth and finding. Therefore, the journey of the prodigal son is understood as a journey leading to death, and as lack of progress in his spiritual journey. In this sense, the journey away from the father is spiritual death, while his coming back to his father is conceptualized as making progress and as rebirth. Therefore, following the father is good, going away from his father is bad.

5. Concluding Remarks

This paper has attempted to offer a cognitive analysis of the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*. We have observed that the parable has specific properties which make it a “suitable” vehicle for transmitting Jesus’ message and that of revealing God’s realm and divinity. The parable has the function of projecting the imperceptible scenario of the *Kingdom of God*, which exceeds human experience. It does this by using an unusual story of the father who behaves unreasonably from our realistic point of view, but not according to the logic of the world of God. The concrete conceptual domain creates the second domain and makes cross-connections between categories, that is between our world and the world of the kingdom. In this way, these two worlds become similar in some respect, but are still “disanalogous” in other features. What is important is the fact that it project unique qualities for God by using concepts accessible to human scale (“human-sized notions”) in order to project “the “transcendental notions” which “help us to reason about God”.

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