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Rahner's Primordial Words and Bernstein's Metaphorical Leaps: The Affinity of Art with Religion and Theology

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EDITORIAL ESSAYS

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ABSTRACT

Karl Rahner's notion of primordial words and Leonard Bernstein's conception of music as intrinsically metaphorical are engaged to suggest that there is a fundamental affinity between artistic and religious imagination. The affinity is grounded, in part at least, in metaphoric process—an elemental cognitive act in which the human spirit is stretched so that its expressions can address what lies beyond them.

My aim in this essay is to suggest that metaphoric process grounds a fundamental affinity between artistic and religious imagination. This argument draws on and advances the seminal but not entirely satisfactory accounts of the German theologian, Karl Rahner,[1] and the American composer, Leonard Bernstein.[2]

Put very briefly, Rahner contends that there is a fundamental affinity between religious and poetic speech. He explains this in terms of

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[1]Rahner worked out his seminal notions of the "primordial word," "primordial symbol," and "realsymbol" (*Urworte*, *Ursymbol*, and *Realsymbol*) in essays published from 1953 to 1960 and included in his *Theological Investigations*, 23 vols. (various publishers of different volumes including Baltimore: Helicon Press; New York: Herder and Herder; Seabury; and Crossroad, 1961-92) [*Schiften zur Theologie*, 16 vols. (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1960-84)] cited respectively hereafter as TI and [ST].

1953 "'Behold This Heart!': Preliminaries to a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart," TI, 3: 321-30 [ST 3: 379-90]; cited hereafter as "Behold This Heart!";

1956 "Some Theses for a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart," TI, 3: 331-52 [ST, 3: 391-415];

"Priest and Poet," TI, 3: 294-317 [ST, 3: 349-75];

1958 "The Theological Meaning of the Veneration of the Sacred Heart," TI, 8: 217-28 [ST, 8: 481-90];

1960 "The Theology of the Symbol," TI, 4: 221-52 [ST, 4: 275-311];

"Poetry and the Christian," TI, 4, 357-67 [ST, 4: 441-54].

In several places I have amended translations in deference to more inclusive language. The German is provided in cases where I have used significantly different translations.

[2]Leonard Bernstein, *The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

his concept of primordial words. He contends that such words manifest transcendence and mystery insofar as they are able to intimate more than they say and insofar as they do so with original freshness, power and a distinctive unity between the words themselves and that which they seek to communicate. Rahner contends that both the poetic and the religious are characterized by the use of such words. Because of this, he suggests, a capacity for poetic imagination is a necessity for believers and theologians. Likewise, he proposes that poetry can be seen as sharing, or at least anticipating, aspects of religious imagination.

Rahner's discussion of primordial words provides a suggestive scheme for characterizing in very broad and general terms this intuition about the fundamental affinity between religious and poetic imagination. It does not provide, however, a rigorous, comprehensive or ultimately satisfactory account of the kinship. It is dependent on aspects of his thought that many people find problematic, inaccessible, or too speculative. It makes it sound as though poets and believers have some sort of privileged vocabulary and unmediated resource of symbols apart from what our world offers. Finally, Rahner's account overstates somewhat the priority of the word as a human means for manifesting transcendence and mystery.

By way of contrast, Bernstein argues that music surpasses poetry in naming the unnamable and communicating the unknowable. For him the point of affinity between art and transcendence is grounded in metaphor and in a fundamental analogy between what he calls the grammars of the poetic and musical imaginations. As in Rahner's case, the issue is whether Bernstein's analogies are rigorous enough to provide a convincing and satisfactory account of the relationship. At key junctures in his argument, Bernstein admits that he is making huge "leaps." One could object that his analogies are so suggestive only because he so prodigally and profligately forces them.

But successfully "forcing" uncalled-for analogies in a way that reshapes our fields of meanings is precisely the sort of conceptual move that Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell have so fruitfully analyzed and that they call "metaphoric process."[3] I propose that the affinity between art and the religious that Rahner seeks to capture in his notion of

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[3]See Mary Gerhart and Allan Melvin Russell, *Metaphoric Process: The Creation of Scientific and Religious Understanding* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1984); and *New Maps for Old: Explorations in Science and Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2001). I have published more detailed discussion of their account and its potential in a number of essays: "The Force of Analogy," *Anglican Theological Review* 87/3 (2005): 471-86; "Saving God," *Horizons* 31/2 (2004): 239-71; "Reframing the Fields," *Zygon* 39/1 (March 2004): 49-62; "Metaphor As Apt for Conversation: The Inherently Conversational Character of Theological Discourse," in *Theology and Conversation. Developing a Relational Theology*, ed. Jacques Haers and Peter de Mey (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2003), 145-61; "The Clash of Christological Symbols: A Case for Metaphoric Re-

primordial words and Bernstein in his notion of metaphor, not to mention Rahner's and Bernstein's efforts as such, presuppose a more original cognitive performance in which the human spirit is stretched so that its artistic, religious and theological expressions can address what lies beyond them.

I. A Recollection of Bernstein's Mass

I have a distinct memory of the first time I heard Bernstein's *Mass.*[4] It was commissioned by Jacqueline Kennedy for the opening of the John F. Kennedy Center in 1971. This alone gave it special significance for me and my generational associates: our senior year of high school was defined by President Kennedy's assassination; our senior year of college by the assassinations of his brother Robert and of Martin Luther King, Jr.; the years between by racial tension and the war in Vietnam.

Bernstein did not intend his *Mass* for liturgical prayer. But he did intend this unique theater performance to be a deeply religious work.[5] At the time, it was a very controversial piece. He intended that too. His *Mass* juxtaposed complex and simple musical idioms, sophisticated symphonic motifs and tunes that could have been lifted directly from *West Side Story.* It alternated between Latin and English, between resonances of the liturgies before the Second Vatican Council and those after it, between the sacred and the secular, between the formality and symbolism of the Catholic liturgy upstage and an increasingly irreverent and crude street chorus downstage, between questioning God and affirming of God, between dialogue and interruption.

I was a graduate student in theology at the time, struggling academically and personally to reconcile such dualities. Somewhere in the midst of the performance I experienced not only the affective-chill-down-the-spine that great artistic performances sometimes engender, but with it, a moment of illumination and transcendence that was vivid enough that I still recall it. The coherence of the intellectual and spiritual issues with which I was wrestling seemed to distill in an incredible rush of insight and density of meaning. It seemed for a timeless moment that a clearing had been opened in which the truth, and the beauty, and the goodness of reality were disclosed in brilliance and clarity, along with an imperative to serve such a flourishing for every human being—especially those in need.

alism," in *Christology: Memory, Inquiry, Practice,* ed. Anne M. Clifford and Anthony J. Godzieba (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 62-86; and "Analogy and Metaphoric Process," *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 571-96.

[4] *Mass, A Theater Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers,* orchestrated by Leonard Bernstein. Texts from the liturgy of the Roman Mass with additional texts by Stephen Schwartz and Leonard Bernstein, Sony Music Entertainment Inc., 1971.

[5] "Bernstein Talks about His Work," *Time,* 20 September 1971, p. 42.

Although the memory of surprising comprehension and lucidity persisted, the words, thoughts and insights—the clearing itself—turned out to be as ineffable as the moment. When my wife asked what I thought as we headed out for the subway after the performance I was at a loss for words.

That experience, which could be described as aesthetic, religious, and affective, is not all that unusual. It is the sort of everyday mysticism about which Rahner speaks.[6] I believe that almost everyone has such moments occasionally although they might explain them differently than I just have. A life devoid of such moments would be missing something vital. In them art, theology and the human spirit do cohere. The question is, "How?"

II. Primordial Words and Symbols

Rahner's thought offers an initial resource. He wrote a number of essays between 1953 and 1960 that discuss the fundamental affinity of poetry with religion and theology.[7] The point of connection is in the use of what he calls "primordial words" (*Urwörte*). The designation is somewhat misleading. A close reading indicates that he does not have in mind a particular kind of word so much as a way of the using of words.

Rahner's description of primordial words is itself quite lyrical, even poetic. He is more concerned with sketching their characteristics than with justifying his conception. Nevertheless, it is clear that his characterization is grounded in his notion of the human person as spirit in the world. Human existence is a dynamic openness for God. But it is only in the world, and in particular in the word, that this destiny is achieved. The word is not a mere cipher or vehicle for human thought. It is the corporeal state in which thought is achieved. The word itself, therefore, is an intrinsic part of the movement of our knowing, freedom, and love toward fulfillment. Consequently, words are not only "expressions" through which we recognize and take a stance toward our transcendence. Words themselves are a concrete expression, manifestation, and achievement of this transcendence.

Not all words, of course, reflect this dynamism to the same degree. Most have a much more mundane and utilitarian direction. Some words speak primarily to the mind. They do not share in the life of their message. Other words, however, refract that relation at the same time as they speak about it. They reflect the whole person, both our worldliness and our transcendence. In such primordial words, Rahner says, "spirit and flesh, the signified and its symbol, concept and word, things

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[6]See Harvey Egan, *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).
[7]See note 1 above.

and image, are still freshly and originally one."[8] Because such words are interwoven with all of reality, they penetrate endlessly into its depths.

Rahner claims that innumerable words are capable of such a status. "Blossom, night, star . . . and thousands of other words of genuine thinkers and poets are primordial words"—or at least can be if they are not abused and worn out.[9] He does not enumerate characteristics in his articles, but ten standout. Primordial words as he describes them:

1. have an original and intrinsic relation to the realities about which they speak;[10]
2. point beyond themselves into the "unfathomable depths" of reality;[11]
3. have a richness of meaning that cannot be unequivocally defined;[12]
4. are not and cannot be arbitrarily constructed;[13]
5. are not merely conventional or arbitrary signs;[14]
6. are irreplaceable; no explanation or synonym adequately substitutes for them;[15]
7. are a presentation of the reality they signify;[16]
8. open up *dimensions* of reality for the hearer;[17]
9. open up the *hearer* to dimensions of reality; [18]
10. have a redeeming mission; are sacraments.[19]

These characteristics require further explanation. How is the primordial word a presentation of the thing itself, especially if, as I have suggested already, Rahner is really talking about a way of using words rather than words themselves? How can words be redeeming? What basis is there for such a strong distinction between primordial words and other words and signs?

Let us begin with the last question. The essay "Behold this Heart!" elaborates somewhat on the difference between primordial words and signs by introducing the notion of "primordial symbols" (*Ursymbole*). Rahner claims that the representation of the physical heart is a primordial symbol rather than a "conventional sign" because "it belongs as

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[8]"Priest and Poet," TI, 3: 297-98 [353].
[9]Ibid., TI, 3: 298 [353].
[10]Ibid., TI, 3: 299 [354].
[11]Ibid., TI, 3: 298 [353].
[12]Ibid., TI, 3: 297 [352].
[13]Ibid., TI, 3: 297 [352].
[14]Ibid., TI, 3: 299 [354]; "Behold This Heart!" TI, 3: 327 [385].
[15]"Behold This Heart!" TI, 3: 328-29 [387-88].
[16]"Priest and Poet," TI, 3: 299 [354].
[17]Ibid., TI, 3: 299 [354-5].
[18]Ibid., TI, 3: 299 [354-5].
[19]Ibid., TI, 3: 300-301 [356].

much to the reality it indicates"— namely the fundamental unity of the person as body and spirit—as it does to the body as such.[20] So "heart" is a primordial word because of its reference to a primordial symbol. A fuller explanation came several years later with his article on the *Real-symbol*. Rahner argues there that the nature of symbol in the most fundamental sense cannot be defined adequately merely in terms of observed likenesses or agreements. A more fundamental basis is needed to determine what constitutes a symbol.

Ultimately Rahner concludes that the concept of symbol must be based on the fact that beings by nature are in themselves symbolic prior to any reference to other beings.[21] Every being consists of a plurality in unity. The plural elements can be distinguished from the underlying unity that they express, and in that sense the plurality can be considered a kind of "other" or "otherness." But it is an "otherness" intrinsic to the unity and expressive of it—the way the body itself and bodily gestures express a person. On the one hand, the only access to persons is in their embodiment. We are our bodies. On the other hand, there is something fundamentally dialectical about personal embodiment. We are not simply our bodies. One can—and indeed must—distinguish between persons and their embodiments. In extreme situations (for example, such as deception or the influence of drugs) bodily expressions may no longer be genuine self-expressions. They may be only a partial, ambiguous, or even faked embodiment. Hence the body both "is" and "is not" the person. Rahner contends that something like this is true of the relation between plurality and unity in all things.

He does not elaborate on the relation of the concept of the *Real-symbol* to his concept of the primordial word. But it is clear from his discussion of the heart as primordial symbol that three concepts (primordial word, primordial symbol and *Realsymbol*) are interrelated. The word "heart" is primordial because it names a primordial symbol (the physical heart) that in turn signifies a *Realsymbol* (the manifestation of the person as a unity of spirit and flesh). [22] It is possible to conclude from this that a word is primordial, or to be more precise, the use of a word is primordial, to the extent that it signifies a *Realsymbol*.

With these observations in mind it is possible to see how Rahner's ontology of the symbol underlies his characterization of primordial words. Such words are different from other words because they signify a being's *Realsymbol*. This is why word and concept are "still originally one"[23] in such words. This explains how such words are able to "con-

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[20]"Behold This Heart!" TI, 3: 328 [386].
[21]"The Theology of the Symbol," TI, 4: 224-25 [278].
[22]Ibid., TI, 4: 251 [311].
[23]"Priest and Poet," TI, 3: 297-98 [353].

jure up the whole"[24] in a way that is not possible for words that are symbolic in a more derivative sense. A being's *Realsymbol* is not something that the knower attributes to the being but rather is the being's own self-expression and self-realization. This explains why primordial words cannot be arbitrarily constituted and why they are irreplaceable. It explains why a primordial word is not simply a sign that points to something as a matter of convention, and it suggests the sense in which it can be said that the primordial word is the "presentation of the thing itself,"[25] for a being is known in its *Realsymbol* and without its *Realsymbol* it cannot be known at all. Rahner's discussion of christology and the sacraments suggests that one of the most fundamental features of our own *Realsymbol* as humans being are our words. It is precisely in words that we are able to become self-present. It is also through words that we are able to give ourselves to another. In such cases the word is a presentation of the self to another.

The observation that a being's *Realsymbol* is not something that the knower reads into the being but rather is the thing's own self-expression provides the basis for Rahner's contention that the reality that is known takes possession of the knower through the primordial word. The primordial word is not a label which we impose on our object. Rather, in the primordial use of words, the object impresses itself upon us. This harks back to the Thomistic thesis that in sensibility the object impresses itself upon the knower. In this sense the primordial word opens up a dimension of the world for its hearer and opens up the hearer to that reality.

The ontology of the *Realsymbol* also enables a clarification of how, at least in a preliminary and general way, it can be said that the primordial word has a "redeeming mission" or that it is the "sacrament by means of which all beings achieve their destiny."[26] For Rahner be-ing is self-presence. A be-ing realizes itself to the degree that it is present to itself. This self-presence is achieved most perfectly in those properly primordial words and symbols in which be-ing expresses itself and realizes itself at once.

In Rahner's view, therefore, there is an essential affinity between religious discourse and poetry because both require the use of primordial language. "The poet is not a person who in a superfluous, more pleasing form, in 'rhymes', in a sentimental torrent of words, says in a more complicated way what others—philosophers and scientists—

[24]"Behold this Heart!" TI, 3: 322 [380].
[25]"Priest and Poet," TI, 3: 299 [354].
[26]Ibid., TI, 3: 300-301 [356].

have said more intelligibly."[27] Rather, the poet is a person "capable of speaking ... primordial words in powerful concentration."[28]

The affinity of such words to those of the believer derives from the fact that they express the openness of the human spirit to the mystery toward which our transcendence directs us and which the believer names "God." The words of the poet, according to Rahner, "stretch out towards what cannot be grasped."[29] But these words, he also contends, do not themselves give the infinite. "The poet is driven forward by the transcendence of the spirit."[30] The poet speaks "words of longing," and thus calls for another word. That other word, according to Rahner, is the one to which believers attend. But in the attempt to speak of that other word and the fullness of truth, goodness, beauty, and love that it discloses, believers are driven to the primordial and symbolic use of words, and hence to poetic words, to express more intimately and holistically than possible in ordinary language the relation of that "holy mystery" to our human existence.

For those of us receptive to Rahner's philosophical approach and theological convictions, this is an evocative vision of the affinity between theological and poetic discourse. It has limitations, however. For now, I simply draw the reader's attention to three aspects to which I will return.

First, his explanation of the connection between the theological and poetic, presupposes aspects of his thought that some find problematic and others find inaccessible and too speculative. Is there a less freighted, more accessible way of making the connection between religious discourse and art?—one faithful to Rahner's insights but not so dependent on his philosophical idiom?

Second, while a careful reading indicates that Rahner's talk about primordial words has in mind a particular use of words rather than the properties of specific words, this is not apparent in his surface grammar. The way he speaks through most of these essays makes it sound, against his intention, as if the poet and theologian have some primordial vocabulary available to them different from the everyday language of our world. But they do not. Somehow poets and believers have to find a means to get that everyday language to do the kinds of extraordinary things that Rahner describes as characteristic of primordial words. The problem is not resolved simply by moving the discussion back to primordial symbols and *Realsymbol*. That makes it sound as though the poet and theologian have access to some privileged, unme-

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[27]Ibid., TI, 3: 301 [357].
[28]Ibid., TI, 3: 301 [356].
[29]Ibid., TI, 3: 316 [374].
[30]Ibid., TI, 3: 316 [374].

diated resource of symbols apart from what the everyday world offers. But again they do not.[31] The wonder is that poetry and religion do find in ordinary things like water, blossoms and hearts a depth of meaning that can give these realties privileged symbolic status. Rahner notes well with others such as Paul Tillich[32] that words and symbols can have such effect but more needs to be said about *how* they have such effect.

Third, the priority Rahner gives to "word" appears absolute. Among all the modes of expression used in the arts, he says, "there is something that belongs exclusively to the word, something that it shares with no other human instrumentality, namely, it lives in what-lies-beyond" (*Überschreitung*).[33] This is because it is only in words that negation is possible. He admits that music too is full of mystery but he contends that it and the other arts can represent "in the first place only what is apprehended and circumscribed."[34] He observes a bit rhetorically "that God revealed himself in word and not in purely tonal music."[35] The implication is that arts such as music lack the word's ability through negation to transcend itself. But is this an exclusive preroga-

[31]In saying they do not, I am not denying revelation but merely observing that any putative claim for the symbolic status of Jesus, sacramental symbols, or other symbols in Christianity or other religions, is nevertheless mediated by everyday realities.

[32]The parallels between Rahner's understanding of language and Tillich's are noteworthy, although it is not possible to present a detailed comparison here. Both base their interpretations on the symbolic character of being, although in quite different ways. Both see a real and very important correlation between religious language in the narrow sense and any language that evokes mystery, or as Tillich would say, expresses ultimate concern. There is a similarity in the distinctions that both draw between signs and symbols, although again the ontologies which underlie their distinctions are quite different. Both speak of richly symbolic words that point to the depth of reality and which reflect the unity of beings and their ground. Both insist that truly symbolic utterances cannot be constructed arbitrarily. Both stress the concreteness of symbols. Both maintain that there is a way in which a symbol, in Tillich's words, "opens up reality and . . . opens up the soul" ("The Nature of Religious Language," in *Theology of Culture,* ed. Robert C. Kimball [New York: Oxford University Press, 1959], p. 57). Both insist that there is a way in which the symbol presents the thing itself, or in Tillich's terminology "participates" in the reality to which it points. Both speak of the sacramental character of language (Ibid., pp. 64-65). Both point to the possibility of symbols dying, although for Rahner it does not appear that such a process ever leads to a death that is permanent, while for Tillich it can and often does. Despite these parallels, however, there are significant differences between their perspectives. Tillich's ontology posits an "absolute break" between beings or symbols and Being itself which they manifest (See his *Systematic Theology,* 1 [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967], p. 237), while Rahner's ontology posits an intrinsic continuity between God and beings. This has significant implications and should caution against any easy identification of their notions of symbol, as I argued in "The Clash of Christological Symbols: A Case for Metaphoric Realism."

[33]"Priest and Poet," TI, 3: 302 [358]: "Aber unter aller Aussage des Menschen in allen Künsten kommt dem Wort doch etwas allein zu, das es mit keinem anderen Gebilde des Menschen teilt: Es lebt in der Überschreitung."

[34]"Priest and Poet," TI, 3: 301-2 [357].

[35]"Priest and Poet," TI, 3: 302 [357].

tive of the word? Does the affinity between the theological and the poetic have no parallels or analogies in the other arts?

III. Bernstein's "Norton Lectures"

By way of contrast, Leonard Bernstein argued that it is music that surpasses poetry in naming the unnamable and communicating the unknowable.[36] Early in the first talk of his "Norton Lectures," *The Unanswered Question*, he tells his Harvard audience:

> I have often thought that if it is literally true that In The Beginning Was The Word, then it must have been a *sung* word. The Bible tells us the whole Creation story not only verbally, but in terms of verbal creation. God *said:* Let there be light. God *said:* Let there be a firmament. He created verbally. Now can you imagine God *saying,* just like that, "Let there be light," as if ordering lunch? Or even in the original language: *Y'hi Or?* I've always had a private fantasy of God *singing* those two blazing words: *Y'HI—O-O-O-R!* Now that could really have done it; music could have caused light to break forth.[37]

Of course Bernstein speaks from a very different perspective than Rahner. But in the final analysis, there is something much deeper in common between Rahner and Bernstein once adjustment is made for the way each overstates his case. To show this, however, it is necessary to lay out some of Bernstein's argument. Bernstein was famous for his ability to explain music to non-professionals. These particular lectures, however, are very challenging. They are all the more so here without the benefit of his illustrations at the piano and with the orchestra that carry much of the explanatory burden.

The "unanswered question" to which his title refers is the fate of modern music. "Is great art still possible in our century of death?"[38] He is most concerned with defending tonality and Stravinsky's experimentation with it against the harsh criticism of Theodor Adorno in his book *The Philosophy of Modern Music.*[39] Adorno saw Arnold Schoenberg's total break with tonality as the only authentic future for music; Igor Stravinsky's path was insincere and a dead-end. Bernstein, to answer the question for his university audience, proposes an extended analogy with linguistics and particularly with Noam Chomsky's transformational grammar. Bernstein's rationale is that as a matter of course grammar is familiar to us all, while what might be called the "grammar" of music is not. Moreover, few of us have acquired the specialized vocabulary and mathematics of the professional musicologist. At the

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[36] *The Unanswered Question*, 140.
[37] Ibid., 15-16.
[38] Ibid., 380.
[39] Theodor Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music* (New York: Seabury, 1973).

heart of his argument is his thesis that the driving mechanism in music and theatre as well as poetry is metaphor. He acknowledges many times in the text, to the consternation of some musicologists, that his case itself makes metaphorical leaps.[40] It is precisely in these leaps and in what drives them that we will find the connection with Rahner and with our question about the affinity of art and theology.

The first key notion that Bernstein draws from transformational grammar is the distinction between surface structure and deep structure. He asks his audience to consider the sentences "Jack loves Jill" and "Jill is loved by Jack." Without being told, a person with competence in English, even a young child, recognizes that these sentences have the same meaning even though their structure is different—even though Jack is the subject of the first sentence and the object in the second. Transformational grammar aims to explain how the deep meaning that is the same in both cases can yield sentences whose surface structure is different. The sort of parsing that Bernstein learned at Boston Latin School, and that many of us learned, diagrams only the surface grammar. As the following simple example illustrates transformational grammar charts the more complex relationship between the surface and deep grammars.
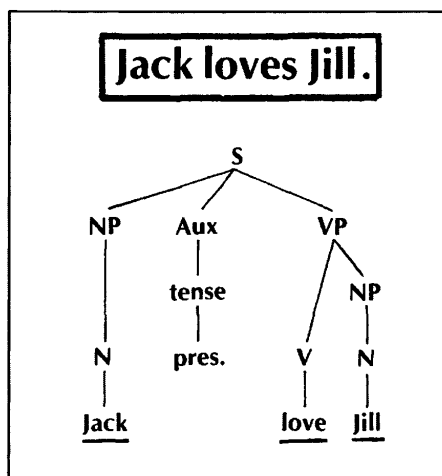
For our purposes, however, it is not necessary to retrace any further Bernstein's account of the details of such diagrams.

The second key notion follows from the first. It is possible to

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[40]See, e.g., Allan Keiler, "Bernstein's *The Unanswered Question* and the Problem of Musical Competence," *The Musical Quarterly* 64/ 2 (April, 1978), 195-222.

specify the transformational rules that can be applied to the deep structure's string of information to yield different sentences at the surface level. Bernstein shows how at least eight basic sentences can be derived by applying such rules to the underlying string, "Jack + Jill + love," to make it a question, a negative statement, a passive, and so forth.

1. Jack loves Jill.
2. Does Jack love Jill? Interrogative transformation
3. Jack does not love Jill. Negative transformation
4. Doesn't Jack love Jill? Interrogative plus negative transformations
5. Jill is loved by Jack. Passive transformation
6. Is Jill loved by Jack? Passive plus interrogative transformations
7. Jill is not loved by Jack. Passive plus negative transformations
8. Isn't Jill loved by Jack? Passive plus negative plus interrogative transformations.[41]

Bernstein spends some time explaining how such principles apply to more complicated sentences such as "Harry persuades John to take up golf," which actually combines several strings of information. In this case Bernstein identifies at least three strings.

1. John was glad (that)
2. Harry persuaded John
3. John (to) take up golf [42]

Through transformational principles of deletion, embedding and pronominalization these three strings are transformed into a single, clean, natural sentence: "Harry persuades John to take up golf." Bernstein suggests that there is analogy here with the underlying musical string which by similar operations of deletion, embedding, condensing and combination can evolve into a "fine musical phrase."[43] The analogy does not quite work, however, because sentences belong to the world of prose and literal meaning, whereas the corresponding musical phrase inhabits a world of sensuous, aural meaning. It is not a true analogy because musical surface structure has only an aesthetic function while language "leads a double life; it has a communicative function *and* an aesthetic function."[44] So that leads Bernstein, as he says,

> to another rash hypothesis. . . . Isn't it just possible that by reapplying those same transformational rules of deletion, embedding, and so
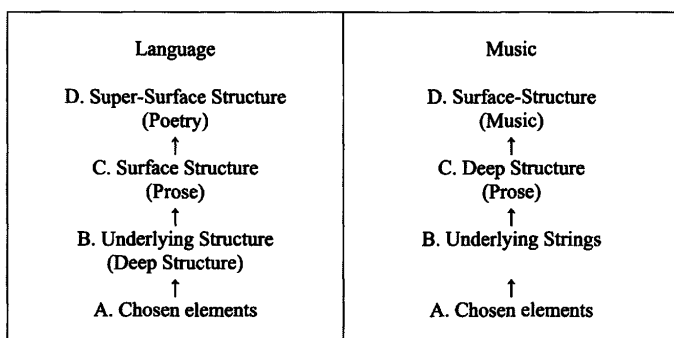
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[41]*The Unanswered Question*, 72.
[42]Ibid., 75.
[43]Ibid., 77.
[44]Ibid., 79.

on, to a linguistic surface structure, or sentence, we can transform it into a new super-surface, an aesthetic surface, namely poetry? And once we have established this aesthetic surface structure, above and beyond the prose Chomskian surface, then we can have a true parallel with music—poetry. It means making an extra push, or better, taking a leap—a metaphorical leap into the super-surface structure of art.[45]

Bernstein offers a chart to help picture this analogy.

Language	Music
D. Super-Surface Structure (Poetry) ↑ C. Surface Structure (Prose) ↑ B. Underlying Structure (Deep Structure) ↑ A. Chosen elements	D. Surface-Structure (Music) ↑ C. Deep Structure (Prose) ↑ B. Underlying Strings ↑ A. Chosen elements

As he proposes it, poetry is the better analogue for music because in poetry the surface of language has been subjected to aesthetic transformations that give it a richness and depth of meaning that goes beyond what is possible in prose. The mechanism at the root of all these transformations, he contends, is metaphor. He offers the example of how the sentence "The whole town was old men and women" is supercharged with possible meanings.

> When you are confronted by a sentence like that one (*The whole town was old men and women*) which is syntactically correct but semantically incorrect (since a town is a *place* and men and women are *people*, and a place can't be people)—when you are confronted by a sentence like that your mind automatically goes through a series of decision-making steps: first, it seeks some grammatical justification of the semantic conflict, and finding none, can then decide one of two things: to reject it as illogical, hence impermissible speech, or to find another level on which it may be acceptable—a poetic level. In other words, something in the mind intuits a metaphorical meaning, and can then accept the semantic ambiguity on that level.[46]

[45]Ibid.
[46]Ibid., 122.

The poetic ambiguity is a rich one. Is the town old men and old women because all the young people have gone off to the Big City, leaving only the old folks behind, or because all the young men had all gone off to war, leaving behind old men and women of all ages? Is the town literally equated with "old men and women" because those losses in war have changed fundamentally the identity of the town?

Bernstein contends that metaphor is the key here because the sentence achieves its richer meaning by breaking semantic rules. Likewise, Shakespeare's "Juliet is the sun" is a classic example of metaphor, of breaking a semantic rule and saying "this is that." Juliet is a human being but the sun is a star.[47] Bernstein emphasizes the role that transformations plays in this. He suggests that we construct a logical progression to "normalize" Shakespeare's metaphor.

> There is a human being called Juliet.
> There is a star called the Sun.
> The human being called Juliet is radiant.
> A Star called the sun is radiant.
> [hence]
> The human being called Juliet is like a star called the Sun in respect to radiance.[48]

The result is perfectly logical. The sentence is then transformed by deleting all the steps in the deep structure. We wind up with a simile, *Juliet is like the sun*, which is true in the one respect that they are both radiant. Then, Bernstein notes, we make the key deletion of the word *like*. With that the "simile is transformed into a metaphor. Juliet *is* the sun. This *is* that."[49] Bernstein comments, "Of course, that last metaphorical leap makes it false logic, as in that invalid syllogism they always throw at you in Elementary Logic courses: *my dog is brown*, *your dog is brown*, hence, *my dog is your dog*."[50] But, he notes, this is wrong. My dog is *like* your dog only in terms of brown-ness. As literal discourse this is impermissible. It is valid only as poetry.

For Bernstein the musical metaphor is like this. Only, the *this* and *that*, the A and B of music, "are not burdened by the literal semantic weights" of words like "my dog" or "Juliet."[51] At this point it is crucial to recognize that Bernstein is proposing analogies only. Musical mean-

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[47]Ibid., 123.
[48]Ibid., 124.
[49]Ibid.
[50]Ibid.
[51]Ibid., 127.

ings are distinct from linguistic meanings.[52] The intrinsic meanings of music are what is "conveyed by the sounding notes themselves . . . 'sonorous forms in motion'."[53] So when Bernstein talks about musical metaphors equating a *this* and a *that*, an A and a B, he is talking about the way the composer and musician can do analogous sorts of things with notes, combinations of notes, chords, keys, and rhythms, that is to say, using the whole range of musical vocabulary and grammar. In such ways the music itself says in effect: "See how this note in *this* key, is *that* note in the other key." It is difficult to describe in text what Bernstein displays so effectively on the piano.

> There are, as it were, twelve "letters" that can be juggled and re-juggled. The constant rearrangement and transformation of these "letters" is made particularly rich by the combined possibilities of horizontal and vertical structures—melodic, harmonic, and contrapuntal anagrams—which of course language cannot do, even with twenty-six letters. Music is further enriched by the extension of these possibilities to near-infinity, through the extraordinary variety of high and low registers, durations, dynamics, meters, rhythms, tempi, colorations. It's as if all music were one supergame of sonic anagrams.[54]

So for Bernstein music is in this sense "a totally *metaphorical* language."[55] Again, it is important to distinguish this intrinsic metaphoric character of musical meaning—the sonorous forms, the audible play of sounds, rhythms and the rest—from any sort of extrinsic metaphors, that is to say from any connections with the world of linguistic meanings or feelings outside of the music. Music has intrinsic metaphoric meanings that can and must be distinguished from anything extrinsic. It is crucial to grasp that distinction. Now, in addition to intrinsic musical metaphors, there can be associations that we might make between certain notes and external images in the world. Bernstein calls these "extrinsic" metaphors. An example is Beethoven's *Pastorale* Symphony where the composer's comments indicate that certain notes are meant to suggest merry peasants, brooks, birds and the like. This is an instance of metaphor also—these are those—but at a different level.

[52]Ibid., 131.
[53]Ibid., 135.
[54]Ibid., 130.
[55]Ibid., 139.

Such subjective and affective associations, however, even when the composer has suggested them, are trivial compared to a third way of thinking about metaphor. Keeping in mind that musical metaphor has its own intrinsic meanings, Bernstein suggests a still higher level of metaphor where those intrinsic musical ideas can be identified with well-matched verbal ideas. In this case, he is not envisioning merely subjective association between a string of notes and some image. He is not talking about those extrinsic metaphors mentioned earlier. Where Bernstein's earlier chart of the analogy between language and music compared the aesthetic super-surface structure of poetry to the aesthetic surface structure of music, he now envisions an analogy at what he calls the supra-level of concepts. This is a case where there is something about the way the composer and musician metaphorically juggle all the musical elements at their disposal to express an idea—a pure musical idea—that is then equated with a poetic idea: this *is* that, but at the level of concepts.

| Language	Music
CONCEPT	CONCEPT
↑	↑
D. Super-Surface Structure (Poetry)	D. Surface-Structure (Music)
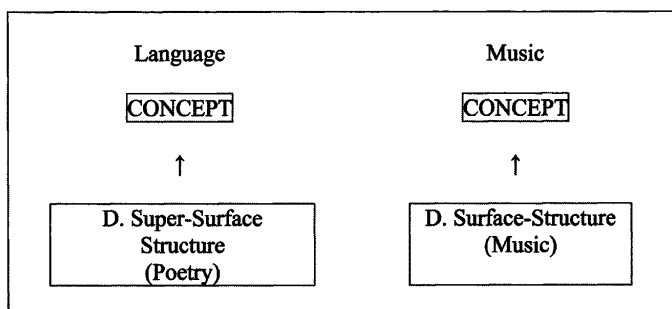
He explains this step as

taking yet another leap, on both sides of the chart at once. If we take the two top levels as our starting point, the two aesthetic surfaces of language and music, and urge our minds still further upward . . . , we find ourselves on an even higher metaphorical plane, perhaps the highest there is. . . . We are now beyond surface analysis, or even super–surface analysis. . . . It is on this plane of thought, a transcendental plane . . . , that the concepts of musical thought and verbal thought become comparable, where musical and nonmusical ideas can coincide.[56]

[56]Ibid., 380.

At this third, higher level of metaphor, Bernstein tells us, a composer seeks musical thoughts that are "most condign" to the semantic meanings of the words in the text.[57] Bernstein emphasizes that the identity here is not between notes and words but between the musical and poetic ideas that underlie them. The ideal sought is a perfect consummation which he visualizes with a diagram that itself is something of a metaphor for what he is getting at.
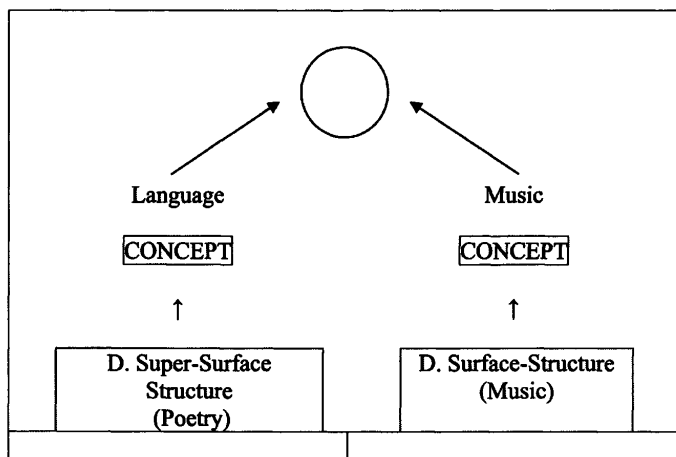
By the circle Bernstein suggests a higher level of unity. He describes it as "an infinity, a realm within which all our responses to art can converge."[58] This sounds quite a bit like the sort of unity Rahner attributes to primordial words. Among the examples Bernstein offers is the "love-death idea" in Wagner's Tristan.

> The love-death idea in Isolde's words correspond almost magically with the equivalent idea in the music. When she says "Ertrinken, versinken", she does literally seem to be drowning, her voice is submerged in the sea of orchestral texture that surges around her. When she sings the word "Wellen" you hear waves; when she is pouring out a progression of sexual verbs like "schwellen" and "schlürfen" and "wogenden," you experience them musically, in the orgasmic pulsings of the orchestra.[59]
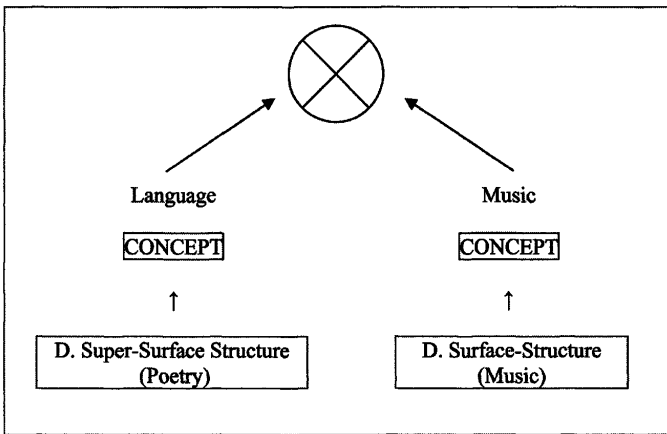
He then argues that Stravinsky's "musical incongruities" and "misalli-

[57]Ibid., 383
[58]Ibid.
[59]Ibid., 384.

ances" provide a kind of reverse or antithetical image of that classical metaphor.

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                    ⊗
            ↗              ↖

      Language              Music

      [CONCEPT]            [CONCEPT]

         ↑                    ↑

  ┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
  │ D. Super-Surface │  │ D. Surface-      │
  │   Structure      │  │   Structure      │
  │    (Poetry)      │  │    (Music)       │
  └──────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘
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In effect, by putting together that which initially seems incongruous—by breaking the rules and asserting *this* is *that* where we do not expect it—Stravinsky creates a new musical language. Note that this is not just new musical phrases but a new language: a new vocabulary and a new grammar that is built from the contrast of "the modern with the primitive," from "tonality with wrong notes in it," from "chords fighting" one another, from "rhythm against rhythm" and similar antitheses.[60] So, against Adorno, Bernstein sees in Stravinsky not just a "trickster" playing musical games but the future for music. Stravinsky demonstrates the human ability to develop ever new musical languages from what Bernstein calls the "poetry of the earth," that is to say, from the underlying tonality that is given in the earth, in universal possibilities provided by the physics of sound. This defense of Stravinsky against Adorno does not mean that Bernstein attacks Schoenberg, the hero of Adorno's narrative. Schoenberg's efforts, like Stravinsky's, demonstrate the transcendence of the human spirit: our ability to find ever new meanings in the fruits of the earth; the unending openness of the human spirit; the ability to name the unnamable and communicate by concepts—musical and poetic—what transcends our concepts.

IV. Metaphoric Process

Can we make a further metaphorical leap? Can we identify Bernstein's supra-surface structure metaphors with Rahner's primordial

[60]Ibid.

words? Can we link the affinity Bernstein sees between the musical and poetic with the affinity of the poetic with the religious and the theological that Rahner sees? Can we equate Bernstein's poetry of the earth with Rahner's spirit in the world? I believe we can, but we need a deeper understanding of the metaphoric process to do so.

Bernstein's notion of metaphor as affirmations that break lexical or grammatical rules accords well with contemporary theories of metaphor.[61] Such theories, however, do not adequately account for the kind of higher-order metaphor that Bernstein describes occurring at the supra-surface level. Gerhart and Russell's theory of metaphoric process is very helpful on this issue.[62] Their analysis argues that sometimes we go beyond analogy, simile, and metaphor to something else, to a new plane of meaning when we break the rules and identify against conventions and expectations *this* with *that*, A with B.

Let me explain. With a successful analogy between A and B, I learn something more about A, or about B, or about both A and B. So from analogies between computers and minds we can sometimes learn something new about computers, or minds, or both. We can add to our information. A simile uses a known feature to tell us about something unknown. So if we are told that the CTS President plowed through the Business Meeting while everyone else was out enjoying Denver, that tells those who skipped the meeting how things went.

Now to use the example cited from Bernstein earlier, "Juliet is the sun" could be construed merely as poetic and aesthetic transformations of an underlying string of information. On Bernstein's account, the transformational violation of our expectations creates ambiguity and so aesthetic depth. Such metaphors are not reducible to a normalized prose equivalent. So we could say they provide a new fund of musical and poetic ideas. This I propose is similar to the way analogies and similes add to our lexical information and vocabulary. It is an addition that enriches both in the sense that it *adds* an aesthetic dimension and in the sense that it *adds to* the aesthetic dimension. But, as Bernstein explains it, such additions are only aesthetic and primarily additive. He underlines the difference between poetic logic and the logic of reality.

But is poetic logic merely formal and aesthetic? Is it not connected with reality? Do not the twists of meaning and turns of phrase, at least in great poetry, create the possibility for seeing Juliet in a new way?

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[61] A particularly helpful overview is provided in Herwi Rikhof's *The Concept of Church: A Methodological Inquiry into the Use of Metaphors in Ecclesiology* (Sheed and Ward: London, 1981), esp. 67-122; related to this see my forthcoming article "Analogy as Higher-Order Metaphor in Aquinas," in *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* ed. H.W.M. rikhof et al. (Louvain: Peeters, in press).

[62] See note 3 above.

Perhaps for seeing a new Juliet? And even more, for seeing the world in a new way? Perhaps even for seeing a new world?

Gerhart and Russell contend that sometimes saying *this* is *that*, A is B, changes not only the meaning of A and B, but the whole field of meanings associated with A and B. Such was the case, they explain, when Copernicus' insisted that the sun is the center of the universe, or when Newton insisted that the mechanical laws of the heavens are identical with the earth's. Their affirmations did more than add new information to the science of the day. The effect of both was to open up possibilities for understanding that had not been available before. These were conceptual moves that changed fundamental notions within physics—changed science. Does Shakespeare at his best not do that for literature? Do Beethoven and Stravinsky at their best not do the same for music? Bernstein's response to the unanswered question hinges on the claim that Stravinsky created a new language for music.

What I am suggesting, then, is that Bernstein's argument is an example of metaphoric process. It is an example of forcing an analogy that requires us to look in a different way at their entire field of meanings within which we are working. Following Gerhart and Russell, I recommend calling such forced analogies "metaphoric" rather than "metaphorical" to distinguish them from the more common examples of·saying *this* is *that* which do not change the underlying fields of meanings but merely add to them or merely transform a particular string of information.

In the terminology I am proposing, music and poetry are not only intrinsically metaphorical, in the right hands they can be metaphoric. That is to say, great music and great poetry can name the unnamable and can communicate something of our participation in a mystery beyond anything that we can capture in the poetic or musical concepts themselves. Perhaps such art, insofar as it lives in what-lies-beyond— to use Rahner's phrase—can even communicate something of the mystery as such. This is not necessarily a transcendence that indicates or that consciously intends God. It is open-ended. Its ultimate horizon is unspecified. But if we are to name that mystery or hear something of its self-revelation, the metaphoric use of musical and poetic meaning provides a mechanism—a way of stretching grammar and sense—so that they can serve this purpose.

Rahner's affirmation that God is transcendental reality effects analogous fundamental and global changes in the available theological and metaphysical fields of meanings. The most significant effect of his transcendental analysis is that it calls attention to the logical difference between talk of God and talk of other realties. Rahner's use of such terms as "Holy Mystery," "nameless whither," "horizon," and "asymp-

totic goal" are meant to call attention to this metaphoric shift in signi-
fication. His explanation of primordial words is based on this meta-
phoric shift in meanings and is an expression of it. The indissolubility
of spirit and matter, the openness of our embodied thought beyond
itself, is already expressed in the metaphoric process that got him to his
particular way of formulating the issue. And so it is possible to describe
this metaphoric openness without appealing to Rahner's transcenden-
tal vocabulary. Consequently, metaphoric process provides a more ac-
cessible and less philosophically freighted conceptual frame than Rah-
ner for explaining how theological and poetic speech goes beyond it-
self. At the same time, metaphoric process provides a scheme for
explaining *how* Rahner's theological reflections are an exemplar of
great metaphoric speech.

So in metaphoric process we already have a deep expression of
self-transcendence. In such metaphoric conceptual and aesthetic
moves we already have a profound affinity between the poetic, the
musical and the theological.

V. Performance

With this I return to the performance of Bernstein's *Mass* to suggest
one last metaphoric leap. What is particularly crucial about his "piece
for singers, players and dancers" is that it is a performance. The notes
and directions on the page are not truly music until they are performed.
This is yet a higher plane where *this* becomes *that*. As we know, every
performance has varying degrees of success and authenticity. Each per-
formance can contribute new shades of meaning. A great singer or actor
(sometimes even one who is just talented) can transform the original
text into a whole new level of meaning. Or, the meaning of a perfor-
mance can be transformed by the context, as was the case with the first
productions of Bernstein's *Mass*—a good piece but by no means an
artistic achievement of the highest order.

Are not the kind of metaphoric processes entailed in poetic, mu-
sical, religious and theological speech entailed in all the arts? Bernstein
made some of this case for us with his reference to opera. But if opera,
why not other forms of performance? Theater and movies, at their best,
also can create new conceptual and aesthetic space by breaking the
rules and bringing together in some uncalled for way a *this* and *that*. Is
this not true of effective narratives too? Why should the poet be privi-
leged to the exclusion of the novelist or the writer of short stories?
There is something of this too in sculpture, drawing, painting and
architecture. There is an interesting little article in an issue of the
journal *Visual Mathematics* that describes how the kind of metaphori-

cal transformations that Bernstein attributes to music are paralleled in the geometry of pictorial and ornamental art.[63] But what I have in mind is something more—the way successful performances in those arts can create new spaces for us, can put us in new kinds of space and some-times can even create new spatial languages.

What is particularly important about performance is the connec-tion it suggests between the beautiful and ethical. Wagner's sights may have been limited to finding a perfect match between the musical and the poetic idea on stage but I believe the most valuable art looks for the perfect match with life—with lived performance, with what we theo-logians nowadays call *praxis*. At least that is my hypothesis about why the sacred literature of most cultures and religions is usually also great literature. Human speech inhabits what-lies-beyond to the degree that it reaches a level of conformity between the conceptual, aesthetic, af-fective and our performances on the stage of life.

I share Bernstein's fantasy about divine creativity. The word has a priority in God's creating. But it is a relative priority. Other priorities are involved. God's word is also an authentic word. It creates truth. It is an aesthetic word. It creates a world of wondrous beauty. It is a moral word. What it creates is first of all good. It is an effective word in which performance matches intention. Finally, it is an affective word—a word that God must have sung out. Now, if we are images of God, then our theological creativity and our teaching must *look* like this too, and most of all, must *sound* like this: a metaphoric, human *Y'HI—O-O-O-R* that is a musical icon of God's.

In offering this image I do not intend to assert that such metaphoric creativity is anything more than one icon—one aspect, although cer-tainly an important one, of a fundamental affinity between artistic and religious imagination that helps explain how some expressions of the human spirit can address what lies beyond us.

[63]Robert Dixon Leonardo, "Two Conformal Mappings," *Visual Mathematics* 25/ 314 (1992): 263-66.