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Spatial Conceptualizations of Spiritual Life: A Cognitive-Linguistic Perspective

Konceptualizacje życia duchowego
w kategoriach przestrzennych: perspektywa
językoznawczo-kognitywna

Abstract

The article examines selected spatial conceptualizations of inner life and spiritual experience in the writings of Augustine of Hippo, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Ávila, William Law, and Etty Hillesum. The source material consists of texts representing different periods and traditions of Christian spirituality, while the secondary literature includes both studies in the history of spirituality and works in cognitive linguistics, whose tools were employed in the analysis. Particular attention is devoted to the container, centre–periphery, up–down, and source–path–goal image schemas. The central thesis of the article is that descriptions of spiritual life are deeply grounded in embodied human experience and rely on basic cognitive structures derived from experiences of space, movement, and architecture. The observations demonstrate that the same image schemas may be used to conceptualize different aspects of religious experience and may acquire different meanings depending on their theological and spiritual context.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics, image schemas, conceptual blends, inner space, Augustine of Hippo, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Ávila, William Law, Etty Hillesum.

Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje wybrane konceptualizacje przestrzenne życia wewnętrznego i doświadczenia duchowego w pismach Augustyna z Hippony, Juliany z Norwich, Teresy z Ávili, Williama Law oraz Etty Hillesum. Materiał źródłowy obejmuje teksty należące do różnych epok i tradycji chrześcijańskiej duchowości, natomiast literatura przedmiotu to zarówno opracowania z zakresu historii duchowości, jak i prace z językoznawstwa kognitywnego, którego narzędzia wykorzystano podczas analizy. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono schematom wyobrażeniowym pojemnik, centrum–peryferia, góra–dół oraz źródło–ścieżka–cel. Główna teza artykułu głosi, że opisy życia duchowego są głęboko zakorzenione w ucieleśnionym doświadczeniu człowieka i wykorzystują podstawowe struktury poznawcze wywiedzione z doświadczenia przestrzeni, ruchu i architektury. Przeprowadzone obserwacje pokazują, że te same schematy mogą służyć konceptualizacji różnych aspektów doświadczenia religijnego i nabierać odmiennych znaczeń w zależności od kontekstu teologicznego i duchowego.

Słowa kluczowe: językoznawstwo kognitywne, schematy wyobrażeniowe, amalgamaty pojęciowe, przestrzeń wewnętrzna, Augustyn z Hippony, Juliana z Norwich, Teresa z Ávili, William Law, Etty Hillesum.

Introduction

In this article, I examine several spatial conceptualizations employed in descriptions of inner and spiritual experience by selected Christian authors from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. More specifically, I focus on image schemas, conceptual metaphors and conceptual blends, that is, cognitive structures through which abstract domains of experience are understood in terms of more concrete and embodied ones.¹ In other words, rather than concentrate on the doctrinal content of the texts under discussion, I will try to shed some light on the building blocks used to construe them and to show how these blocks are combined in order to create novel religious meanings.

1 Due to space limitations, I will not discuss here the theoretical background of these cognitive structures in detail. For conceptual metaphors, see: George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980); for image schemas, see: Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind. The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980); for conceptual blends, see: Gilles Fauconnier, Mark Turner, *The Way We Think. Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

Keeping in mind “the desperate inadequacy of the language [mystics] had at their disposal when trying to describe what they had lived through in their acts of union,”² we must nevertheless acknowledge that such descriptions are attempted. More importantly, from a cognitive-linguistic perspective, those who write about their spiritual lives inevitably draw upon the embodied experience of human beings living in the physical world.³ It is this shared experience and the language grounded in it that make communication possible, including communication of one’s mental and emotional states. This fact often escapes us precisely because we are so used to it. Take the concept of the “inner life” itself, which is a classic example of the container image schema, that is, the conceptualization of the human person as a container with “the self” inside, the physical world outside, and the body as the boundary between the two. Or take English expressions such as “I see” or “to be in the dark,” which communicate understanding, lack of knowledge, and similar states in terms of sight. They instantiate the mind is body conceptual metaphor, a widespread conceptualization employed to represent mental states and processes in Indo-European languages.⁴ An interesting and particularly fruitful variant of this metaphor in Christian tradition is the doctrine of spiritual senses, through which believers can experience God.⁵

Spatial conceptualizations of the inner life constitute yet another instance of how embodied experience underlies mental and spiritual experience. Attempts to describe the topography of the spiritual life are not new. One may recall, for example, Jean-Louis Chrétien’s phenomenological reflections on the spatial organization of inner experience and his analyses of Augustine and Teresa of Ávila, both of whom are also discussed in the present paper.⁶ My concern here, however, is not

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- 2 Leszek Kołakowski, *Religion. If there is no God... On God, the Devil, Sin and other Worries of the so called Philosophy of Religion* (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 99. Although I do not examine descriptions of mystical union as such, I believe that Kołakowski’s observation may be extended to religious and spiritual experiences more generally.
 - 3 Sometimes authors draw not only on embodied experience but also on the cosmological assumptions of their age. Augustine’s “*pondus meum amor meus*” is an example of such imagery, relying on the ancient idea that every being is drawn toward its proper place. See: Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self’s place. The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 260–270.
 - 4 Eve Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 28–44.
 - 5 Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, eds., *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
 - 6 Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L’espace Intérieur* (Paris: Les Éditions De Minuit, 2014).

phenomenological description but the cognitive structures that underlie such spatial representations. In this sense, and contrary to the Cartesian opposition between “res cogitans” and “res extensa,” the soul – or the self, whenever we speak of it – appears to possess a spatial dimension of its own. It is often conceptualized as occupying a position within an inner space, entering or inhabiting a building, moving toward a privileged centre, or descending into ever greater depths. Such positions and movements exemplify image schemas such as container, centre–periphery, up–down, and source–path–goal. The first three usually possess an axiological structure, with the interior, the centre, and the depth functioning as positively valued poles.⁷ This is particularly visible in Augustine of Hippo and Teresa of Ávila, the two principal figures in my analysis, but also in Julian of Norwich, William Law, and, in a more modern context, Etty Hillesum.⁸ As the analyses will show, the same image schemas may be employed to conceptualize different aspects of spiritual life and may acquire different meanings in different religious contexts.

Augustine: “Cubiculum cordis”

According to Charles Taylor, it was “Augustine who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of thought.”⁹ Stressing the distinction between outside and inside and primacy of the latter is the constant theme in his works: “Do not go outside, come back into yourself. It is in the inner self that Truth dwells.”¹⁰ In his construal of the inner space he sometimes combines the container schema and up–down schema: “But you were more inward than my most

7 Tomasz P. Krzeszowski, “The Axiological Parameter in Preconceptual Image Schemata,” in *Conceptualizations and Mental Processing in Language*, eds. Richard A. Geiger and Brygida Rudzka-Ostyn (Berlin–New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 307–330.

8 The present selection is illustrative rather than exhaustive. These authors were chosen because their writings contain particularly clear examples of the cognitive structures discussed here. Many other examples could be included, but there is not enough space to discuss them here.

9 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 131. See also: Philip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self. The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

10 Augustine, “True Religion (De vera religione), 72” in *On Christian Belief*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., ed. Boniface Ramsey, ser. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century I/8 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005), 78.

inward part and higher than the highest element within me.”¹¹ In this way he manages to grasp both God’s immanence and transcendence and the tension between them. The Latin original makes the interplay of both image schemas especially clear: “tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo.”¹²

In another passage of *Confessions* the inner space takes on a more concrete shape and is described in terms of a house. By depicting its size and condition Augustine is once again able to say something important about the human relationship with God:

The house [*domus*] of my soul is too small for you to come to it. May it be enlarged by you.

It is in ruins [*ruinosa est*]: restore it.¹³

To be precise, Augustine was not the first thinker in the Western tradition who encouraged us to turn inward and created the topography of the inner space. More than two hundred years before him, Marcus Aurelius, in his *Meditations*, speaks of a citadel to which one’s ruling centre may withdraw from the world:

Remember that your ruling centre [*hegemonikon*] becomes invincible when it withdraws into itself and rests content with itself, doing nothing other than what it wishes, even where its refusal to act is not reasonably based; and how much more contented it will be, then, when it founds its decision on reason and careful reflection. By virtue of this, an intelligence free from passions is a mighty citadel [*akropolis*]; for man has no stronghold more secure to which he can retreat to remain unassailable from that time onward.¹⁴

11 Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43.

12 S. Avreli Avgvstini, *Confessionvm. Libri XIII* (Berolini et Novi Eboraci: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 45.

13 *Confessions*, I, 5; Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 6. Augustine, like he often does in *Confessions* and in his other writings, may be referring here to the Bible, more exactly to the words of the Psalmist “Cum dilatasti cor meum” (Ps 118 (119): 32).

14 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* VIII, 48, trans. R. Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 78; Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, *The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the Emperor of Rome, Together with His Speeches and Sayings*, trans. C.R. Haines, ser. Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann; New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), 222. Marcus’ metaphor is a popular Stoic image that goes back to Plato. See also: Lothar Willms, “Body, Mind, Soul, and Self,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Marcus Aurelius*, ed. John Sellars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), 90. This act of withdrawal may be also seen as belonging to *otium*, traditionally valued in Roman culture over *negotium*.

In depicting the inner space as a citadel Marcus Aurelius also employs the up-down schema (fortresses are typically situated atop of a hill or mountain). The similarity of conceptualizations should not deceive us; however, for the Roman emperor, unlike the Christian bishop, does not intend to meet anyone in his citadel; on the contrary, the inner citadel is invincible precisely because it is impenetrable. It is another variant of “the symbol of the sage completely within itself well-rounded and spherical, so that nothing extraneous can adhere to it.”¹⁵ Indeed, a very distant image from that of Augustine’s house in need of repair.

That Augustine’s conceptualization of inner space goes in an entirely different direction becomes evident in his other texts. In his *Expositions of the Psalms*, he quotes Matthew 6:6 and maps the physical space of a “private room” onto the inner self:

“Go into your private room,¹⁶ shut your door, and pray in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will give you.” Entering your private room means entering your heart.¹⁷

Drawing on this biblical passage, Augustine depicts the human heart (his privileged image of the inner self) in terms of a room, or, to use cognitive-linguistic terminology, creates a blend by mapping selected elements of a room onto the heart in order to highlight things he wants to say and – by referring to our experience of the physical world – to express aspects of spiritual life that would be difficult to express in any other way. Thus, he calls the inner space of the believer the “private room of the heart” (“cubiculum cordis”) and returns to this blend frequently in his writings. “Cubiculum cordis” is for him not only the place of encounter with God, but also a container in its own right, in which “precious jewels of virtue – jewels of justice, truth, charity, faith, patience and endurance”¹⁸ are stored. What is more, by further mapping of other properties of the physical room, onto the “cubiculum cordis” Augustine is able to

15 Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel. The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, trans. M. Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 119.

16 In Greek *tameion*; in Latin *cubiculum*. The word is variously translated and biblical scholars differ as to what exactly it refers to. See, for example: Carolyn Osiek, “When You Pray, Go into Your ταμειον (Matthew 6:6): But Why?” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71/4 (2009): 723–740.

17 Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 33(2), 8; Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 33–50, trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B., ser. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, III/16 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 29.

18 Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 33(2),15; *ibidem*, 35.

express various theological meanings with the latter. For example, in one of his sermons, he identifies the “cubiculum cordis” with the believer’s moral sense and tells his audience that, just as a physical room may be closed to the light of the sun, so too may the inner space of the heart be closed to the light of justice.¹⁹ In another passage, again commenting on Matthew 6:6 and Jesus’ instruction that the door of the room in which one prays should be closed, Augustine writes:

Our entering the rooms is not enough if the door be left open to the importunate, for external things rush brazenly in through this door, and lay hold on our inmost affections. And we have said that all temporal and visible things are on the outside; and through this door, that is, one of the senses, they enter our thoughts and by a swarm of idle fancies noisily disturb us while engaged in prayer. Therefore, the door must be closed; that is to say, the bodily sense must be resisted, so that the prayer of the spirit may be directed to the Father. For this prayer is formed in the depths of the heart [*intimis cordis*], where a man prays in secret to the Father.²⁰

In this passage, Augustine strengthens the blend by equating the room’s door with the bodily senses. Moreover, by introducing the up–down schema, he deepens the image, as it were, identifying the place where one meets God not simply with the heart but with “the depths of the heart”. The image thus goes beyond a simple container schema, for the interior is itself differentiated: one does not merely turn inward, but inward toward ever greater depths, where the encounter with God ultimately takes place.

Augustine occasionally extends this imagery even further and conceptualizes the heart not merely as a room (“cubiculum”) but as a whole house (“domus”), much as he does with the soul in the *Confessions*. In doing so, he constructs a conceptual blend that brings together several domains of embodied experience. The heart becomes a house prepared for an honoured guest, the moral life is understood in terms of its cleaning, and the state of sin is conveyed through Christ’s reference to the “den of robbers” (Matt 21:13 par.):

19 Augustine, *Sermon 50,7*; Augustine, *Sermons II (20–50) on the Old Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., ser. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, III/2 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 348.

20 St. Augustine, *The Lord Sermon on The Mount*, 2, 11, trans. John J. Epsom (Westminster, ML: The Newman Press, 1948), 101.

To invoke God is to call God into yourself, for this is what “invocation” means, to “call him into.” But you would not presume to invite a person of such authority into your home [*domum cordis tui*],²¹ unless you knew how to prepare a fit place in which to entertain him. So what if God were to say to you, “Well now, you called me in, and here I am. What kind of place am I to enter? Am I expected to put up with such disgusting filth in your conscience? If you were inviting a servant of mine into your home, would you not take care to clean it up first? Yet you invite me into your heart, and it is like a robbers’ den.”²²

The purification of the heart is the first step on the road to human deification, a theme important for Augustine, and even more for the Eastern Church theology.²³ This may be illustrated by the following quote:

Purify your heart so that he may himself enlighten you, and he whom you invoke may enter it. Be a home for him, and he will be a home for you; let him dwell in you, and you will dwell in him. If you have welcomed him with your heart in this age, he will welcome you with his face when this age is past.²⁴

In this passage the precondition of deification is expressed by the means container image schema with “home” as the container. Actually, we can see here two containers simultaneously one in another. This Escher-like image is a good example of paradoxical nature of religious spiritual language.

21 *Sancti Avrelīi Avgvstīni, Enarrationes in Psalmos I–L* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956), 215.

22 Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 30(4), 4; *Expositions of the Psalms 1–32*, trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B., ser. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, III/15 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 349.

23 See: David V. Meconi, *The One Christ. St. Augustine’s Theology of Deification* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013); Georgiana Huian, “Embodied Mystery, Spiritual Deepness: Paradoxes of the Heart Inside a Spirituality of Purification,” *Religions* 16 (2025): 410.

24 Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 30(4), 8; *Expositions of the Psalms 1–32*, trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B., ser. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, III/15 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 353; “Purgate cor, ut ipse illuminet, et quern inuocatis intret. Esto domus eius, et erit domus tua; habitet in te, et tu habitabis in eo. Si eum in hoc saeculo exceperis corde tuo, ille post hoc saeculum excipiet te uultu suo.” *Sancti Avrelīi Avgvstīni, Enarrationes in Psalmos I–L*, 218.

Julian of Norwich: The Soul as the Barren Land and the City

Before we visit the grandiose castle of Teresa of Ávila, let us pause for a moment with Julian of Norwich (1342–1416), whose eschatological optimism found its way into Eliot's *Little Gidding*. Like Augustine, she also employs the container image schema to depict the double relationship between God and the soul:

It is a great understanding to see and know inwardly that God, who is our creator, dwells in our soul, and it is a far greater understanding to see and know inwardly that our soul, which is created, dwells in God.²⁵

Here we can see two “containers,” one within the other, as in Augustine. Yet elsewhere in her text we can find a quasi-panteistic touch that may be linked to Paul's quotation from Epimenides in Acts 17: 28, when she writes that God is “our clothing” and “love that wraps and enfolds us [...], embraces us [...] surrounds us.”²⁶ All these verbs (as well as the image of “clothing”) are linguistic realizations of the container image schema. Julian further strengthens this spatial imagery by introducing a contrast between the small and the large with her famous depiction of the whole of creation as “no bigger than a hazelnut” that “lasts and always will, because God loves it.”²⁷

In her text we can find also other examples of inner spiritual architecture that combine the soul with God in an original way:

And then our good Lord opened my spiritual eye, and showed me my soul in the midst of my heart. I saw the soul as wide as if it were an endless citadel, and also as if it were a blessed kingdom, and from the state which I saw in it, I understood that it is a fine city. In the midst of that city sits our Lord Jesus, true God and true man, a handsome person and tall, highest bishop, most awesome king, most honourable lord [...] The place which Jesus takes in our soul he will nevermore vacate, for in us is his home of homes and his everlasting dwelling.²⁸

There are several elements in Julian's image that deserve attention from a cognitive-linguistic perspective. First of all, she tells us what she

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 285.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 130.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 312.

“sees” with her “spiritual eye,” which is an instance of the mind is body conceptual metaphor and an example of the doctrine of spiritual senses. Her mystical language is also grounded in her experience of somebody living in the late Middle Ages. Stressing the dual nature of Christ,²⁹ she can describe him only through his humanity and therefore resorts to familiar markers of status and power drawn from her social world: Jesus is “bishop,” “king” and “lord.”³⁰ Yet the most original aspect of her vision is its spatial imagery. Unlike Augustine’s small cubiculum, the soul is, for Julian, “as large as [...] an endless citadel.” It is no longer a room in a building but a “kingdom” and “city.” The image schema underlying this vision is centre–periphery, with Jesus occupying its very centre. The image seems to echo the New Jerusalem of Revelation, with the soul itself taking the place of the city. Jesus’ dwelling in the soul as his “most familiar home,” although reminiscent of Augustine’s references to meeting God in the depths of the heart, also appears to allude to John 14:23. Interestingly, in another chapter of her work, she presents the soul as a “waste land” awaiting transformation into a city through the redemptive work of Christ:

But his [God] sitting on the ground, barren and waste, signifies this: He made man’s soul to be his own city and his dwelling place, which is the most pleasing to him of all his works. And when man had fallen into sorrow and pain, he was not wholly proper to serve in that noble office, and therefore our kind Father did not wish to prepare any other place, but sat upon the ground, awaiting human nature, which is mixed with earth, until the time when by his grace his beloved Son had brought back his city into its noble place by his hard labour.³¹

The soul as a barren land awaiting transformation into a glorious city may be seen as another variant of the “house in need of repair” that we encounter in Augustine. Yet whereas in Augustine this spiritual “reconstruction” concerns the individual soul, Julian, with the means of the spatial imagery, offers one of the most original illustrations of the doctrine of redemption of humanity in Western religious literature.

29 Emphasizing the dual nature of Christ was characteristic of the Middle Ages. See: Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through centuries. His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 1999), 133–144.

30 The title “lord” was also used in medieval England to address members of the social and political elite, especially noblemen and landowners.

31 Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, 272.

Teresa of Ávila: The Interior Castle

Teresa's metaphor of the human interior as a castle has been examined by many authors; they either approach it from a theological and spiritual perspective or seek to establish the origin of her imagery.³² My concern here is not so much with the theological interpretation of the castle or with the question of its sources and instead, I will focus on the three image schemas that underlie Teresa's vision.

First of all, like Marcus Aurelius and Augustine, Teresa's utilizes the container image schema and encourages us to withdraw and to go "inside":

The soul is like one who gets up from the table after winning a game, for it already sees what the things of the world are. It rises up at the best time, as one who enters a fortified castle to be safe from enemies. There is a withdrawing of the senses from exterior things and a renunciation of them in such a way that, without one's realizing it, the eyes close so as to avoid seeing them and so that the sight might be more awake to things of the soul.³³

The image of the fortified castle recalls Marcus Aurelius' citadel, yet whereas the Stoic citadel is meant to preserve the self's autonomy, Teresa's castle serves as a place of encounter with God. At the same time, her description of entering the castle echoes Augustine's entering the "cubiculum cordis," since both stress the necessity of shutting off all external distractions.

The castle itself has "seven dwelling places, and in the seventh, which [is] in the centre, the King of Glory dwell[s] in the greatest splendor."³⁴

32 For example: Peter Bourne H.M.C., *St. Teresa's Castle of the Soul. A Study of the Interior Castle* (Long Beach, CA: Wenzel Press, 1995); Joseph F. Chorprenning, "The Monastery, Paradise, and the Castle: Literary Images and Spiritual Development in St. Teresa of Ávila," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* LXII (1985): 245–257; Mary C. Coelho, "St. Teresa of Ávila's Transformation of the Symbol of the Interior Castle," *Teresianum* 1 (1987): 109–125; Eric W. Trueman Dicken, "The Imagery of the Interior Castle and Its Implications," *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 21 (1970): 198–218; Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, *Entering Teresa of Ávila's Interior Castle. A Reader's Companion* (New York–Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2005). Despite their age, these studies remain useful points of reference. There is also a Jungian interpretation of the castle (Lourens Minnema, "Spatial imagery as key to two mystical experiences of transformation: a comparison between Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 15/6 (2012): 587–609.

33 Teresa of Ávila, *The Way of Perfection*, 28,6, trans. K. Kavanaugh (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2000), 251.

34 Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodrigues (New York–Ramsey–Toronto: Paulist Press, 1979), 20.

Importantly, these seven concentric dwelling places or *moradas*³⁵ should be seen not in one but two dimensions.

You mustn't think of these dwelling places in such a way that each one would follow in file after the other; but turn your eyes toward the centre, which is the room or royal chamber where the King stays, and think of how a palmetto has many leaves surrounding and covering the tasty part that can be eaten. So here, surrounding this centre room are many other rooms; and the same holds true for those above. Let the soul walk through these dwelling places which are up above, down below, and to the sides, since God has given it such great dignity.³⁶

Even from this brief passage we can see that Teresa develops her inner topography on a much larger scale than Augustine. Apart from the container image schema – the soul is conceived as an enclosed architectural space separated from the external world – there is also the centre–periphery schema, which serves not only to locate God in the most important place within the castle but also to mark progress along the spiritual path, since the outer dwelling places are occupied by souls still distracted by worldly concerns. Indeed, this idea of progress is new, and it is grounded in the source–path–goal schema. The believer begins at the periphery and gradually advances through successive dwelling places toward the centre. The journey is not easy, for the soul encounters numerous obstacles and temptations that hinder its progress. The final goal of this movement is the seventh dwelling place, where the soul reaches the union with God in what Teresa describes as spiritual marriage, an example of another and even more prominent form of erotic imagery frequently employed by mystical writers.³⁷ Another original aspect of Teresa's vision is the comparison of the central part of her architectural structure to the most desirable part of a plant, hidden beneath layers of leaves that obstruct access to it and thus imply that reaching it requires effort. Reference to

35 By *moradas* Teresa means not individual chambers but places that themselves have complex architecture, since in each of these “there are many others, below and above and to the sides, with lovely gardens and fountains and labyrinths”; *The Interior Castle*, Epilogue 3; *ibidem*, 196.

36 *The Interior Castle* 2,8; *ibidem*, 42.

37 Kołakowski, *Religion*, 151. This, of course, leads us to the rich Christian mystical tradition based on the *Song of Songs* and represented among others by Origen and Bernard of Clairvaux.

gustatory experience is another form of embodied experience frequently found in Christian religious language.³⁸

William Law: The Depth and Centre of the Soul

A cognitive-linguistic exploration of religious texts helps us see that the same image schemas may conceptualize different aspects of inner experience or construe them in different ways. This is also confirmed by the analysis of the following excerpt from William Law's spiritual guide:

For this turning to the Light and Spirit of God within thee, is thy only true turning unto God, there is no other way of finding him, but in that place where He dwelleth in thee. For though God be everywhere present, yet He is only present to thee in the deepest, and most central part of thy soul. Thy natural senses cannot possess or unite thee to Him, nay thy inward faculties of understanding, will and memory, can only reach after God but cannot be the place of his habitation in thee. But there is a root, or depth in thee, from whence all these faculties come forth, as lines from a centre, or as branches from the body of the tree. This depth is called the centre, the fund or bottom of the soul. This Depth is the Unity, the Eternity, the Infinity of thy Soul; for it is so infinite, that nothing can satisfy it, or give it any rest, but the infinity of God.³⁹

Law's words echo Augustine's "interior intimo meo et superior summo meo": God dwells within the believer and yet remains beyond reach. Identifying God with the bottom or fund of the soul is a realization of the up-down schema that we also encounter in Meister Eckhart's *Seelengrund* and in Paul Tillich's notion of the "Ground of Being." Like Teresa, Law also employs the centre-periphery image schema, although here it carries different meanings. The centre is not the place of our destination, but the source from which things spread like branches. At the same time, its role has changed. Teresa identifies the centre with God, but the spiritual itinerary she describes is one that relatively few believers are likely to follow to its end. Although reaching the seventh mansion, where the King dwells, brings the promise of extraordinary bliss, it remains an ideal rather than a necessity. Law suggests that due to the character

38 For example, Augustine frequently speaks of God's sweetness ("suavitas Dei," "dulcedo Dei") in his *Expositions of the Psalms*, especially in connection with Psalm 33:9: "Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus." For a detailed discussion, see also: Franz Posset, "The Sweetness of God," *American Benedictine Review* 44/2 (1993): 143–178.

39 William Law, *The Spirit of Prayer. The Spirit of Love* (Cambridge–London: James Clarke & Co., 1969), 44.

of our soul, only God can satisfy it. Teresa speaks of the sweet heart of a palmetto hidden within layers of leaves. Yet, if we follow the logic of the image, it remains a desirable fruit rather than a necessity of life. Law, by contrast, suggests that because the soul is insatiable and because only God can satisfy it, those who do not seek God suffer spiritual hunger.

Etty Hillesum: God at the Bottom of a Well

Unlike the earlier authors discussed above, Etty Hillesum is hardly a mystical writer in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, her diaries reveal a strong sense of the Augustinian turn inward, a “dialogue with what is deepest inside me, which for the sake of convenience I call God.”⁴⁰ The two combined image schemas (up–down and container) present in this quotation become even more visible in the following passage, where movement toward the depths of the self becomes a way of approaching the divine:

There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there, too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then He must be dug out again.⁴¹

Architectonically, Hillesum’s conceptualization is the poorest among the examples discussed here. There are no castles, cities, or houses, but only a well, which may be regarded as one of the simplest instantiations of the container and up–down image schemas found in the material discussed here. Yet precisely because of its simplicity the image possesses remarkable expressive power. The movement toward God is represented not as a journey through successive dwelling places but as the laborious task of removing obstacles that block access to the divine presence. In this respect, Hillesum’s image may be even more compelling than those of Augustine and Teresa, for it emphasizes the effort involved in the spiritual life with exceptional clarity: God is already there, but must be dug out.

40 Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries, 1941–1943. Letters from Westerbork*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (New York: Metropolitan Books Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 183.

41 *Ibidem*, 44.

Conclusion

The examples discussed above demonstrate that descriptions of spiritual life, far from being detached from ordinary human experience, are deeply grounded in it. The examined authors conceptualize the inner life by drawing on basic image schemas such as container, up–down, centre–periphery, and source–path–goal, as well as on conceptual blends that combine architectural, bodily, and spatial experience with religious meanings. At the same time, the same cognitive structures may serve different purposes and acquire different meanings in different contexts. Augustine’s house, Julian’s city, Teresa’s castle, Law’s centre of the soul, and Hillesum’s well all belong to the same family of spatial conceptualizations, yet each highlights a different aspect of the relationship between the human self and God. The image schemas discussed above are grounded in our experiences as embodied human beings that inhabit spaces, move between places and distinguish between the centre and the periphery. The persistence of such imagery seems to be related to the difficulty of describing spiritual experience itself: familiar spatial structures provide writers with a way of giving concrete form to otherwise elusive aspects of inner life. Thus, the similarities observed here need not result from direct literary influence, but may arise from the interaction of embodied cognition, tradition, and the conventions of spiritual writing.

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42 For the sake of consistency, English translations of Augustine’s works are listed under “Augustine,” while original Latin texts under “Augustinus Aurelius.” In the footnotes the form of the author’s name follows the title page of the edition cited.

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