

**NORTHROP FRYE, SOREN KIERKEGAARD AND KERYGMA – ON THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIBLICAL METAPHOR, LITERAL READINGS
OF THE BIBLE AND LIVING IN THE SPIRIT,**

by James Cunningham

I want to talk about what it means to read the Bible as revelation and, in so doing, to show how the Bible is a document capable of motivating us to become spiritual beings. To do so, I'm going to draw on the help of some late twentieth century critical theory, mainly that of Canadian literary icon and Biblical critic, Northrop Frye. I'm going to proceed by arguing, as does Frye, that the Bible is read as revelation when it is read as primarily an imaginative expression of metaphor and myth. In the face of those who would call this view heresy, I'm also going to argue that even the famed arch-literalist, Soren Kierkegaard, is shown by Frye to mean, if unintentionally, that the literal reading is a metaphorical one. And Frye is in agreement with the French hermeneutics scholar, Paul Ricoeur, that if metaphor is literally descriptive of anything, it is of an imaginative – as in creative – world, in which all meanings are remade anew. Finally, I'm going to show that, for Frye, while the Bible may be a structure of metaphor and myth, this does not entail that it is literature, though it does in some sense entail that it is literary. Rather, the Bible is an example of prophetic language that speaks through metaphor called Kerygmatic language. The power Kerygma to render men into spiritual beings derives from its ability to motivate them to read its metaphors in the language of love and so reveal a vision of their real selves that is synonymous with that of Martin Buber's thou. As such, the Kerygmatic language of the Bible renders it into a revolutionary document for all ages, capable of giving readers access to their spiritual selves.

As outlined above, the project I've assigned for this paper is to be in two parts. Part one sees how Frye might be seen to argue that if Kierkegaard rejects analogical readings of scripture for literal ones, he identifies the literal reading not with an historical or philosophical reading but, rather, with the reading of scripture as metaphor. I will proceed by way of a close analysis of Kierkegaard's reading of Luke 14:26, in *Fear and Trembling*, and related texts. Part two is written with extended reference to Frye's *Words with Power*, where, in his chapter, "Symbol and Spirit," Frye argues that the Bible goes beyond the literary consideration of life in the spirit: as the essential elements of Kerygma – the language of proclamation – Biblical metaphors exhort the reader to see and live his/her own life in spiritual terms. Like literature, then, the Bible is an imaginative document. Unlike literature, it is the meaning of the reader's life that the Bible creates anew.

Part one: Frye on Kierkegaard -- Kierkegaard is a literalist, but his literal reading of the Bible is as metaphor.

About one thing, at least, Kierkegaard is clear in this matter. He takes it is an act of cowardice (one upon which he pores much scorn) to assume that revelation can be read as some sort of analogy to what would seem reasonable in the present age. For Kierkegaard, such analogous readings take the reader away from revelation. In opposition to such a move, Kierkegaard demands that the Bible be read literally, as meaning exactly what it says. This we see, for instance, when Kierkegaard, writing in *Fear and Trembling* under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio, cites Luke 14:26 as articulating "a striking doctrine taught about absolute duty to God: 'If any man cometh unto me and hateth not his own father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea,

and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple' ” (82). In his remarks on this passage, Kierkegaard says that reading it analogically would “give utterance to [its] terrible ends by driveling rather than terrifying ... if there is any sense to this passage, it must be understood literally. God it is who requires absolute love” (83). For Kierkegaard, then, analogical readings of scripture’s terrible words are the driveling of cowards. Literal readings are those which acknowledge the “humble courage” (83) of faith – which can both understand and do the word of God, though his “words are terrible” (83).

Does this cast Kierkegaard as a fundamentalist? Certainly there have been fundamentalists who have tried to claim Kierkegaard as one of their own. But this can hardly be the case! Kierkegaard would look askance and what, for him, would be fundamentalism's tendency to sectarianism¹: it’s obvious need for ecstatic crowd approval; its rabid defense of neo-conservative politics; its demand for an intellect suppressing denial of the dissonance between fundamentalism's creationist claims and those of science and philosophy². For Kierkegaard, all such tendencies would look like those of the cowardly conformist rather than of the lonely individual who “walks alone” on the path of faith (*Fear and Trembling* 90). However, Kierkegaard does seem to share with fundamentalists the demand that the Bible be read as having, what in critical theory circles would be called, a truth of “correspondence,” where a text that is literally descriptive of a non-verbal truth about God and the world (*Anatomy* 74). After all, Kierkegaard's is a call to faith and faith, indicated, for Kierkegaard, by the “how” of belief, is justified by the passionate intensity with which the lone individual trusts that something is true (*Objective and Subjective Reflection* 258). For Kierkegaard, then, even

it is not history or philosophy, the Bible's truth is plainly spoken and, therefore, in need of no analogical supplement.

If Kierkegaard holds that the Bible is literally a statement of descriptive truth, so that no analogical supplement is necessary, it would seem also that he denies that the Bible is ultimately a literary document. Primarily, analogy is a literary figuration, and Kierkegaard would seem to want to deny any judgment that, in the final estimation, the Bible's truth is literary, for Kierkegaard must hold that literature, like poetry and music, serves primarily to celebrate that world which the individual experiences in what Kierkegaard would call the realm of the aesthetic. To Kierkegaard, such an individual “has not chosen himself; like Narcissus he has fallen in love with himself” (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vols. 3&4, 338). As such, the aesthete’s life is not lived in accordance with the freedom required for life of faith, neither is his/her poesy capable of expressing it. Whatever it may be, Kierkegaard avers, literary truth cannot be identified with the truth which is lived in faith and expressed in revelation. But, if Kierkegaard's sentiment is to reject any claim that the Bible as an expression of dramatic truth, it is not clear that his sentiment is consistent with his practice as articulate reader of scripture. This is true for two reasons.

The first reason has to do with the essential literariness of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings on religion. Kierkegaard cannot seem to write philosophically on the topic of religion unless it is through the literary prismatic of dissonant authorial voices; fragments; lost drafts accidentally discovered; and stories within stories within stories, all of them irony laden. *Prima facie*, his writing looks very much like those that

suggest such truth is inaccessible unless it is conveyed dramatically. But all of this has been explored by others more knowledgably than ever I could.³

I want to discuss a second reason why we would say that Kierkegaard's practice as reader does not mesh with his sentiments concerning how the Bible should be read. To return to his citation of Luke, in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard does indeed reject the need for an analogical supplement to Biblical truth. In so doing, however, he seems to me to replace the analogical reading with another reading, one ever so much like that of a literary critic parsing the Bible as what Northrop Frye would call a structure of metaphor. And, structures of metaphor are essentially dramatic in nature. As I hope to show, it should not be so surprising, maybe not even unsettling, that Kierkegaard's reading of scripture should conform to Frye's view that the Bible is read literally only when read as metaphor (*Words With Power* 102). Frye, after all, is with Kierkegaard in acknowledging the Bible's status as revelation. That is, while Frye deems the Bible to have a metaphorical and thus a literary structure, he never concedes that the Bible is simply literature. For Frye, the Bible conveys the truth about God, not fantasies. Yet it does so in a way that only literary structures can. Frye contends, therefore, that if the Bible is revelation, it also must be a verbal structure of metaphor called myth. For, says Frye, myth is the only vehicle that has traditionally been called revelation. Revelation, as we all know, *reveals*. But what it reveals is the world of the spirit. Argues Frye, if the Bible reveals anything, it reveals a world that common sensibilities can never see, that is, a world that can be captured only through the imaginative gaze, and the language of the imaginative gaze is that of myth and metaphor. Adds Frye, in a manner somewhat resonant with that of Kierkegaard, it is no madder that the "speaking voice from God"

(118) should be transmitted to us through the imaginative metaphors uttered and penned by his/her "human agents" (118) than that his/her voice should be transmitted to us by historical writings.

That, in practice if not in sentiment, Kierkegaard should read the Bible as what Frye would call a myth, does not mean then that he rejects the status of the Bible as revelation. It means simply that Kierkegaard's reading of scripture embodies a recognition of what Frye avers: that revelation is given through the language of the imagination. And it's not really surprising that Kierkegaard's reading should embody such a recognition. In his "Preliminary Expectoration" of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard talks of the nature of the world of the spirit; of how it is governed by principles so different from those governing the world of the senses that it can seem to men only the stuff of fairy tales. From such a fairy tale would come the proverb, "only the man who works gets the bread." Thus does Kierkegaard treat the Bible as presenting the world of the spirit imaginatively: that is, as a world whose truth worldly men must take to be absurdities. Such a treatment of holy writ would seem consonant with Kierkegaard's observations, in *Either/Or* and *The Stages on Life's Way*, that the aesthetic is not to be omitted from the life of faith, so much as it is to be *dethroned*: that is, put into the service of appreciating faith's truth. Frye would agree. For Frye, such service is the very function of myth and metaphor, at least as they appear in the Bible: says Frye, the Bible is, after all, that myth to live by.

For much the same reasons, Frye and Kierkegaard dismiss readings of the Bible as history and philosophy (a text whose truth claims are consonant with available

historical evidence and prevailing standards of reason). It has yet to be seen that they both read the Bible as metaphor and myth: as yet, that may even seem an unbelievable claim. For Kierkegaard, the Bible is to be believed literally. And he would probably deny that literary structures make such demands. So it is that Kierkegaard excoriates more conventional readings that make it acceptable to modern ears with the claim that the Bible couldn't have meant that it happened exactly that way, or that it meant exactly what it said. Returning to Kierkegaard's commentary on Luke 14:26, from *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard says of this passage that it is one that Christians tend to pass over in silent embarrassment. The sentiment in the silence is that surely, Jesus could NOT have meant hate -- not literally. He may not even have said "hate", not really. That the silence indicates the above sentiment is indicated in those rare attempts to make sense of the passage: where interpreters claim that for purposes of clearer exegesis the word *hate* should be understood analogically, as a poetic exaggeration of "feel dislike", "love less", "put in a subordinate place", "show no reverence", "regard as naught". Poring scorn on such readings, Kierkegaard argues that faith would never allow that it is a fitting substitute for "hate" to say one "has become lukewarm to" (for it is this to which the above analogues amount). Kierkegaard might well add that cowardice would make just such an allowance.

Fine, so far. But what does Kierkegaard say next. He says that no one would want a follower who became "lukewarm" on their father, brother, daughter etc., certainly not God. God would want followers capable only of a love so strong that it was undying. That a daughter forsakes her family for her husband is a legal form of renunciation -- of hatred. That she acts in hatred, however, should in no way indicate the feelings of her

heart. So it should be for God's follower. For instance, when Abraham hearkens to God's temptation and puts Isaac under the sacrificial knife, he enacts the legal form of hate.

Earlier, in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard illustrates this enactment on the part of Abraham.

[Abraham] seized Isaac by the throat, threw him to the ground, and said, "Stupid boy, dost thou then suppose that I am thy father? I am an idolater. Dost thou suppose that this is God's bidding? No, it is my desire." Then Isaac trembled and cried out in his terror, "Oh God in heaven, have compassion upon me. If I have no father upon earth, be Thou my father!" But Abraham in a low voice said to himself, "Oh Lord in heaven, I thank Thee. After all it is better for him to believe that I am a monster, rather than that he should lose faith in thee." 27

Says Kierkegaard, if Abraham's treatment of Isaac is an act of hatred, during the act, his heart's love for Isaac is greater than ever it was. For, adds Kierkegaard, Abraham is not Cain: unlike Cain's, Abraham's act of hatred is not a sign that his love is dead (or that there was only ever the form of love with no actual love to die). Thus is Abraham's act of hatred a meaningful expression of faith. Kierkegaard, then, reads the text, "if anyone would follow me he must first hate his father, his mother, his son etc," as meaning what it says. But what it says is that a follower must hate his son: something only a true father, one incapable of even of thinking "you are no son of mine" can do. And a true father can never hate his son in his heart, only in his actions.

Now, I've rehearsed Kierkegaard's reading of the above text to make the following point. Kierkegaard might call the reading described above one that takes the Bible to be literally descriptive of what Jesus said and meant. Thus does he reject the analogical reading of the text as an act of cowardice. But in rejecting the analogical reading, Kierkegaard replaces it with one that Frye would describe as literally metaphorical: Kierkegaard's possible protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. Look at what

Kierkegaard does. He embraces a reading of scripture that must be absurd: a god of love literally requires hate of his followers. But, in embracing the absurd reading of scripture, Kierkegaard recognizes in its absurdity an invitation to revisit what it is to be a believer: of what it is to love truly. Thus does Kierkegaard read the scripture as an invitation to see belief, love -- indeed the world in which such love and belief can be possible -- anew. But such a reading is identical to what Frye would call a reading of the Bible as literally a metaphor.

Frye takes a metaphor to say, "grammatically and syntactically, that A is B while at the same time suggesting that nobody would be fool enough to accept that A really is B", in other words, suggesting that an acceptance of the identification as really true is absurd. In calling the Bible a literal metaphor, Frye is arguing, like Kierkegaard, for the Bible as an invitation to take what we know to be absurdities as truth, but without suppressing the intelligence in ways that are required if we take them as historic or philosophical truths: the result of such a reading is our acceptance of an invitation to re-see the world. Frye cites an example of this in *Double Vision* with his reference to the metaphor "Jesus is King". According to Frye, the biblical account of the life of Jesus up to the crucifixion belies the claim that Jesus is king. Jesus is shown consistently to abjure opportunities for political sovereignty, to live a life of service, to go unacknowledged as king by established political authorities ... except in derision. Even in his time of trial Jesus chooses not to avail himself to the options of resistance and flight (options of sovereignty open even to commoners); even inuring himself to the pain of the crucifixion, something Frye says would probably be within the capability of someone with Jesus' powers of concentration, is something Jesus will not do. Weighed against the usual

standards by which we measure power, then, all the evidence of Jesus' life speaks against the claim that he is king. And yet, in Mark 10, Jesus equates his ascent to kingship with his passion. We have this assertion in the story where James and John, sons of Zebedee, approach Jesus asking that, when he comes into his glory, they should be at his right and left side. Jesus answers them that they know not what they ask, but that, in any case, those positions have been prepared for others (the others being two thieves executed on either side of Jesus at his own crucifixion). The literal meaning here is that Jesus' glory is identified with his crucifixion.

It is interesting to note, at this point, that fundamentalist interpretations of the crucifixion tend to associate the crucifixion with the sacrifice that Jesus is to undergo before his ascension to glory; that the crucifixion is what he must undergo before he takes up his power. Not only is such an interpretation a failure to take Jesus at his word (a strange move for descriptive literalists), in effect, surely not in intent, it associates the crucifixion story with older non-Christian myths of the disguised God or hero who reveals himself only when taking revenge on those who abused him when his power was hidden from them. Incarnations of this myth are recognizable in Homer's *Odyssey*, some of the medieval mystery plays concerning the archangel Gabriel, and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. The morals of each story is that divine power is like power as we understand it in this world, a matter of brute force; that God disguises his power that he may reveal his true majesty at a later date. The literal metaphorical reading, however, takes Jesus at his word and against all evidence and reason accepts that his crucifixion IS the realization of his glory. Such a reading forces us to reconsider the nature of power and glory. For surely Jesus is correct if power is NOT what we normally take it to be: if

the true sign of power is a person's ability to live an uncompromisingly good life in an evil world, to insist on a principled existence for oneself, even if that insistence must result in torture and death. Set against such a reconsideration of power, what the world regards as the ultimate expression of power (brute force) is shown to be a sign of weakness, of inadequate personalities, of egos out of control.

As the above example shows, for Frye, to say that the Bible as literally a metaphor is to say that if we take what the Bible says at face value, as meaning exactly what it says in spite of the absurdity of that meaning (an absurdity we must not deny), then we will find ourselves invited to understand, to see, the world anew. Thus is Frye's understanding of metaphor like that of Paul Ricoeur, who describes metaphor as an identification which creates, then resolves, a cognitive dissonance. That is, Ricoeur understands that the metaphorical identification forces us to reconceive of the world in terms that would render implausible identifications plausible. Says Ricoeur, the metaphor is not flowery language standing in for a more ordinary meaning, rather, the metaphor bestows NEW meaning on the world, forcing us to understand it in ways that render our usual (modern) ways of understanding the world strange to us. For Ricoeur, like Frye, there is an inherent inability to integrate metaphorical and modern understandings of the world. This is because metaphorical meaning identifies things that our modern understanding must always dismiss as logically contradictory: namely traits that the modern understanding would take to be exclusive to human personality with traits that the modern understanding would take to be exclusive to non-human nature. It is this collapsing by metaphor of what Ricoeur with Frye would call the subject object distinction that allows Homer to identify Zeus with the lightning bolt and the Bible to

identify God with timeless truth capable of breaking into history and taking human form.

As such, says Ricoeur, metaphor is descriptive of what philosophers such as Heidegger and Gadamer call the “life world” – an anthropomorphized world of poets and playwrights at odds with that world of the modern understanding in which everything can be reduced to matter in motion. As incompatible as this metaphorical world is with the modern understanding, it persists as a serious challenge to modern understanding’s epistemological authority, for it is also the world conceived in accordance with the heart’s desire. For Kierkegaard, as it is the world of the heart’s desire, what he calls the world of the subject, that truly informs our beliefs, the Bible must be revelatory of grounds for belief only if it exposes the world of the spirit for our consideration. But this is a world that we get to consider, which invites our reconsideration of the world as we thought we knew it, only if the Bible is read as metaphor.

Another sign that Kierkegaard is, in effect, if not in intent, advocating the reading of scripture as a literal metaphor is what Frye would identify as Kierkegaard’s use of myth. Says Frye, if metaphor presents us with the simultaneous (spatial) image of a world in which absurd identifications are made plausible, myth spins these identifications out in time. According to Frye, a myth is a story of a god or, in its displaced form, a hero. And the full meaning of metaphors is indicated by their context with myths. That Kierkegaard discerns the full meaning of metaphor in the Bible with reference to Biblical myth is shown in his analysis of the Luke verse, reviewed above, as well, in his understanding of the Biblical claim that Abraham is the father of the faith. In the case of the Luke verse, Kierkegaard bases his conclusion that the faithful hate in action, not in their hearts on a reference to Abraham – to his not being Cain. Kierkegaard’s point here

must be that the metaphor of the true believer is best understood within the context of the myth to which it is most aptly related, which is NOT the myth of Cain, but of Abraham.

Part two: Frye on Kerygmatic language in the Bible – Metaphor as the language of exhortation.

And yet we must be disquieted with the Frygean claim that Kierkegaard's reading of the Biblical passage from Luke apprehends Biblical meaning primarily in metaphor and myth. If metaphor and myth invite us only to entertain the world anew, to reconsider the nature of the world in terms of what the human heart conceives (that is, in terms of its being a spiritual world), then they cannot be enough for Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard, the Bible must be read in such a manner that it becomes the vehicle through which we see and live in the world of the spirit. This the Bible cannot do if it is but a call to reconsideration – and it is to that which literature confines itself, as is evidenced by the fact that even the most serious works of literature are called plays and entertainments. For Kierkegaard, then, the Bible must be a call to go beyond reconsideration all the way to belief.

And with Kierkegaard, Frye again agrees. As mentioned earlier, Frye is adamant that the Bible is not literature. It is, however, literary. Can Frye have it both ways? Well, of course, he thinks he can and he makes his case with reference to what he calls “meta-literary” or Kerygmatic language. Argues Frye, if the Bible is revelation, as Kierkegaard says, then it must be written in the language of revelation and that is the language of Kerygma. Kerygmatic language is a hybrid: non-literary in its intent, but literary in its form. That is, like non-literary language, Kerygma has about it that part of revelation best described as “proclamation” which calls us to receive and live in its words as the

truth. Like literature, however, the meaning of Kerygmatic proclamation is found primarily in metaphors and myths, the same source of meaning as in literature. The effect is that instead of proclaiming the asserted truth, as would be the case with non-literary proclamations, Kergma proclaims the myth to live by, which forgoes assertion and the appeal to immediate action (the kind of thing we see in advertising and rhetoric generally) for the modeling of continuous action.

Frye says that we see the myth to live by in the Bible but in many other works as well. Citing Plato's dialogues, Frye notes, correctly I think, that Plato doesn't so much argue for his meaning as present it by way of the dialogue as a whole. So, for instance, the meaning of justice is fully communicated only if justice is seen to be discussed by intellectually honest men; friendship, only if discussed by the friendly; love only if discussed by lovers. If we are to see how Kerygmatic speech is consonant with what Kierkegaard would consider adequate to the language of faith, it is important to note, here, that the content – the what – of the message is much less important to its meaning than the manner – the how – of its delivery. To refer again to the same Platonist dialogues, we will learn nothing of justice, friendship and love if their discussions are not justice, friendship and love in action. What is compelling, in each of these cases, is the image of authentic embodiment, not the assertions embodied.

The concentration on presentation in Kerygmatic speech – its refusal to communicate by assertion – entails that its address must always be indirect: like the liturgy, where the priest's address to God is overheard – and maybe even meant to be overheard – by the congregation. The effect of Kerygmatic speech, then, is akin to that of overhearing one side of a telephone conversation. Because you are not a part of the

conversation – and therefore not privy to all that is said – your attention is forced by the necessity of filling in gaps, in aid of which you must model the speakers you overhear. The hope is that, by being as they are, you will better be able to infer what they heard: but the best you will attain are tantalizing verbal hints and clues of the stories they might be telling.

Kerygmatic speech is more than simply a form of indirect address, however: literary works are a form of indirect address, as well. Inherent Kerygmatic speech is the message that, if the listener is not the subject of the address, he is certainly its object. Thus we add to the analogy of the telephone conversation that what you overhear is one side of the most important conversation any two people of good will might ever have about YOU. According to Frye, this sense of import – the sense that what is being discussed are the fullest possibilities for your life – is communicated in Kerygmatic speech by what Longinus calls touchstones. Longinus describes touchstones as instances of speech where there is a role reversal: instead of men using language, touchstones are instances of writing or speech in which language uses men. They are short passages – “the ‘let there be light’ passage in Genesis, for instance” – which stand out from their context “as suddenly breaking through into a different dimension of response.” That is, we respond to touchstones as heralding a description of the true form of, or model for, our own lives, of which our actual lives are but an imperfect example. For Frye, kerygmatic language is distinguished from literary language by having achieved a critical mass of touchstones. Then does the language go beyond literature’s inviting a reconsideration of things: its message is in metaphors so profoundly about every reader

or listener who receives it that they are compelled to take it as a model for abundant living.

Fair enough. But one might counter with an expression of concern over what men are to make of the models for action in Biblical revelation. One has only to be reminded of the Bishop's sermon in, *Joyeux Noel*, in which he interprets Christ's proclamation "I come not to **bring** peace, but to **bring a sword**" as an injunction to kill Germans, to realize the folly in the assumption that kerygmatic language is safe in the hands of any old reader – "kill them all," he says, "so we don't have to do it ever again". Frye answers this concern as does Kierkegaard. We must take the scripture literally – recognizing, adds Frye, that the scripture is literally a metaphor. For Frye, reading Kerygmatic language as metaphor is synonymous with what St Paul means when he says of the scripture that "it must be spiritually discerned," and what St Augustine means when he says that scripture must be read in the language of love. Argues Frye, we read Kerygmatic lovingly when we read it as citizens of the Biblical kingdom of Beulah. Referenced in *Isiah* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, Beulah is a garden kingdom of plenty on the outskirts of heaven, a place where all things no matter how different dwell so peaceably together that even contradiction is not impediment to mutual cohabitation. Frye could point out that, as we have already seen, to read literature as a structure of myth and metaphor is to accept for the purpose reading a story that all of literature's postulates are true: as the kingdom of Beulah, literature as a whole must be read as describing a kingdom where even such contradictory creations as those of Bunyan and Rochester, Austin and Sade can meet and kiss.

Now, if we are reading Kerygma, which is not literature, this way, what is described for us is not the stuff of fantasies but of life as we are called to live it. Still, what is described is also a metaphor – which, as we recall Frye saying, says simultaneously that A is true and that no damn fool would believe such a thing of A. As such, Kerygma must be taken as what Frye calls a real description which no damn fool would ever take to be a description: literally a description without place. By this, Frye does not mean a description of a place that doesn't exist, or even the description of invisible things, but rather, description as a type of invisibility which – like the air – allows other things to be visible. What description without place allows to be visible, says Frye is a positive illusion: one that can be transformed into reality, as can a blue print, with creative effort. Still, warns Frye, the illusion is, by its nature, a call to continuous effort. To complete the transformation would be to render illusion into reality, but when transformed into reality, an illusion ceases to be one. Frye implies that the positive illusion of scripture is a source of striving, not a goal: it spurs readers to action and finds them wanting when the rest in the folly that the job is done. As such, the positive illusion which the invisibility of the Kerygmatic metaphor allows us to see is what Frye, citing scripture calls “the proof of things unseen.” It is the assurance that the continuous application of human creativity can transform both the individual and his world: that a man can enter heaven simply by deciding to live as would one of its citizens.

For Frye, the type of invisibility embodied by the Kerygmatic metaphor is what we call spirit, which has always been associated with air. That is spirit is a way of seeing which renders ordinary life invisible and allows people to see act and come together in

new and dynamic ways. Read in the spirit of love appropriate to literary metaphors, says Frye, the Kerygmatic speech of the Bible calls us to come together into a spiritual body, which is neither an individuality like the physical body, nor a uniform body – the tendency to which all human societies conform more or less. Rather, the spiritual body of which Scriptural Kerygmatic metaphors speak is a unity: the coming together and cohabiting of diverse things around a central focus of community. Read with a willingness to inhabit such a community, the scripture becomes a guarantee, for the reader, of what Frye, quoting scripture again, calls “the substance of things hoped for.” Frye argues that the substance (that is, the achievement) of things hoped for is guaranteed by our ability to keep hoping. We may give up on our hopes for a particular object. But we best not give up on hope itself: that is, the hope that man’s future holds infinite possibilities. If we do, then we give up on man. And if we give up on man, we give up on ourselves. The guarantee of the substance of things hoped for lies in our capacity not to give up on men, no matter how difficult, nay, impossible they seem. This capacity, we call love. Says Frye, it is love that allows us to merge with other individuals without violating them so that they can live together in a unity which is the peaceful cohabiting of diverse elements. It is in the metaphorical vision of the spiritual body, says Frye, that we meet Buber’s thou. For, according to Buber, I see the other as thou, when I see the face of God shining through his face. And I see that when I treat him as someone not to be violated or dominated but lived with. In this way, Buber describes the focus of community around (or in front of which the diverse members of the spiritual body gather), it is the face of God who can be seen only when we are willing to love each

other. Says Frye, the Bible's language beckons to readers with the promise of abundant living, motivating them to read it with love and so see what love is all about.

Where do we find a metaphor in the Bible to show the substance of things hoped for? Well, first we find it only if we are willing to read with a love motivated and capable of seeing unity in diversity. Then, I suppose we find that the Bible is one huge metaphor for the substance of things hoped for. But let me hint at one such metaphor within it. It is the metaphor constructed of all the references to God in the Old Testament. Read as an historical figure, the Old Testament God is something like Hannibal Lector on a bad day. He seems to delight in grand versions of cheap parlour tricks, as well as in any act of sadism, none is too large or small for his taste. He also seems a bit bi-polar: way up, one minute, down the next, and beware of him when he is down, for he will probably be down on you. For Frye, the invitation to imitate the Old Testament God read thus is the invitation to be a psychotic ape. Read, however, in the spirit of love – that invisibility through which all things are seen to come together – the Old Testament God becomes a symbol for the intense involvement of lover and beloved. On this reading, what comes to the fore is God's refusal to give up on a creation which inspires such a profound variety of feelings in him. And here's the humane lesson in all of this: loving relationships worthy of the name not only survive but thrive on the honest expression of emotion: if we give up on others simply to avoid emotional hurt, we have not loved. If we fear hurt too much to love, then we will see others through our fear – in essence we will project onto them the same monstrous descriptions that the authors of scripture (frail humans, after all) projected onto God. Only in metaphor (fashioned by productive forces

many of which are unconscious and unintentional employed) does her loving face shine through.

Which brings us back to the scripture Kierkegaard quotes from Luke. As Kierkegaard points out, the scripture reveals that love and hate must cohabit, that one who does not love in their heart cannot act in hate. For a man without there is only indifference. Conversely, true love cannot be stifled by hate, so is Abraham's greatest sign of love towards his son Isaac played out as a public act of hate. For Kierkegaard, reading the spirit gives up to us the vision of the Kerygmatic metaphor, love and hate are integral parts of a well integrated spiritual body. And Frye attests that this is what Kierkegaard is doing, if unknowingly, we he writes, "K. realized that there was a prophetic dimension on the other side of the aesthetic, [in what turns out to be the Kerygmatic] but evidently didn't realize that it was only in his aesthetic writings (among which *Fear and Trembling* is probably the most famous) that he came anywhere near expressing it."

I want to finish with some reflection on how the reading of scripture as revelation or as a spiritual document capable of calling us to be spiritual beings renders it into a revolutionary document. Inevitably, the Kerygmatic language of scripture acts as like the air, an invisibility through which things hitherto unrealized become visible. And what inevitably becomes visible is the positive illusion which is nothing more than the vision of our unrealized selves. Scripture calls this unrealized self our true identity. It is our identity as part of a spiritual body which is the only free identity possible: alone it represents a community without the violation and domination of differences in the other which are the universal condition of human enslavement. As a spiritual document, then,

the scripture give us and motivate us to live in the realization of the vision of our real selves. As such, it gives us access to what critical theory in Europe calls the non-identity of our identity, in which case it reveals what all ideology tries so desperately to hide from us: as is seen, for instance, in the efforts of mass culture to reduce personality to an absence of body odor, fresh breath and white teeth. Or, we can refuse to read the Bible in the spirit that it demands: we can do this if we are angry enough, or hate filled enough, or ignorant enough, or indifferent enough. Then, as Buber indicates, we will find what we are looking for – our own true selves. As the old adage has it, if a monkey looks in, he must not expect a sage to be staring back at him.

¹ For Kierkegaard's views on Sectarianism as "false ... faith", see Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974) 89.

² Frye refers to this "suppressive" tendency in fundamentalism as "a totality uncritical response [which] is bound to create a latent hysteria in the believer's mind, leaving an impression that there are aspects of his mind that do not agree with much of what he says he believes, but that they are being internally shouted down or rationalized into silence.

"In the more extroverted 'literalists' one may see hysteria in the staring glazed eyes, the loud overconfident voice, the forced heartiness that accompany so much expression of conviction on this level." See Northrop Frye, "The Dialectic of Belief and Vision" *Shenandoah* 39, no. 3 (1989): 47-64. Rept. in *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays, 1974-88*. Ed. Robert D. Denham (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1990) 98.

³ For instance, when writing on the relationship between Kierkegaard's aesthetic writings and his "decisive religious works" (Translator's Introduction 19), Walter Lowrie intimates that both types of writing are necessary to Kierkegaard's exposition on faith. "Hence there exists indeed no paradox for faith in its perfection [as described in the decisive religious works], but for the human individual who is in process of becoming the paradoxical [which is to be described aesthetically or not at all] cannot be avoided without arbitrarily limiting the spiritual process" (17).