

covenant community and with common characteristics in its various local manifestations. Moreover, it is clear that all the different churches—whether within the New Testament or throughout church history—represent manifestations of this one church only insofar as they rightfully claim a New Testament basis. Our concern is unity in diversity and not diversity in contradiction.

4

INTERPRETING THE BIBLICAL MODELS OF THE CHURCH

A HERMENEUTICAL DEEPENING OF ECCLESIOLOGY

Edmund P. Clowney

Habbakuk, a prize-winning multi-media production by the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship in the United States, uses images projected on five screens to dramatise the text of the prophet. In the midst of wrap-around symbols and sounds the viewer may at times experience disorientation. Perhaps his vertigo may be shared by the theologian who seeks to interpret the teaching of Scripture concerning the church of God. On the screens of Holy Writ an overwhelming variety of symbols, images, and metaphors crowd upon one another. The church appears as a flock of sheep, a marching host, a temple and a field, a vine and a pillar. More than eighty of these figures for the church have been catalogued and examined by Paul Minear.¹ Nor is the profusion queued up for cataloguing. Figure blends with figure; the building grows (Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5); the city comes from heaven dressed as a bride (Rev. 2:2). The buzzing, blooming garden of figures may delight the preacher seeking vivid word-pictures, but what is the theologian to make of them?

The question has become particularly urgent in Roman Catholic theology since Vatican II. ‘The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church’, *Lumen Gentium*, much revised from the initial draft, departs from an exclusive focus on the ‘body of Christ’ figure to speak of ‘the people of God’ (chap.2).² It also provides a section on the variety of images used in the O.T. and the N.T.: ‘Taken either from the life of the shepherd or from cultivation of the land, from the art

1 1. Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia 1960) 28.

2 2. Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, N.Y. 1975, reprinted 1980, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids) 350–426. For a discussion of the drafting and revision process, see Herwi Rikhof, *The Concept of Church: A Methodological Inquiry into the Use of Metaphors in Ecclesiology* (London 1981) 13–38.

of building or from family life and marriage, these images have their preparation in the books of the prophets.’³

Following Vatican II, Catholic theologians have been divided on the question as to whether the ‘people of God’ image has replaced the body of Christ as the central model in *Lumen Gentium*, whether the two images are now to be combined, or whether the body of Christ remains the working model for Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Since the Pope declared in *Mystici Corporis*: ‘If we would define and describe this true church of Jesus Christ—which is the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church—we shall find no expression more noble, more sublime or more divine than the phrase which calls it “the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ”’,⁴ it should cause no surprise to find its pre-eminence stoutly defended.

Yet the discussions that *Lumen Gentium* has occasioned raise an even more fundamental issue for biblical hermeneutics. How are we to understand the wealth of metaphorical language in Scripture? Figurative statements about the church are, of course, only selected by that topic from a vast range of figurative language in the Bible. By focusing on the church, however, we may raise general questions as they apply to one group of figures. Since we need a better understanding of the biblical doctrine of the church as well as of biblical hermeneutics we may profitably consider the two subjects in relation to each other.

A. UNDERSTANDING METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE

Herwi Rikhof has done this from within Roman Catholic theology in *The Concept of Church*, a book that carries the descriptive subtitle, *A Methodological Inquiry into the Use of Metaphors in Ecclesiology*.⁵ He analyzes the theological discussions of the figures used in *Lumen Gentium*, provides a careful examination of contemporary writing about metaphor (as it applies to his purpose), and defends his conclusion as to the mechanism and function of metaphor in theology. He maintains the meaning of metaphorical expressions in religious language but argues that it is the task of theology to paraphrase metaphorical language in theoretical statements that unpack the cognitive content of the metaphorical descriptions.⁶ The church, says Rikhof, may be formally defined as ‘the *communio* of the faithful’.⁷

As Rikhof’s work demonstrates by its methodical scholarship, a host of issues must be faced to come to conclusions about the interpretation of biblical metaphors.

1. Extreme Positions

At one extreme we find rhetoricians who view metaphors simply as stylistic adornments. This view finds the metaphor in the word rather than in the expression as a whole. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines metaphor as ‘the figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is

3 3. *Lumen Gentium* I:5 (Flannery, *Vatican Council* 353).

4 4. Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi* in Claudia Carlen, ed., *The Papal Encyclicals 1939–1958* (Wilmington, N.C. 1981) 37–62 as cited in Rikhof, *The Concept of Church* 45, and in Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, N.Y. 1974) 27.

5 5. (London, Shepherdstown, W.Va. 1981).

6 6. See, for example, his summary paragraph on p.205.

7 7. p.233.

transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable'.⁸

This view sees metaphor as the result of substitution. You may wish to say that a man eats too much. Instead you say that he is a pig. Since the context, an affirmation about a man, shows that the full sense of 'pig' cannot be meant, the interpreter searches for some secondary or derived use of 'pig' that will fit the context. He finds it in the common association of greedy eating with the pig, and concludes that he is meant to understand that the man is a glutton.

Why, then, did not the communicator say what he meant in the first place? Why require the receptor to do a double-take? Various reasons may be given. Perhaps the more vivid language will keep the hearer awake. The fleeting vision of the man in question undergoing a porcine metamorphosis could be mildly entertaining. Or perhaps the stimulus is more to analysis than to imagination. We like to work puzzles, and the quick solution of this one makes the hearer a satisfied participant in the language game.

In any case, the substitution view focuses on the word and makes a strong case for the definable meaning of metaphorical expressions. At the same time, it is a case against their necessity. We need only insert the language for which the metaphor is substituted and we have the meaning without the metaphor.

If metaphor has only a rhetorical justification, its use in scientific language may well be challenged. Max Black describes the scorn of the French physicist Pierre Duhem for the models used in British physical theory. Duhem considers Faraday's model of electrostatic action to be a fantastic assemblage of glued rubber bands; he concludes that theory for the English physicist is 'neither an explanation nor a rational classification, but a model of these laws, a model not built for the satisfying of reason but for the pleasure of the imagination. Hence, it escapes the domination of logic.'⁹

Duhem's objection to models in science would apply with greater force against the use of substitution metaphors in scientific language.

Yet even when a metaphor is defined in terms of the use of a word rather than in terms of the predication of a sentence it may function as more than a rhetorical decoration. C. S. Lewis proposed a useful distinction between a master's metaphor and a pupil's metaphor.¹⁰ In the first, a teacher who understands what he wishes to communicate uses a metaphor to make it vivid and concrete (or to assist communication in some other way). In the second, a 'pupil' who does not understand a subject struggles to grasp it by using the analogy of metaphorical expression. When Jesus says, 'I am the door', he understands what he wishes to express about his unique role in admitting people to fellowship with God and with others who have been brought into that fellowship. His is a master's metaphor. But we could imagine someone trying to understand how diversity of spiritual gifts could produce unity in the church. 'How

8 8. Max Black cites the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition in his essay 'Metaphor' in *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca 1962) 31.

9 9. *ibid.* 234. The quotation is from Pierre Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, trans. Philip P. Wiener (Princeton, N.J. 1954) 81.

10 10. C.S.Lewis, 'Bluspels and Flalansferes', in *The Importance of Language*, ed. Max Black (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1962) 36–50.

can the church be like that?’ he might ask. ‘Oh, I see’, he could exclaim, with a flash of insight, ‘the church is not a collection of cards, it is a *body!*’

As Lewis points out, the master can dispense with his metaphor and express his meaning directly. But for the pupil, the metaphor is indispensable. He cannot paraphrase it because he cannot find any other means of expressing the understanding for which it is the key.

The metaphor in this case functions as a model. It organizes and redescribes a state of affairs by an analogy. The fictional model of people being organs in a physical body offers a new way of interpreting how they relate to one another in the church. As a model, the figure is more than a picture. It is a simplified structure that serves to relate and interpret what could not otherwise be grasped.

Since metaphors and models depend upon the function of analogy, involving both identity and difference, there are those who would go to an opposite extreme. Rather than limiting metaphor to dispensable decoration, they would extend it to cover all language and thought. Sallie TeSelle urges that metaphorical language does not simply have a place in human knowing, but that it is ‘the human method of investigating the universe’.¹¹ Indeed, metaphorical groping describes the movement of the human organism in all its areas of discovery, whether they be ‘scientific, religious, poetic, social, political or personal’. The basis of the movement is ‘undoubtedly erotic’, the desire to be united with ‘what is’.¹² The human organism is itself the great metaphor that makes all understanding autobiographical. We ‘figure’ the unknown with ourselves. Herwi Rikhof objects to Te Selle’s definition of metaphor, and to the vagueness of her sweeping claims. His key objection, however, is the absence of criteria. If all thought is metaphorical, ‘everything is possible and everything is permissible, which leads to a Christianity void of content and rightly denounced as ideology’.¹³

Indeed, the very fact that metaphorical expression can be made a subject of argument and that sweeping claims can be made for it would seem to show that metaphors do have a place, and do not fill the entire horizon of language and thought. Without an accepted order of reality to which conceptual language refers, the deviation that constitutes the metaphor could not be recognized.

Still another position regarding metaphor denies that all language is metaphorical, but affirms that theological language is necessarily metaphorical. Alan Richardson says: ‘Much depends on our understanding of the necessarily symbolical character of all theological language. It would surely be wiser to say that such a phrase as “the body of Christ” (meaning the church) is used realistically, ontologically, and *therefore* metaphorically or symbolically or analogically.’¹⁴

One of the commonplaces of post-Kantian theological thought has been that our language for describing the noumenal cannot operate with the categories used by scientific thought in

11 11. Sallie McFague TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia 1975) 59.

12 12. *ibid.* 58.

13 13. Rikhof, *The Concept of Church* 141.

14 14. A. Richardson, *Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London 1958) 257. Cited in Minear, *Images of the Church* 21.

analyzing the phenomenal world. Kant developed his critical philosophy to gain a secure base for Newtonian physics in the face of the skepticism of David Hume. At the same time, he sought a separate epistemological ground for reflection on God, freedom, and immortality. His refutation of the classic proofs for the existence of God was an effort to show that theoretical categories could not be used for the transcendent.

The Kantian dualism has broken down from both sides. On the one side, theological liberalism has made painfully evident the consequences of divorcing Christian faith from scientific fact and historical understanding. Christian belief hangs upon the truth-claim made for the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the other side, the positivistic understanding of Newtonian physics has dissolved. The physicist finds himself compelled to recognize the inadequacy of his models and to debate the function of metaphor and analogy in the paradigms around which scientific research is organized.¹⁵

To be sure, the Kantian division is not healed in contemporary phenomenology on the one hand, or logical positivism on the other. For logical positivists religious talk may be seen as a language game that we play according to our arbitrary rules without reference to the God who is there. Phenomenology as adapted by Rudolf Bultmann rejects ontology in the biblical sense. For Bultmann the biblical conception of God in heaven is mythological. The meaning of the myth is to be found in our existential decision.

In any case, Christian theology must challenge all immanentism. From the assumption that human experience must be our only starting point we cannot give an account of either that experience or of the God who gives it. For that reason we cannot be content with philosophies that deed a playing field to religion provided that it keeps in bounds and knows its place (whether mythological or metaphorical). To say this, of course, does not answer the question as to the place of analogy in our created understanding. Nor does it deny that there is distinctiveness to religious language. 'But religious language is distinctive not because it deals with some narrow, peculiar subject matter, nor because it is properly used only in certain restricted areas of life. It is distinctive precisely because it is presuppositional, and thus demands authority over all life.'¹⁶

One other sweeping claim about metaphorical language should be noted. It is sometimes said that the Bible reflects an imagistic culture that is alien to our analytic and scientific understanding of life.¹⁷ This may be taken to be the difference between Eastern and Western thought, or between ancient and modern thought, rather than the difference between religious and secular thought. At its extreme, this approach may liken Hebrew thought to the 'primitive

15 15. This is evident in the issues raised by Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago 1970). See the analysis by Paul Feyerabend, 'How to Defend Society against Science', in Ian Hacking, ed., *Scientific Revolutions* (New York 1981) 156–167. Kuhn's position is debated in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge 1970).

16 16. John M. Frame, 'Christianity and the Great Debates' (Course syllabus, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia n. d.) 24.

17 17. Paul Minear discusses the problem briefly, noting 'the radical discontinuity between the mind of the New Testament and our own mind.' He refers to 'the archaic mythology of the New Testament with its fantastic concepts of heaven, the angels, the demons, and hell—all repugnant to the scientific world views of modern churchgoers' (*Images of the Church* 16, 17).

mentality' imagined by anthropologists before the days of field experience. Those ancient Hebrews, it was thought, could not distinguish the individual from the collective personality of the tribe, nor could they distinguish word from event (since *dābār* means both). James Barr has laid to rest the foolishness about Hebrew mentality deduced from the meaning of *dābār*.¹⁸ We may hope that just as anthropologists have gained a profound appreciation for the reasoning ability evident in tribal life,¹⁹ so, too, Bible scholars will continue to produce convincing evidence of the wealth of discursive thought that the Scriptures contain. The book of Romans contains many images, but they are embedded in a conceptually coherent structure of analysis and reasoning.

Whatever difficulties interpretation may encounter in relating 'meaning-then' to 'meaning-now', the two horizons share perspectives common to human beings made in God's image living in a world God created. When the experience of God's salvation is also in common both horizons come under the rainbow of God's revelation.

2. Metaphor and Meaning

Before we turn to biblical figures for the church we should draw together some key observations on metaphor and meaning. Some of these points have already been stated in setting aside the sweeping assumptions we have just considered.

First, the metaphor is found in the sentence, not in a single word. The 'substitution' view, as we have seen, finds the metaphor in an improper word that has been inserted. Instead of saying, 'He is a glutton', we say, 'He is a pig'. But as Rikhof points out, this understanding of metaphor confuses usage with use.²⁰ Dictionaries define word usage; they cannot define or describe possible use. The metaphor appears in the use; the terms of a metaphorical statement must carry their normal reference for the metaphor to convey its meaning. Indeed, if a term is used in a trite metaphor, it may acquire an unusual meaning that the dictionary will list. 'Pig', for example, in Webster's Seventh Collegiate Dictionary has among its definitions, 'one resembling a pig' and '*slang*: an immoral woman'.²¹ When we use the word 'pig' in one of its possible dictionary meanings (established by usage) we are no longer speaking metaphorically, if metaphor is word substitution.

In so brief a metaphorical expression as 'he is a tiger', it may seem that the metaphor is entirely in the word, for if another word is substituted the metaphor may disappear. 'He is aggressive' is not metaphorical. When the metaphor is more complex, the substitution paraphrase becomes more difficult, although not impossible. The prophet Amos cries, 'The lion has roared; who will not fear?' He proceeds to give a paraphrase: 'The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?' (Amos 3:8). But the complexity becomes overwhelming

18 18. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London 1961). See chap.2, 'The Current Contrast of Greek and Hebrew Thought' (8–20) and 'Dabar "Word, Matter"' (129–140).

19 19. For example, Paul Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (New York 1927). So, too, Claude Lévi-Strauss speaks of 'the false antinomy between logical and pre-logical mentality'. 'The savage mind is logical in the same sense and the same fashion as ours, though as our own it is only when it is applied to knowledge of a universe in which it recognizes physical and semantic properties simultaneously' (*The Savage Mind* [Chicago 1966] 268).

20 20. Rikhof, *The Concept of Church* 69.

21 21. (Springfield, MA 1965) 640.

when Jesus says, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, he cleanses it, that it may bear more fruit' (Jn. 15:1, 2).

The image of the vine as it is used in the sentence recalls the prophetic figure of Israel as the vine and God as the vinedresser (Isa. 5:1–7). The adjective 'true' in John can mean the real in contrast to symbol or type. It therefore controls our understanding of the metaphorical expression. Jesus is the true Israel, and God's care plants and nurtures him. Only as his disciples are united to him are they part of the true Israel of God. As soon as we begin to paraphrase, however, we become aware of how much more is implied. The metaphorical expression relates the Father to the Son, and the disciples to both. The further thought of the life of the branches coming from the vine is also involved in the original expression. We begin to perceive that the metaphor is not simply a colourful synonym. Rather it brings together two realms of concepts that the rules of language would normally keep distinct. A man cannot be identified with a plant, nor God with a gardener. Rikhof argues that the rules of language are not violated or discarded. To do so would be to produce nonsense, and the metaphor must be distinguished from nonsense as well as from non-metaphorical statements. The rules are not cancelled but relaxed for the time being.²²

The 'openness' of a metaphorical statement, the possibility of an expanding interpretation, is a result of this relaxing of the rules. As the metaphor brings together two conceptual realms, we are invited to explore one in terms of the other. Max Black likens the subsidiary subject (in the example above, the vine and the gardener) to a filter through which the principal subject is seen.²³ The relations of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the disciples are seen in terms of the relations of a vine to its branches and to the gardener who trims them.

As Black points out, the principal subject also interacts with the subsidiary subject. The distinction between Christ and his disciples pushes the hearer to reflect on the distinction between the stem of the vine (to which it is cut back annually) and the branches that grow from the stem.

The metaphor, then, is not found in one word, whether the word be a noun or another part of speech. Rather, the metaphor is formed by the sentence. Paul Ricoeur pushes beyond this, to consider the place of metaphor in discourse.²⁴ In the vine and branches example, our interpretation of the metaphor depends not only on the statements quoted above, but on the context of the discourse of Jesus recorded in John's gospel, and on the universe of discourse that includes the Old Testament background and the use of the metaphor there.

This brings us to a second key observation regarding metaphor. Ricoeur argues that even taking account of the discourse does not adequately account for the function of metaphor. By creating a fictional structure of reference the metaphor may redescribe reality, and in that way express a poetic truth that stands in tension with the truth of ordinary understanding in a way

22 22. Rikhof, *The Concept of Church* 83: 'in using and understanding language metaphorically, the rules governing the use of the sets of concepts or the conceptual realms involved are relaxed for this particular occasion, and on that level a combination is allowed which under normal circumstances would not be permitted.' See also pp. 119–121.

23 23. Max Black, *Models and Metaphors* 41ff.

24 24. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto 1977) 173–215.

that may be compared to the tension in the structure of the metaphor itself. Ricoeur summarizes:

From this conjunction of fiction and re-description I conclude that the ‘place’ of metaphor, its most intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb *to be*. The metaphorical ‘is’ at once signifies both ‘is not’ and ‘is like’. If this is really so, we are allowed to speak of metaphorical truth, but in an equally ‘tensive’ sense of the word ‘truth’.²⁵

Rikhof makes a similar point by describing the purpose of metaphor as a ‘proposal to redescribe reality’.²⁶

One may question, of course, whether so drastic an implication may be attached to the simplest of metaphors. Max Black distinguishes between simple word-substitution metaphors and more complex inter-active metaphors.²⁷ The latter carry a cognitive content that cannot be fully conveyed by paraphrase. Yet even the simplest metaphors exist in the tension of the sentence. In principle they draw together two horizons and propose, however modestly, to redescribe reality.

A third observation is closely related to this: the relation of model to metaphor. Especially since the publication of Thomas S. Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*²⁸ the discussion of the role of models in science has spread far beyond the fields of the philosophy and history of science. In particular, the place of models in theology has become a renewed issue. Do the metaphors for the church in the Bible offer a basis for the elaboration of models that may function in ecclesiology in a way similar to the function of models in science?

Max Black sees models as closely related to metaphors. There is similarity, he says, between the use of a model and of a metaphor—‘perhaps we should say, of a sustained and systematic metaphor’.²⁹ Like metaphors, models in science bring together two separate cognitive domains to produce insight. Models are used in science as instruments for discovery, not just as means for description.

At the same time, Black acknowledges differences between models and metaphors. Metaphor is best limited to relatively brief statements, while the model is extended and elaborated. The metaphor operates with commonplace implications, while the model brings into relation with the principal subject a subsidiary subject that is already framed as a well-knit theory. Black raises a further possible difference when he points out that a scientific model may be checked for validity. A deductive correspondence cannot be expected, but in principle at least the quality of the ‘fit’ can be investigated apart from the pragmatic test of fruitfulness in discovery.³⁰

Rikhof strongly objects to the identification of model with metaphor. He holds that it rests in part on a misunderstanding of metaphor. The ‘extension of meaning’ in a model implies, he thinks, the substitution view of metaphor. He argues that scientific models redescribe reality

25 25. *ibid.* 7.

26 26. Rikhof, *The Concept of Church* 121.

27 27. Black, *Models and Metaphors* 38ff.

28 28. See note 15.

29 29. Black, *Models and Metaphors* 236.

30 30. *ibid.* 238.

in a way that is not metaphorical. The scientific imagination, whether operating in the field of perception or of reality beyond perception is seeking ‘to reach a scientific explanation, a theory of causal mechanism’.³¹ Precisely in the area of reality that can never be experienced (the area of metaphysics) we cannot visualize or represent. What is necessary is not metaphor, but precise, technical, theoretical language.

Ricoeur, on the other hand, sees an analogy between models in science and metaphor in poetry. In scientific language, ‘the model is essentially a heuristic instrument that seeks, by means of fiction, to break down an inadequate interpretation and to lay the way for a new, more adequate interpretation.’³² With Black, Ricoeur sees the model as an instrument of discovery, using a rational method with its own principles. In using the model, the scientific mind is not being distracted by images, but it is given an instrument to try out new relationships that have their rationale in an isomorphism of relationships between the original domain and the domain described in the model. Since the domain of the model is not constructed by deduction from that which is to be explained, but has its own coherence, the ‘approximate fit’ of the model situates it closer to metaphorical language than to pure deduction.³³

Further, the scientific model involves a ‘redescription of reality’. The model enables us to see that which is to be explained in a different light. There is danger, of course, that the redescription will be carried too far by adopting a provisional model as the ‘real’ explanation. Maxwell first proposed ‘an imaginary fluid’ as a model to explain an electrical field. He described it as ‘a collection of imaginary properties’ including incompressibility. Later he and others began to speak of ether in a realistic idiom.³⁴ But the mistake in supposing that ether existed was not a necessary consequence of the model that was used. Nor was the original model the hypothesis that such a fluid existed.

With Black, Ricoeur sees the literary parallel to the scientific model not in the brief metaphor but in its extension: the allegory or tale of fiction. He appeals to Aristotle’s analysis of tragedy. Tragic poetry, Aristotle said, is an imitation (*mimesis*) of human life, but this imitation passes through the creation of a tale (*mythos*), which has a structure and order not found in the dramas of daily life. The *mythos*, Ricoeur suggests, is metaphorical much as a model is. He compares it to the ‘root metaphor’ of which Black speaks, a master metaphor, or archetype that stands as a model, offering a network of organization in terms of which we may gain a new perspective on what we seek to understand, the events of life. The model of the *mythos* is at the service of the redescription, the *mimesis*. The ‘imitation’ is the denotative dimension of the *mythos*.³⁵

Ricoeur uses the parallel of metaphor with model to bring to light a further implication of metaphor, the concept of ‘metaphorical truth’. He presents this not only as a defensible but as a necessary implication of metaphor, springing from its redescription of reality. At the same time he clearly shows the tension that must exist between the metaphorical redescription and the description that it replaces or seeks to disclose. In the vast range of metaphorical expressions presenting the relation of God with his people the concept of ‘metaphorical truth’

31 31. Rikhof, *The Concept of Church* 159.

32 32. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* 240.

33 33. *ibid.* 242.

34 34. Black, *Models and Metaphors* 226, 228.

35 35. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* 244, 245.

seems to meet us on every hand. The ‘redescription of reality’ that shows God, then Christ, as the Shepherd and us as the sheep provides such rich insight that we often lose sight of its metaphorical structure. Then we learn, for example, that oriental shepherds were known to sleep across the only opening of a stone sheepfold where wood for a door was not available. Jesus’ statement ‘I am the door’ after he has identified himself as the good Shepherd suddenly acquires fresh metaphorical power.³⁶

B. METAPHORS FOR THE CHURCH

1. Richness of Metaphorical Expression

With these observations on metaphor and meaning in mind, let us consider the question of scriptural metaphors for the church. If we classify them in terms of their subordinate subjects rather than in terms of the aspects of the church that they reveal, we see that the major spheres of life have been harvested. Paul Minear remarks on the ‘diverse origins of the analogies: in home life, in wedding customs, in farm and lake, in city streets and temple, in kitchen and in courtroom, in ancient legends and contemporary events’.³⁷ Certainly the major areas of human life are drawn from: family life, for we are described as the family of God (Eph. 3:14), his sons and daughters (Deut. 14:1; Hos. 1:10; Isa. 43:6; 2 Cor. 6:18) and therefore brothers and sisters in our relations to one another (Matt. 12:49, 50; 23:8; 1 Jn. 4:21); community life, for the tabernacle and temple symbolize God’s dwelling in the midst of his people (1 Ki. 8:12, 13, 27). Marriage is used, for Israel appears as the unfaithful bride of Yahweh (Hos. 2:14–20) and the N.T. church is presented as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:32). The language of covenant uses the figure of the suzerainty treaty to describe the bond that God establishes with his people (cf 1 Sam. 11:1; Exod. 24:7, 8). The world of agriculture is well represented: bread and wine (1 Cor. 10:16–18), the vine and vineyards (Jn. 15:5; Matt. 21:33–44), the fig and olive trees (Mk. 11:13, 14; Rom. 11:17–24), God’s field and his planting (1 Cor. 3:9), the sowing and the reaping of the Lord (Matt. 13:1–30; Jn. 4:35). Often linked with agriculture is the world of construction. The church is the house and temple of God (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:16, 17), an edifice built on a rock (Matt. 16:18), the pillar and ground of truth (1 Tim. 3:15), God’s building of living stones (1 Pet. 2:3–5).³⁸ The very organism of our bodies becomes a major metaphor, for we are members of the body of Christ, formed to minister to one another in union with him.

As we review the plethora of images, we must remember that these are not simply word-metaphors to be substituted for ‘Christ’ or ‘church’. Rather, they represent worlds of human experience. Here a distinctive principle comes to view in the understanding of Christian faith. The worlds of human experience reflect man’s own nature, for he is made in the image of God. The principle of analogy, so fruitful in the operation of our thought, is not an alien mold stamped upon a meaningless universe. Rather, analogy is fruitful because God has established a universe with analogical structure.

36 36. cf Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids 1976).

37 37. Minear, *Images of the Church* 221.

38 38. For the use of these images see Paul Minear, *ibid.* chap.2.

Further, as we consider the scriptural metaphors for the church, we find, as Paul Minear rightly insists, that they are always directly theological.³⁹ That is, they continually relate the church to the triune God. The church is not simply a body as the citizens of a Greek city might be a body; it is the body of Christ. Israel is not just a people, one among the peoples of the earth; it is the people of God. The church is a house or a temple, not as an architectural image in itself, but as the dwelling of God, his habitation in the Spirit.

The God-relatedness of the figures is more consistently perceived if we recognize the structure and operation of metaphor. We do not have only images or pictures of the church. We have metaphorical affirmations in which the daily realities of life in the created world are brought into a tensive but fruitful relation to the realities of God's revelation of his name and his works.

By recognizing this principle we can better understand the flexibility and interfacing of the metaphors concerning the church. The body metaphor, for example, is closely connected with the temple metaphor (1 Cor. 6:19). This is not the case because of an extension of the organic figure in itself. The way in which the diverse functions of the individual members contribute to the unity of the body does not suggest that the body is a dwelling to be inhabited. Rather, it is the relation of the body of Christ that opens the metaphor in that direction. So, too, the relation of the body figure to cohabitation (1 Cor. 6:15–20) and to marriage (Eph. 5:23, 28–32; 1 Cor. 11:3) finds its explanation not by way of word substitution, but by way of metaphorical discourse in which the life of the body is drawn into relation with Christ and his union with the church.

A further implication of the 'metaphorical truth' aspect of scriptural metaphors is the difficulty that appears in distinguishing the literal from the metaphorical as the world of the metaphor rises from the inorganic and the organic to the highest relationships of human life. To speak of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit is still to use a metaphor; it is obviously metaphorical to speak of the church as the bride of Christ. But when Paul says that the members of our bodies are members of Christ the metaphorical element in the expression is much less obvious. Such is the case, too, with the figure of the church as the family of God or the people of God. Evidently there can be danger in ignoring the 'tensive' character of the metaphor, or forgetting that the expression is metaphorical, or of ignoring the scriptural context of the world of the metaphor. Precisely because a metaphor carries emotional as well as cognitive content, precisely because the scriptural metaphors reach into the world of daily experience and are applied to the affairs of daily life, it may be easy to forget the common understandings of family and societal structures that form the basis of the subordinate subjects of the metaphors. For example, we may be puzzled to find 'father' rather than 'king' in correlation with 'kingdom' in the gospels. We forget that the father image in the metaphor of father applied to God is the patriarchal father who is the final law and governor as well as progenitor of the tribal unit.

We have seen something of the richness and flexibility of the metaphors for the church in Scripture and we have noted how important it is to perceive metaphorical use in context and not to think narrowly of word-metaphors.

2. Metaphors and Models of the Church

39 39. *ibid.* 223.

We may now focus on the question of major metaphors of the church and their relation to models in ecclesiology. As we have seen, two metaphors for the church are used in a prominent way in the *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II. 'Body of Christ' and 'People of God' are metaphors that have been used as models. Yet when Avery Dulles designates the major models in Roman Catholic ecclesiology, he does not work directly or exclusively from the scriptural metaphors. The models he examines are: the church as institution, as mystical communion, as sacrament, as herald, and as servant. He sees these models as representing different mind-sets having wider application than to ecclesiology. Dulles develops the models with a view to serving the cause of Roman Catholic ecumenical dialogue. He is committed to theological pluralism, believes the Roman Catholic church has really allowed this more than it may recognize, and hopes that by describing these models dispassionately he may encourage others to see that, 'by a kind of mental juggling act, we have to keep several models in the air at once.'⁴⁰ His listing of pros and cons in the book makes it clear that he has preferences among the models, but he would argue that each has value as a perspective on the church.

The pluralist argument does not actually square with Kuhn's description of the use of models in science. Pluralistic theologians regularly appeal to the wave and corpuscular models in the scientific theories about light. Yet Kuhn's study of the history of science is not an account of how discrepant models learned to live together in scientific theory. Rather Kuhn's thesis is that scientific revolutions are brought about when one model or paradigm in science is succeeded by another. A paradigm is established in relation to key experiments. It provides the framework in which facts are interpreted and sets the agenda for 'normal science'. When the paradigm begins to break up it is never abandoned, according to Kuhn, until a new one is offered to take its place. A period of transition follows during which scientists shift to the new paradigm.⁴¹

Dulles, too traces a somewhat similar development in the history of Roman Catholic ecclesiology. The institutional model he sees as deeply rooted in the Middle Ages but much strengthened in the Counter-Reformation. The strengthening came about by a 'conservative' movement in the church. Dulles does not deal directly with the history of the challenge to Roman Catholic ecclesiology by the theology of the Reformation. The institutional model was succeeded by the 'mystical body' model, often combined with the sacramental. The 'herald' model brings in, belatedly enough, some aspects of reformation ecclesiology in neo-orthodox form, and the servant model represents the challenge of World Council of Churches theology to the Roman Catholic church.

Certainly a survey of the history of the competitive models does not reassure us as to the skill of theologians in keeping a half-dozen balls in the air at once. Indeed, we may fear that the best jugglers are ecclesiastical politicians like one of the drafters of *Lumen Gentium* who told Edward Schillebeeckx: 'We have intentionally formulated some texts in an ambivalent way, so that the minority can accept the principle of collegiality.'⁴²

40 40. Dulles, *Models of the Church* 8.

41 41. Thomas S. Kuhn, *Structure passim*.

42 42. Rikhof, *The Concept of Church* xii.

When Schillebeeckx objected that the minority of traditionalists would use their official positions to put their interpretation on the ambiguous texts, he was told, 'Compromise is the only way to reach a degree of consensus'.⁴³

Certainly we all must acknowledge a vast pluralism of metaphors regarding the church in the Bible. This does not necessarily indicate that we must work with a pluralism of models, however. That may depend upon our understanding and use of a model. Paul Minear says about the figures of the church: 'No one figure can be selected as the dominating base line.'⁴⁴ In his judgment no one figure of the church will serve as an adequate model.

As we have seen, a model offers a redescription of reality. It offers organization that incorporates what is known and by analogy suggests exploration that promises new understanding.

'Root models' or archetypes as described by Max Black have their rationale as exclusive models. They serve the purpose of providing a framework. Such models must seek to incorporate other models within themselves. When they can no longer do this they will be replaced. Those working within a model will tend to extend its boundaries, to carry its basic figure as far as possible to cover areas that seem alien to its idiom.

This has happened in the various models used for the church. For example, the figure of the body for the church serves beautifully to describe the relation of Christians with diverse gifts to one another. It may also serve to show the collective growth and maturing of the church in the life of Christians together. But it is an awkward model to use for the missionary expansion of the church. In the organic realm of plant life the figure may include this by the rather drastic image of grafting. So Paul speaks of the grafting of the wild olive branches into the cultivated olive tree (Rom. 11:16–24). But the hellenistic world knew nothing of bodily organ transplants, and the notion of the body growing by feeding on the nations would scarcely be an appropriate metaphor for world missions!⁴⁵

Catholic theologians who prefer the model 'body of Christ' to 'the people of God' often defend their choice by arguing that the people of God model is essentially O.T. in its provenance, while the 'body of Christ' is a distinctively N.T. figure. Reformed theologians have favoured the 'people of God' image partly because of its comprehensive reference, uniting O. T. and N. T. believers. The development of 'people of God' as a model has also been advanced by the reformed doctrine of the covenant, a figure that can be applied to marriage and to the bonds of friendship as well as to a people united under a suzerainty treaty. Yet here, too, the figure must be pushed beyond its normal limits to serve as a model for the relation of the triune God to the church. It is awkward to express sonship or divine dwelling in strictly covenantal terms, even though covenantal theology at its best has well described how the covenant is transformed as well as fulfilled in the new covenant and union with Christ.

Models may also be used eclectically, of course. It is quite possible to think of images like the body of Christ and the people of God as major metaphors without assuming that they be used as archetypes providing a framework for the whole of ecclesiology. The interrelation of

43 43. *ibid.*

44 44. Minear, *Images of the Church* 222.

45 45. Minear disputes the observation of Ernest Best that the body figure does not include the thought of expansion or service (*ibid.* 239f).

such major metaphors will then become a significant theological task. Such interrelation may sometimes be accomplished in the idiom of the metaphor itself. The apostle Paul does this when he relates the organic figure of the body to the figure of marriage by means of the concept of bodily union: the O.T. image that man and wife become ‘one flesh’ (Eph. 5:31; Gen. 2:24). The interrelation may also be done in theoretical language that makes no direct use of metaphorical expressions.

On the other hand, there are combinations of metaphors that violate the ‘grid’ of the original metaphorical predication. For example, Anders Nygren uses the ‘body of Christ’ figure to suggest that just as a body without a head is dead, so a head without a body can accomplish nothing.⁴⁶ The suggestion that Christ is helpless without the church would surely never have occurred to the apostle Paul. It arises as a deduction from an improper combination of two distinct metaphors: the image of the head and of the body.

Paul uses the term ‘head’ (κεφαλή Hebrew *rosh*) to describe the supremacy of Christ over all things and all ages (Eph. 1:22; Col. 2:10). His usage is shaped from the O.T. in Greek, where κεφαλή is associated with ἀρχή in translating the Hebrew *rō’s*. The ‘head’ has primacy, origination, honour, authority, summation. Here usage has so faded the original metaphor that there is no necessary implication whatever that the head stands in any organic connection with the body. Christ is head of all powers in heaven and earth as well as head of the church (Col. 2:10; 1:18). Neither the universe nor the powers are thought of as the body of Christ.⁴⁷ Even when Christ as ‘head’ is brought in close connection with the body the independence of the metaphor remains. When Paul describes the members of the body of Christ, he does not hesitate to use the eye and the ear as sample members of the body. If he thought in composite terms, of Christ as the head and the body as the torso, he would not have chosen parts of the head to illustrate members of the body. Efforts to explain the physiology of Paul’s supposed composite metaphor in Eph. 4:11–16 have been in vain. How does the body grow up into the head? How is the body framed and knit together by the head? The point is that Paul’s image of the church as a body is the image of a whole body, head included, a new man in Christ. Christ is the head over the whole body as the husband is the head over the wife (cf 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23). Only by keeping the metaphors distinct can they be properly understood.⁴⁸ Paul does not conceive of Christ the head of the church after the fashion of the ‘Head’ in C. S. Lewis’s novel, *That Hideous Strength!*

The harvest of metaphorical teaching is to be reaped, not only in preaching and teaching, but also in theology. But the effort to construct one model as an archetype from a scriptural metaphor has not succeeded. It is conceivable that a particular metaphor could be so used, but we begin to see the dangers that would threaten the project.

46 46. Anders Nygren, *Christ and His Church* (Philadelphia 1956) 89–100. Nygren qualifies this. It is shockingly put in *Mystici Corporis Christi* (par. 44), where ‘The head cannot say to the feet: I have no need of you’ is applied to Christ the Head needing his members!

47 47. Lucien Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul* (New York 1959) 338–341. Cerfaux opposes W.L. Knox, *St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles* (Cambridge 1939) 160ff., and others.

48 48. See Cerfaux, *The Church* 370; Pierre Benoit, ‘Corps, Tête et Plérôme dans les Epîtres de la Captivité’, *RB* 63 (1956) 26; Stephen Bedale, ‘The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles’, *JTS* 5 (1954) 211–215; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids 1975) 376–387; Yves M.-J. Congar, *Sainte Eglise* (Paris 1964) 29.

The formation of an archetypal model requires a distinct process of construction. The metaphors of Scripture are employed occasionally, not systematically or comprehensively. The metaphor that would be extended for use as a model must be such that other scriptural metaphors and non-metaphorical statements can be included in it. It must also be such that it suggests new ways of understanding the riches of scriptural teaching about the church.

In the process that constructed models in the past drastic alterations were made. Yves Congar, in an essay on defining the church, calls attention to the differences between those using 'the body of Christ' as a model for defining the church and the exegetes who were concerned with the N.T. passages. (The exegetes, Congar notes, recognized the separation of the 'head' metaphor from that of the body.)⁴⁹

In the traditional Roman Catholic 'body of Christ' theology, as represented by *Mystici Corporis*, there are included the concepts of the Spirit as the 'soul' of the body, of the body as sacramental, and of the church as hierarchically organized, on the assumption that the body is hierarchically organized.⁵⁰ This is carried to the point of representing the pope as the head of the body in his role as the vicar of Christ.⁵¹ The sacramental view of the church is, of course, connected with the Roman Catholic view of sacraments. As the bread of the sacrament incorporates the heavenly presence in the earthly, so does the church incorporate the presence of Christ as his mystical body.⁵² Christ's incarnation is continued not only in the elements on the altar, but also in the church. The emphasis put by some theologians on the 'people of God' metaphor at Vatican II was an effort to reduce the hierarchical and sacramentalist interpretation that the body of Christ figure had received.

As Paul Minear shows,⁵³ the apostle Paul did not think of the 'body of Christ' in application to the church as a physical body, as though it represented the temporal aspect to be supplemented by the Spirit as the heavenly presence. The body is spiritual, constituted by the presence and gifts of the Spirit.

The dangers of reconstructing a metaphor into a model are increased as one model is isolated from others. We have seen the awkwardness that comes when a model is stretched to include teaching that it cannot readily 'code'. But if an isolated model is *not* stretched, an imbalanced view of the church will result. Certainly the institutional view of the medieval church described by Dulles fell into this error. The figure of the kingdom, misinterpreted in the doctrine of the 'two swords', was made the basis for viewing the church as the city of God in a fashion that made it an ecclesiastical counterpart to imperial Rome. The often quoted

49 49. Congar, 'Peut-on définir l'église?', in *Sainte Eglise: Etudes et approches ecclésiologiques* (Paris 1964) 29.

50 50. *Mystici Corporis Christi* in Claudia Carlen, ed. *The Papal Encyclicals 1939–1958* (Wilmington, N.C. 1981) 37–62.

51 51. *ibid.* par.40, 45: 'That Christ and His Vicar constitute one only Head is the solemn teaching of Our predecessor of immortal memory Boniface VIII in the Apostolic Letter *Unam Sanctam*; and his successors have never ceased to repeat the same.' Cf also par.44.

52 52. See Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Chicago 1974) 78 n.15. As late as the eleventh century, the 'mystical body' meant the eucharist. When it was used of the church it 'initially simply emphasized the traditional doctrine that the Eucharist signifies the Church and the ecclesial body is symbolized by the Eucharistic body.'

53 53. Minear, *Images of the Church* 238.

dictum of Cardinal Bellarmine was that the church is a society ‘as visible and palpable as the community of the Roman people, or the Kingdom of France, or the Republic of Venice’.⁵⁴ One wonders whether the comparisons are merely illustrative or whether the secular empire came close to being a model for the Rome of the Papal States and even Vatican City.

In a curious way the temple also became a model for the medieval church. A sacramental theology might be incorporated into the model for the church in one locality as well as for the church universal. The cathedral at Chartres gave overwhelming architectural form to the sacramental mysteries at one place where the mystery was made visible. Would any worshipper there in the days of its glory think of the church as anything but a temple? We need not go back to medieval Chartres to find the church understood in the model of a temple! What is more common among contemporary Protestants than to speak of the building as a ‘church’?

C. THEOLOGICAL USE OF METAPHORS FOR THE CHURCH

Our review of the effort to derive an archetypal model of the church from one of the metaphors has certainly not covered all the possibilities, but a case against the effort has been taking shape. We have noted the deficiencies and dangers of making such major models as ‘body of Christ’ or even ‘people of God’ into archetypes.

1. How Metaphors are Understood

How, then, are metaphors to be grasped and related? For Christians who acknowledge the authority of the Word of God, it is clear that the metaphors of Scripture are in no different position from any other forms of inspired text. They are to be understood in their context by careful exegesis. We have already seen the check that Scripture puts on certain reconstructions of the metaphorical expressions.

Since Scripture characteristically blends images together, exegesis will be sensitive to both their independent structure and their interrelation. For example, when Jesus speaks his foundational word regarding the church to Simon Peter as recorded in Matthew 16, we find in one short pericope the figures of building, assembly, rock foundation, the gates of Sheol, the keys of the kingdom, and binding and loosing, not to speak of the messianic role that Jesus fills as the eternal Son of God. Surprisingly, the literature of the Qumran community has shed light on many of these figures, not only by the community’s own use of similar metaphors, but by the prominence that the Qumran scrolls give to metaphors from the O.T.⁵⁵ We are reminded, too, that ἐκκλησία is the Septuagint translation of *qāhāl*, and we are led back to the great assembly at Mount Sinai where God constituted his covenant people before him after the exodus deliverance. It is not just a word that makes this connection. (James Barr can rightly protest the habit of making indefinite words definite so that they may bear a technical meaning.)⁵⁶ Rather, it is the interplay of the messianic activity of building and that which is

54 54. Dulles, *Models of the Church* 32.

55 55. See E.P. Clowney, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church* (Phillipsburg, N.J. 1979) 87–92.

56 56. James Barr, *Semantics* 122. Barr attacks the linguistic error of ‘unjustified determination.’

constructed, not just the tabernacle of David that was fallen down (Amos 9:11; Acts 15:16–18), but the people of God in the latter days. As in the Qumran literature, the community is founded upon the truth, truth not accessible to the flesh, but revealed of God. The confessing apostle, articulating by revelation the distinctive faith of the Christian church, is made a rock of foundation.⁵⁷

The image of the rushing flood of death and destruction issuing forth from the gates of Sheol is one that the Qumran writers took from the O.T. The church that Jesus establishes is built upon the rock and the floods cannot carry it away (Isa. 28:14–18).⁵⁸

The keys of the kingdom are given to those called to exercise authority in the church (Matt. 16:18, 19; 18:18). The church is therefore brought into close relation to the kingdom of heaven, a relationship that must be clarified by careful examination of many other N.T. passages.

We cannot here consider the exegesis of this passage,⁵⁹ but perhaps it is already evident that we cannot interpret scriptural metaphors by imaginatively applying our own associations. The ‘commonplace’ associations of our culture may be quite different from those that existed in the original context of the Scriptures. When Jesus spoke of his ‘assembly’, the associations evoked by ἐκκλησία or *qāhāl* were ‘the great day of the assembly’ at Sinai, the feast-day assemblies at the temple, and national assemblies of covenant renewal. They were not the associations of a modern interpreter who might think of an assembly as a New England town meeting, or as a gathering of students at a secondary school to hear the principal’s announcements.

Another example is Paul’s use of the ‘body of Christ’ figure. Scholars have sometimes expended more effort in seeking the origins of this figure than in exploring its meaning. Almost every part of Paul’s religious and cultural background has been isolated as the source of his use of the body figure. The Stoics described the cosmos as a σῶμα; in gnostic mythology the body of Anthropos, the primordial man, was cosmic; rabbinical speculation spoke of the nations of the world springing from parts of Adam’s body. H. Wheeler Robinson found the origin in the Hebrew conception of corporate personality. Many would point to the body figure in the sacrament of the Lord’s supper: ‘This is my body’ (cf 1 Cor. 10:17; 11:24).⁶⁰

We cannot categorically exclude any of these proposals, since we do not know what contacts may have first suggested the figure to Paul. But we can observe Paul’s use of the figure and recognize what is decisive in its formulation. Paul sees Christ as the second Adam, the head of a new humanity. The principle involved is that of covenantal representation. The ‘corporate personality’ explanation of Robinson does not adequately distinguish the covenantal representation of the O.T. from the Oriental and Greek notions of embodiment. The O.T. reveals God as the personal creator and sets aside all pantheistic identification. The living God is not a cosmic ocean, the womb and tomb of the universe. Fellowship with God has the pattern of lord and servant, husband and wife, father and son. The images are

57 57. See E.P. Clowney, ‘Note on *Sodh* and *Yesodh* in Qumran Literature,’ in *Biblical Doctrine* 183–184.

58 58. *ibid.* 106–107.

59 59. I have attempted this in the work just cited.

60 60. *ibid.* 150ff.

personal, not material. Even the ‘embodiment’ of descendants in a patriarch is not simply physical, because it takes place before God and by his appointment.

Markus Barth well summarizes this principle:

Yet it is a peculiarity of Israel’s writings, that only the one God in his free election, not different gods, or men, or human deeds, or criteria decides who has to be respected or distinguished as representative of the many. Israel’s chosen men are representatives of the people only along with the call to speak, to act, to suffer for *God*, as representatives of *God’s* will, in the midst of the people. This is the theological nature of biblical representation.⁶¹

The key to Paul’s use of the metaphor ‘body of Christ’ lies in this representative principle as it is applied to the *literal* body of Christ. Paul speaks of our ‘being reconciled in the body of his flesh through death’ (Col. 1:22). He also refers to Christ’s physical body when he says we are ‘dead to the law through the body of Christ’ (Rom. 7:4). Whoever partakes of the sacrament unworthily is ‘guilty of the body and blood of the Lord’ (1 Cor. 11:27). Here the crucified body of Christ is in view. The apostolic doctrine is that Christ ‘bore our sins in his own body on the tree’ (1 Pet. 2:24). We are justified by the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9).

The close connection in Paul’s thought between the physical body of Christ (who died as our representative) and the church as the body of Christ is evident in Eph. 2:13–16. The representative efficacy of Christ’s death is emphasized. Gentiles are brought near ‘in the blood of Christ’. The enmity between Jew and Gentile is abolished ‘in his flesh’. Jews and Gentiles are reconciled ‘in one body unto God through the cross’.

Notice the possible reference of the ‘one body’ in that last clause (v 16). Does the ‘one body’ refer to the church, the one new man of v 15? Or does it refer to the physical body of Christ (‘the blood of Christ’, v 13; ‘in his flesh’, v 16)? The difficulty in answering this question demonstrates how closely Paul draws together the physical, representative body of Christ and the figure of the church as his body. Since we are saved by union with Christ, a union that is both representative and vital, we can understand that Paul calls those who are joined to the body of Christ by that very name. Christians are one in Christ’s body; they are one body in Christ (Rom. 12:5); they are a body of Christ (without the article: 1 Cor. 12:27). They are *the* body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).

Having this root for the metaphor, Paul elaborates it. He makes use of the organic simile of the body to describe the way in which the ministry of differing spiritual gifts does not divide, but rather unites Christians in fellowship. The organic simile provides the key for that unity.

Again we see the necessity of exegesis in the interpretation of these metaphors. Only in the full discourse in which the metaphor appears will we find the proper context for its interpretation.

61 61. Markus Barth, ‘A Chapter on the Church—The Body of Christ’, *Int* 12 (1958) 139 n.19.

Another instance of this is the interpretation of the temple image in the Gospel of John. John presents the fulfilment of the tabernacle/temple in Jesus Christ.⁶² In him is found the reality of which the O.T. figure of God's dwelling with man was the type.

2. Metaphors in the History of Revelation

As we take account of the setting of metaphors in biblical discourse we will be struck by their richness and the orchestra-like of their interrelation. Paul Minear uses the apt figure of the kaleidoscope to point up the striking difference between looking at a figure in isolation (like a chip of coloured glass from a kaleidoscope) and looking at the ever-changing kaleidoscopic patterns of the figures as we find them in the interplay of biblical use.⁶³

The patterns of biblical revelation, however, do not change at random like the patterns of a kaleidoscope. They are ordered by the progressiveness of the history of redemption and of revelation. Not only must we consider the context of the immediate discourse in which a metaphorical expression appears, we must also take account of the horizon of the history of redemption in which the discourse is found. Major metaphors found in the O.T. are transformed as they move forward to their fulfilment in Christ. Various metaphors are interrelated; the patterns that they form unfold through the epochs of the history of redemption.

Take, for example, the grand concept of the dwelling of God with his people. The garden of Eden contains the tree of life with its symbolism, but the garden itself is symbolical. It is the 'garden of God' (Ezek. 28:13; 31:8), not only a prepared place for *man's* dwelling, but a place of *God's* dwelling where he may walk in fellowship with the pair created in his image. The motif of the garden as a sanctuary is heightened by the appearance of the cherubim at the east gate of the garden to keep the way of the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). The symbolism of the embroidered cherubim on the veil of the holy of holies (Exod. 26:31) reflects this background, for the tabernacle (and the later temple), with gates to the east, symbolize the way of approach to God's dwelling.

As the history of redemption unfolds, the 'dwelling of God' theme is developed in the contrast between the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9) and the stairway of Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:10–22). In both cases the phrase is used of the top reaching to heaven. Such was the goal of the tower builders (Gen. 11:4); such was the realization of the stairway in Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:12). The parallel is closer than one might suppose; the *sullam* of the dream was not a wooden ladder but a stone stairway.⁶⁴ We may think of both as reflecting the ziggurat concept in which the tower offered a stairway for the gods.⁶⁵ God does come down at Babel (Gen. 11:7), but in judgment. Men cannot in pride construct their place for God's dwelling.⁶⁶ But

62 62. E.P. Clowney, 'The Final Temple', *WTJ* 35 (1973)156–189.

63 63. Minear, *Images of the Church* 226–227.

64 64. See KB 660; William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the O.T.* (Grand Rapids 1971) 257.

65 65. See André Parrot, *The Tower of Babel* (New York 1955) for a defence of the religious character of the Mesopotamian ziggurat: a small temple was built at the top of the stairway, a larger one at the bottom.

66 66. See Edmond Jacob's review of Parrot in *RHPR* 30 (1950) 137–141. 'In the O.T. man does not mount toward God but by an express command, as Moses did on Sinai; and he does

God comes down to Jacob in grace, to affirm his promise of covenant mercy.⁶⁷ Because God does come down the stairway to stand over him, Jacob says, 'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.' He is afraid, and adds, 'How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven' (Gen. 28:16, 17).

The theme of God's dwelling with his people is central to the book of Exodus. In Mount Sinai Moses received the plan for the tabernacle, God's tent of dwelling to be pitched in the midst of the camp of Israel. But while Moses was on the mountain the people were feasting before the golden calf. In the judgment that followed, God threatened to abandon the tabernacle project. If he were to tabernacle in the midst of this stiff-necked people, surely they would provoke his judgment and he would consume them (Exod. 33:3, 5). Instead, God promised to go before them in the presence of his angel, drive out the Canaanites and give them the land of his promise. In place of the tabernacle in the midst of the camp, Moses was to pitch a tent of meeting outside the camp where God would be available for counsel (Exod. 33:7–11).

Moses rejected that proposal in despair: 'If your presence does not go with us, do not carry us up hence' (Exod. 33:15). It was not enough for God to go before them in his angel. He must go in the midst of them, reveal himself to them, be present as their God whose dwelling is among his people. Moses prayed, 'Show me, I pray, your glory' (Exod. 33:18). God heard the prayer of Moses, declared his name as Yahweh, the God of grace and truth, and the tabernacle was built.

The symbolism of the tabernacle had two aspects, flowing from this central figure of God's dwelling in the midst of a sinful people. One was the aspect of a barrier, of insulation as it were, between the holy God and sinners. The veils cordoned off the holy of holies, the holy place, and the courtyard around the tabernacle. The other aspect was that of a way of approach. Through the sacrificial blood of the great altar and the water of the laver the priests could enter the holy place. The high priest could enter the inmost sanctuary on the day of atonement to represent the people in approaching the mercy-seat, the golden cover of the ark of the covenant that symbolized God's throne.

The cloud of glory was the divinely provided symbol of God's presence and dwelling. It appeared over the tabernacle and again over the temple in Jerusalem. In Ezekiel's vision it was seen departing to the east and returning again (Ezek. 10:18, 19; 11:23; 43:2). The return of the cloud of glory, symbolizing the dwelling of God with his people, is part of a broad use of the symbolism of the temple in the prophets. The restoration will be so unimaginably full and glorious that it will become a renewal. God himself will come to his people and the glory of his coming will surpass all description. The very pots of Jerusalem will be like temple vessels, the least of its citizens will be like David, and in the place of King David will be the angel of the Lord's presence (cf Isa. 19:18–25; Zech. 14:20–21; 12:8, 9).

not do it without trembling. Yahweh, to descend to the earth, does not have need for men to construct for him ways of access' (p. 140).

⁶⁷ 67. The Hebrew word in Gen. 28:13 should be translated 'beside him' rather than 'above it'. The same phrase is found in the second appearance of God to Jacob at Bethel in Gen. 35:13, 'God went up from beside him.' The preposition '*al*' ('above' or 'upon') is used to describe someone standing above one who is recumbent.

The history of redemption in the O.T. carries along a rich pattern of figures centering on the dwelling of God with his people. This leads to the N.T. revelation. God came at last to dwell with men: not in a tent, nor in a temple of stone and cedar, but in the temple of the body of the Son of God (Jn. 2:19). In the first chapter of his Gospel, John refers repeatedly and explicitly to Exodus 33, 34. 'The law was given through Moses ...' (v 17). 'No man has seen God at any time' (v 18). John reminds us that Moses saw only God's back. 'The word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth' (v 14). John alludes not only to the cloud of glory over the tabernacle, but to Moses' vision of the glory of the Lord, and to the Lord's proclamation of himself as 'full of grace and truth' (Exod. 34:6; Jn. 1:14).

Further, the history of redemption is more than a carrier for the symbolism of the cultus. It furnishes in its occurrences metaphors that point to the fulfilment of God's promises. The exodus, for example, is more than an act of social and political deliverance. It is a sign of the full and spiritual salvation of the Lord. As Walther Eichrodt points out, the prophets themselves see the exodus as typical of God's great future deliverance when he will again come marching through the wilderness as the saviour of his people: 'Prepare in the desert a highway for our God!' (Isa. 40:3).⁶⁸

The N.T. interpretation of the Old is grounded in this typological structure.⁶⁹ The O.T. history is not complete in itself, but provides analogies that anticipate the greater realization of the New. Jesus is not just another David or Solomon, but the one whose calling is prefigured by the Lord's anointed in the O.T. 'A greater than Solomon is here' (Matt. 12:42).

We may represent the history of revelation as a horizontal line. Along that line concepts such as the 'dwelling of God' motif move forward. Many figures and metaphors are used to represent these concepts. The figures add to the elaboration and communication of the concepts. We may therefore project a line of symbolism in which a particular event, ceremonial, or role points to the concept being revealed. In the fullness of revelation the concept reaches its realization in Jesus Christ. Therefore wherever the line of symbolism exists in the history of revelation, the line of typology can also be validly drawn. There are no concepts that drop out of the plan of redemption. In one way or another all point forward to Christ. A concept in the first stages of revelation we may call C1 (C to the first power). That concept as fulfilled in Christ is Cn (C to the nth power). The significance of the event for our understanding is not to be read directly across the bottom of the rectangle. That does not take seriously the presence or absence of symbolism in the O.T. text, nor the development of the history of revelation. Similarly, the full significance of the concept C1 will escape us if we fail to carry it forward to its realization and fulfilment in Christ.

Paul Ricoeur likens a scientific model to tragic poetry.⁷⁰ The fiction of the plot of the tragedy corresponds to the extended metaphor of a scientific model. This is the myth that is retold in the poetry. In the retelling, however, there is *mimesis*, imitation of real life. The story is told with details taken from daily life with which we can identify. This imitation in the tragedy Ricoeur compares to the redescription of the model by which account is taken of the

68 68. Walter Eichrodt, 'Is Typological Exegesis an Appropriate Method?' in Claus Westermann, ed., *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics* (Richmond, VA 1963) 234.

69 69. The typical interpretation assumed in the N.T. is studied in Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids 1982).

70 70. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* 244,245.

data it seeks to explain. The power of the poetry is the remodeling of human life on the theme of fate and tragedy.

In a very different way the O.T. accounts model life and its meaning. The O.T. contains stories. These are not myths fleshed out by fictional imagination. They are events in the history of God's dealings with his people. Yet they do have significant form. They show the judgments and triumphing grace of God as he overcomes the unfaithfulness of his people. At the same time these accounts reflect daily human experience. Indeed, they offer matchless descriptions of human life in theological perspective.

Much as we may appreciate these descriptions of human life (the jealousy of Joseph's brothers, the sporting wagers of Samson), we may not understand the significance of O.T. history by isolating this aspect. The 'plot line' is crucial. It is outlined, for example, in Deuteronomy 30. There we learn of the blessings God will give his people, the curses that will follow as a result of their rebellion, and the final restoration, renewal and blessing when God will circumcise their hearts.

The plot line of the biblical 'typos' model differs radically from the Greek 'mythos' model. It is a model of hope rather than despair, of promise rather than fate. Further, because the O.T. tells the story of God's salvation, it presents the work of God in the perspective of his promise. God continually anticipates and foreshadows his final and full salvation in his incarnate Son.

The 'modelling' of the O.T. is the modelling of God's own work. The servants God calls fulfil particular roles that anticipate the Savior he will send. Judges, kings, priests, prophets, suffering righteous men—these all are given, not first as 'examples' to us, but as 'models' showing what Christ must do. They are more than symbols, for in living faith they serve God in their generation, and in faith they are examples to us.

This is the explanation of the problem as to whether the designation of the church as the 'people of God' is a metaphorical or literal description. It is both. The church in both the N.T. and the Old is the people of God, yet O.T. Israel is also a model, a type, in its earthly form, of the spiritual and heavenly reality of the church. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David all participate by faith in that reality, but their history is embedded in the preparatory forms of that time before Christ came. The mystery was hidden from ages and generations to be revealed in Christ and the church of the new covenant.

In the use of metaphors for the church in the N.T. we find a transformation of figures drawn from the O.T. At times the transformation is by way of contrast: for example, the change from the passover meal to the Lord's supper, or from circumcision to baptism as the initiatory rite of the people of God. The sudden discontinuance of the cultic language of the O.T. in the New is explained by the argument of the book of Hebrews.

An appreciation of the history of redemption is needed to be sensitive to both the connections and the dynamic of transformation.

At this point we may ask, 'Does not the passage from promise to fulfilment bring the end to all models and metaphors?' This question is raised in John's Gospel in the upper room discourse. Jesus says that he has spoken to the disciples in 'parables' but that 'the hour comes when I shall no more speak to you in parables, but shall tell you plainly of the Father' (Jn.

16:25). The term translated ‘parable’ is *παροιμία* which means a byword or proverb (2 Pet. 2:22; Prov. 26:11). Aristotle classes *παροιμιαί* as metaphors,⁷¹ and in John’s Gospel (10:6; 16:25, 29) the term refers to figurative discourse. The disciples respond, ‘Now you are speaking plainly, and without figure of speech [*paroimia*]’ (16:29).

Friedrich Hauck holds that the future time in view is not Easter or Pentecost, but the *παροιμία* when unconcealed revelation will be given, which will be for the first time fully objective speech concerning heavenly things. When the disciples say that he is now speaking plainly, ‘it is as it were a dawning of this time.’⁷²

Heinrich Schlier in his article on *παροιμία*, the term for ‘plain speaking’, says that the promised time when metaphor and riddle will be past is the time when the disciples will pray in the name of Jesus and receive answer directly from God, the day when the Spirit of truth comes (16:13).⁷³

It is characteristic of John’s Gospel to stress the realization that comes with the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit. Hauck is right in referring the final *παροιμία* to the *παροιμία*, but Schlier properly shows that, according to the discourse of Jesus, it does not wait until then. Rather, the ‘plain speaking’ comes with the Spirit. What is at issue is not the form of the words but their effect. The apostle Paul used great plainness of speech in declaring the whole counsel of God, but that did not cause him to abstain from figurative language. We may recall C. S. Lewis’s distinction between master metaphors and pupil metaphors. We must add, however, another kind of ‘master metaphor’. Jesus spoke in parables with a double purpose. The metaphorical language provided a spur and means of discovery to those who believed, while at the same time the truth was hidden from those who were not prepared to appreciate it (Matt. 13:10–15, 34, 35). To be sure, the disciples were sometimes in this category when they should not have been, and Jesus found it necessary to explain the metaphors to them (Mk. 7:17, 18). In both cases it was not ignorance of the secondary subject that presented the barrier to understanding. The disciples and the Pharisees alike understood the metaphors of sowing, fishing, and vine-tending. It was ignorance of the principal subject that left them baffled.

In the case of the disciples, however, ‘hearing ears’ are given by the blessing of God (Matt. 13:16, 17), and Jesus explains the parables to them. Even when they deserve rebuke, Jesus teaches

The Body of Christ, the Christian, the Church

CHRIST’S BODY IN THE FLESH	THE CHRISTIAN’S BODY	CHRIST’S BODY THE CHURCH
<i>Organically one</i> (the assumption of 1 Cor. 1:13; 12:12)	<i>Organically one</i> 1. May be defiled by one member 1 Cor. 6:15 2. May be cleansed by removing	<i>Organically one</i> 1. May be defiled by one member 1 Cor. 3:17; 5:5, 6, 9–13; cf Matt. 18:5–20 2. May be cleaned by removing the

71 71. *Rhetorica* (Academia Regia Bouissica ed., 1831ff) III,11,1413a, 1414. Cited in Friedrich Hauck, art. *παροιμία*, *TDNT* .5.854.

72 72. *ibid.* 856.

73 73. Schlier, art. *παρρησία*, *TDNT* .5.881.

	the offending part Matt. 5:29, 30; 18:7–9; Mk. 9:43	offending member Refs. above; Jn. 15:2 3. Operates in organic harmony 1 Cor. 12:12–27; Rom. 12:4–8
<i>Indwelt of the Spirit</i> Therefore: 1. A temple Jn. 1:14; 2:19 (Incarnation) 2. A renewed temple Mk. 14:58; Jn. 2:19 (Resurrection)	<i>Indwelt of the Spirit</i> 1. A temple 1 Cor. 6:19 2. A new temple 2 Cor. 5:1	<i>Indwelt of the Spirit</i> 1. A temple Eph. 2:13–22 1 Cor. 3:16, 17 cf. 1 Tim 3:15 2. A new temple 1 Pet. 2:5; 2 Cor. 6:16
<i>Offered for sin</i> Col. 1:22; Eph. 5:2; Heb 9:14 Symbolized in the Lord's Supper 1 Cor. 11:27	<i>Offered in gratitude</i> Rom. 12:1, 2 Discerning the Lord's body in the Supper 1 Cor. 11:28, 29	<i>Offered in gratitude</i> Rom. 15:16 Communion in the Supper 1 Cor. 10:16–18
<i>Raised in new life</i> 1 Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18 As the second Adam 1 Cor. 15:20–28; Rom. 5:15	<i>Redeemed for new life</i> 2 Cor. 4:10; Rom. 8:10, 11 Joined to Christ 1 Cor. 6:15; Eph. 5:30; Col. 1:28 New creation 2 Cor. 5:17 Gal. 6:15	'Fullness' of risen Lord Eph. 1:23; 4:13; Col. 2:9, 10 Joined to Christ as wife Eph. 5:22–33; 2 Cor. 11:2 New Man Col. 3:9–11; Eph. 2:15; 4:24

them ([Mk. 7:18, 19](#)). In Mark's Gospel the insensitivity of the disciples appears in their failure to discern the metaphorical character of Jesus' words (the 'leaven of the Pharisees', [Mk. 8:15, 16](#)) and of Jesus' miracles (as heavenly signs, to be understood in their meaning, [Mk. 8:21](#)). The disciples have eyes but do not see, and ears, but do not hear ([Mk. 8:18](#)). Jesus, however, will restore spiritual as well as physical hearing and sight ([Mk. 7:35; 8:25](#)).

3. Metaphors and Definitions

This consideration of metaphors in the context of redemptive history has brought us back to the basic question. How do we understand the metaphors for the church in Scripture? Are these metaphors irreducible, or can they be paraphrased in literal language? Do they enable us to frame a definition of the church in systematic form, or do they remain distinct perspectives on the church that cannot be translated into one another or into abstract language?

No single metaphor used in Scripture provides an adequate model to incorporate the cognitive elements of all the other metaphors. The two best candidates, 'people of God' and 'body of Christ', demonstrate this by their very juxtaposition, for neither is adequate to express the full content of the other.

We have seen, too, the difficulty in maintaining that all language is metaphorical and therefore that paraphrasing can mean only translating from one metaphor into another. Jesus set about paraphrasing his parables to his disciples in order to reveal their meaning, and the

disciples rejoiced at the promise of his speaking 'plainly' rather than figuratively. If meaninglessness is to be avoided, there must be criteria by which the 'fit' of a metaphor or model can be judged.

Further, even a brief reference to some of the metaphors for the church in Scripture calls attention to the importance of understanding not simply various possible connotations of a metaphor but its strong denotative force. This is revealed as metaphors are developed in contexts of discourse. We are required as interpreters to consider carefully the subordinate subject in its cultural context (Hittite treaty forms, Near Eastern customs in shepherding, a *series* of tabernacle/temple forms, fatherhood in the patriarchal sense). We are also required to observe the direct contextual explications and qualifications (the *true* vine, the *heavenly* Father). These contextual modifications include the placing of the metaphor in the history of redemption. For example, when the seven churches appear as lampstands in the opening vision of Revelation, the metaphor alludes to the furniture of the temple. So specific are the metaphors in the description of the glorified Christ in this vision that they function almost as quotations from the O.T. The metaphors do not form one imaginative *Gestalt*, but accumulate statements regarding the divine glory possessed by Christ.

On the other hand, however, to say that we must perceive meaning in the metaphors, that they are not irreducible, is not to say that they can be readily paraphrased or that their implications can be quickly traced. Andrew Burgess has called attention to the conditions in which a metaphor is understood.⁷⁴ He proposes that 'wherever there is the danger of conceptual confusion we be reminded that a metaphor includes a reference to the person for whom it is a metaphor.'⁷⁵ This carries further the point made by Max Black that a set of 'commonplaces' is assumed about the secondary subject.⁷⁶ As we have noted, the 'commonplaces' of Ezekiel's contemporaries about shepherds, or of Hosea's about fathers, or of Paul's about dogs are not necessarily those of our contemporaries. Further the principal subject may also be misunderstood, as it was by the Pharisees and to an extent, the disciples, in attending to Jesus' parables.

If our theory of metaphors were simple word-substitution, we might demand a simple answer to the question of paraphrase. But since metaphorical statement draws together two horizons, and in a sense, two views of reality, we rightly anticipate that the implications may be open-ended. To paraphrase the central meaning of a metaphor in an understandable way may not be too difficult (even if both the Pharisees and the disciples failed). But to draw out the fullness of meaning may prove to be an ongoing process.

This conclusion cuts two ways. We cannot abandon or regard as illegitimate the endeavour to generalize and systematize the understanding gained from scriptural metaphors. The task of systematic theology is essential for the teaching ministry in Christ's church. This enterprise is not self-sufficient, but rests upon and continually returns to the instruction that Scripture gives in metaphorical language as well as in 'plain speech'. On the other hand, we can never discard the metaphors of Scripture. The metaphorical form is not chaff to be blown away once the wheat of meaning has been harvested. No, the metaphors remain, not only to

74 74. Andrew J. Burgess, 'Irreducible Religious Metaphors', *Religious Studies* 8 (1972) 335–366.

75 75. *ibid.* 364.

76 76. Black, *Models and Metaphors* 40.

compel us to re-check our conclusions, but also to lead us into further understanding produced by the power of their truth.

We may note the way in which the Westminster Assembly *Confession of Faith* forms its definition of the church. It states in non-figurative language whom the church consists of, and then in figurative language what the church is. It does both from two aspects, the church as invisible and as visible. For the church invisible, the figurative terms spouse, body, and fullness of Christ are used. For the church visible, the figures are: kingdom of Christ, house and family of God.

The figures are carefully chosen to express the distinction between the church as God alone forms it and the church as it is made apparent to us. Yet, while these emphases may be shown to be uppermost, the figures cannot be strictly categorized in this way. The metaphor of the house of God, for example, may be used so as to include non-elect people (under the further figure of clay pots for dishonour, 2 Tim. 2:20). But the same figure of the house may also be used to describe the temple of living stones (1 Pet. 2:4), a figure in which a hypocrite would find as little place as in the body of Christ metaphor. (There is no suggestion of surgery on the body of Christ.)

The procedure followed in the Westminster Confession does keep in balance theoretical and metaphorical forms of definition. Apart from the unifying perceptions of theoretical analysis we would be vulnerable to a relativistic pluralism in which any image is legitimate. Krister Stendahl has said, 'Over against stringent logic (the way of thinking of later theology) stands Jewish thinking in images, where contradictory facts and conceptions can be put together in a kind of significant mosaic.'⁷⁷

If we assume that scriptural images present to us contradictory conceptions that cannot be related or reconciled, theological pluralism will be the outcome. We will have not a mosaic but a *mêlée*.

But if the metaphors are ignored, a closed systematic structure will lock us in to definitions that gain a specious clarity at the expense of the rich mystery that is revealed. Yves Congar shows how this has happened. When the church is conceived sociologically as a society with certain rights and powers, it is possible to ignore the scriptural figure of the body of Christ and to view the church as one society among others, a Christian species of a well-known human genus. As Congar says, the 'society' of the church is not distinguished by something that is added to a human social entity. 'It is in that very thing that appears to be relatively in common that the Church is substantially supernatural, and represents a mystery.'⁷⁸

As Minear found in his study of the N.T. images, the dimension of depth in defining the church always appears in its *theological* reality.⁷⁹ The church cannot be understood apart from the person, presence, and work of the triune God. The church is the congregation, in heaven and on earth, of those whom God has united to Jesus Christ through the work of the Spirit and in the fellowship of the Spirit. A God-centred definition of the church must recognize God's

77 77. K. Stendahl in A. J. Fridrichsen, ed., *The Root of the Vine* (New York 1953) 67, quoted in Minear, *Models and Metaphors* 252.

78 78. Congar, *Sainte Eglise* 42.

79 79. Minear, *Images of the Church* 223.

choosing in Christ before the world began, as well as of his begetting ‘us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead’ (1 Pet. 1:3b), and his making us alive who were children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1–10). The term ‘invisible’ is perhaps unfortunate in its suggestion of Platonic idealism, but the Reformers developed it against Rome precisely to defend a conception of the church grounded in the free grace of God.

The church must be understood from the side of God’s presence and work; and the scriptural metaphors emphasize this. The church is a people of God’s own possession, called by him, redeemed by him, assembled to him. It is to be holy because he is holy. It is his house, temple, field; his vine, olive tree; his city and kingdom; his flock. It is the bride and body of Christ, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Yet these same metaphors both allow for and provide for the manifestation of God’s saving work in the world. A definition limited to the theological nature of the church in the narrow sense will not do justice to the structure of the new covenant.

Because of this richness of relation, much of ecclesiology has been occupied with the unpacking of a fuller definition of the church: not only the relation of the church as invisible to the church as visible, but of the church as organism to the church as organization, of the church militant and triumphant, local and catholic—all before the consideration of the Nicene attributes to one, holy, catholic, apostolic church.

To isolate even so rich a concept as communion for as brief a definition as Rikhof proposes—‘the *communio* of the faithful’—is not in the long run the most fruitful course. (Note that the *Westminster Confession* presents a chapter on the ‘Communion of the Saints’ immediately after its chapter on the church.) Definitions and summary statements are more useful if they open into the metaphors as well as gleaning understanding and structure from them.

D. INSIGHTS FOR HERMENEUTICS

In the brief summary we may consider some implications for hermeneutics of this study of metaphors and models in the church.

1. Literal or Figurative?

All interpretation requires an assumption of meaning in that which is to be interpreted. That meaning may be interpreted correctly or incorrectly. The irony implicit in the denial of this is illustrated by Eric D. Hirsch, Jr., who writes: ‘I was once told by a theorist who denied the possibility of correct interpretation that I had not interpreted his writings correctly.’⁸⁰

In biblical interpretation the literal meaning of a passage has been identified with the meaning intended by the author.⁸¹ This is debated: apart from inspiration we must allow for

80 80. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago 1976) 6.

81 81. William Sanford LaSor, ‘Interpretation of Prophecy’, in Bernard L. Ramm *et al.*, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids 1971) 98.

the possibility that the author or speaker did not say what he intended. In the case of inspiration the possibility opens at the other end: he may have said more than he intended, as Caiaphas obviously did (Jn. 11:49–52). Then, too, we must take account of the audience to whom the words were originally directed, and the situation and context of the discourse.⁸²

In any case, the ‘literal’ meaning is usually taken to include figurative language. ‘For example, when a writer or speaker makes use of common figures of speech, a “literal” interpretation accepts the figures of speech as figures.’⁸³

But as our consideration of metaphors has suggested, there are degrees and shadings of metaphorical use. Simple metaphors that could plausibly be explained by word substitution may be taken ‘literally’, but we encounter complex metaphors, discourse metaphors, and models within Scripture (like the tabernacle/ temple and the accompanying cultus). Further, we discover that biblical history, since it points forward to fulfilment in Jesus Christ, is structured prophetically. Its literal meaning as a report of God’s dealings with Israel does not exhaust its significance in the context of the history of redemption. This we have seen in the ‘people of God’ analogy for the church. In a sense, this is not a metaphor and therefore not a type, because there is a continuity between the ‘elect nation’ under the old covenant and the new. Yet the form given to Israel in the O.T. anticipates in its outward structure the spiritual reality of the New Covenant church. Its kingship, its ceremonial cleanness, its inheritance of the land, all this and much more is typical of the blessings given to the new Israel.

We dare not, like Origen and some of his modern counterparts, reject the historicity of God’s redemptive work in favour of its spiritual teaching.⁸⁴ To do so is to reject the historical reality that distinguishes the salvation of the living God. But neither should we miss the *significance* of God’s salvation in its preparatory forms.

In appreciating the depth of God’s revelation we do not reject the literal. Yet we must appreciate that the literal can be taken up in a fulfilment that is more than literal. This is evident in Zechariah’s description of the glory of Jerusalem in the latter days, when every wash-pot will be like a temple vessel, when horses will be wearing the inscription from the high priest’s tiara, ‘Holiness to the Lord’ (Zech. 14:20), and when the lowliest citizen will be as King David. Whom then will the king be like? ‘The house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them’ (Zech. 13:8). The figures are stretched to bursting as they point to their fulfilment in the coming of the Lord (cf Isa. 19:19–25).

The glory of the church as the realization of the O.T. symbolism implies that we are given a key for understanding the figurative language. The key is in Christ himself, who fulfils all the promises of the O.T., who breaks down the barriers in that fulfilment, and who seals in the gift of the Spirit all the blessings promised to Abraham, Moses, and David (Gal. 3:13, 14, 29; Phil. 3:3; Acts 15:14–18).

The structure of metaphor brings together two world views and forces us to rethink what we think we know by requiring us to use a perspective that seems absurd. Yet what metaphor

82 82. Vern S. Poythress, ‘Analyzing a Biblical Text: Some Important Linguistic Distinctions’, *SJT* 32 (1979) 113–137.

83 83. LaSor, ‘Interpretation’, 99.

84 84. Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (New York 1963) 82ff.

does in its distinctive and radical way is characteristic of all significant learning. We continually bring together diverse horizons, see the significance of meaning as we find it set in a new context. We ought not to be dismayed, therefore, by the abundance of figurative language that God uses in his revelation. In part, we must learn from figures what we can grasp in no other way. The ‘pupil metaphors’ are our windows on God’s world.

We may be reminded, too, that God who has made us in his image has created a world in which analogy abounds. Vern Poythress has described the cosmos as God’s choric poem.⁸⁵ It is not only poetry and painting that reflect the allusiveness of God’s created analogies. All human thought, science too, must take account of the echoes that resound through the structures of the universe and resonate in the hearts of God’s image-bearers.

2. Hermeneutics and Imagination

When the depth of metaphorical expression is appreciated we will not think of metaphors as mere decoration. We will appreciate their power. Rikhof repeatedly insists on the distinction between religious and theoretical language.⁸⁶ His argument is that metaphorical language is religious but that it must be paraphrased for theoretical expression. Theology is to be cognitive, not emotional.

Certainly metaphors are emotionally moving. Paul presents the church as a pure virgin to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). He warns a man tempted to fornication that he cannot take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot (1 Cor. 6:15). God’s temple, the church, is not to be defiled (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). These metaphors do carry emotional overtones—i.e. an emotional response that is evoked by the secondary subject may be transferred to the principal subject. Indeed in the parables this transference is often focal. Jesus expects indignation at the behaviour of the wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21:40); he pictures vividly the joy of the shepherd, the woman, the father in finding that which was lost (Lk. 15).

Yet in the secondary subject that which evokes emotion is understanding of a situation. The transference is legitimate where, as in these parables of Jesus, the analogy of the principal situation calls for a similar or greater response. The theoretical understanding implied in interpreting the parable is that which can secure the intended response. This is the case with Nathan’s parable to David (2 Sam. 12:1–15).

The divorce that Rikhof assumes between theology and preaching does not do justice to either. Theology involves analysis, clarity of statement, and economy of expression. Yet theology is not an intellectual exercise divorced from the service of God. It is done before God and unto God. The scriptural ideal is wisdom, an ideal that unites the theoretical and practical in the ordering of thought and life in God’s truth. Theology explores the Word of God to understand its significance for belief and life. It is done in the service of the Word of God and through the illumination of the Spirit of God, but it is done in a situation that God has providentially ordained: *our* situation, in which some truths of revelation will be perceived more readily than others, and in which our own understanding of ourselves and our world will be reshaped as we struggle to understand and interpret the Word God has addressed to us.

85 85. Unpublished article, ‘Science as Allegory’.

86 86. Rikhof, *The Concept of Church* 4–6.

Again, the fact that the metaphors for the church stretch our understanding beyond our ability to paraphrase them exhaustively is not to be seen as a defeat but as a challenge. We cannot discount the imaginative force and emotive power of metaphors as irrelevant to hermeneutics. The whole impact of the figures contributes to the understanding that we gain from them. As we are challenged in our view of the world and ourselves by the metaphor/model of the body of Christ, we reflect on the implications of this intimate organic union with him and with one another. Our imagination is not freed to re-direct the metaphorical expression into other channels, but to pursue the depths of the biblical analogy. Indeed, since preaching engages in this pursuit before God and in address to the people of God, preaching not only has need of theology, it also develops theology, as Luther and Calvin have shown us.

3. Metaphors and Theology in Context

We have seen that metaphors are to be understood and interpreted in context. The metaphor itself draws together two dissimilar contexts. Further, it is to be interpreted in the context of discourse; first, the immediate discourse of the text in which it is found, and then the wider discourse of the author's other writings and the situation in which he wrote. Hirsch has distinguished between meaning and significance, recognizing both the necessity of establishing the original meaning of a text and interpreting its significance in any number of broader contexts.⁸⁷ This distinction is important for biblical interpretation.

Only by a complete rejection of the Bible's claims for itself can we use it as a picture file from which to clip illustrations to fit our own copy. Biblical interpretation must understand biblical figures in their immediate context. At the same time, the wider contexts of the progressive history of redemption must be taken with equal seriousness. Only when this is done may we legitimately explore the significance of the revelation for our own context.

Unfortunately, under the buzz word of 'theology in context' all of these principles may be violated. For example, the historical metaphor of the exodus from Egypt may be taken from its context by ignoring the stated purpose of God's exodus deliverance.⁸⁸ True, God did declare, 'I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you go upright' (Lev. 26:13). But God's purpose of deliverance is that 'I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people' (Lev. 26:12). God delivers Israel from bondage to Pharaoh so that Israel might serve him in his covenant (Exod. 4:22, 23). God not only brought Israel out, but brought them unto himself (Exod. 19:4–6). The theology of Exodus is not simply a theology of liberation, but of redemption. As we move through the covenantal history of the O.T. and into the New, we find that Israel's failure to perceive the meaning of redemption lay at the root of all its troubles. The political deliverance was not an end in itself, but a sign and claim of a new relation with God.

In much the same way the medieval institutional ecclesiology, reaffirmed in the Counter-Reformation, both isolated and distorted one image: the church as city and kingdom, with the sad consequence acknowledged by Dulles and others.⁸⁹

87 87. Hirsch, *Aims* 2–6.

88 88. This tendency is described and critiqued by Rosemary Ruether, *Liberation Theology* (New York 1972) 10ff.

89 89. Dulles, *Models of the Church* 40–42.

But if it is not desirable, is it not nevertheless inevitable that every cultural context will feature one metaphor of the church, convert it into a model and ignore less pleasing or convenient images? Does this not account in a measure for denominational divisions? Must we not expect that people in social or political bondage will take most seriously the liberation aspect of the exodus figure? Do not the reflections of tribal life in the life and laws of Israel provide an attractive model in tribal areas of Africa, where legalistic mores are inherent in tribal culture?

Or may not cultural factors operate by contrast: will not a factory worker be drawn to the freedom of the church as fellowship of the Spirit, just as the chaotic Middle Ages sought structure and stability in a hierarchical institute?

Our inquiry into the structure of metaphors has led to the acknowledgment that two horizons are brought unexpectedly together in the working of the metaphor. For its interpretation the horizon of the secondary subject must be regained if it is to serve its valid metaphorical function. This, and not a contemporary understanding of the secondary subject must be used as the 'grid' in interpreting the meaning of the metaphor.

Yet interpretation is possible because regaining the horizon of the secondary subject is possible—possible because of our common human nature made in the image of God, because of our common universe created by God and the resulting commonalities of human experience, and because of the continuing work of the Creator Spirit in maintaining our life and our understanding.

Often, however, the secondary subject will be closely akin to knowledge and experience in the context of a particular culture. Or the principal subject may relate directly to a need that is perceived or to a structure that is acknowledged in that culture. In this way cultural perspectives assist in the hermeneutical task. They bring to light positively or by contrast the *meaning* that the figure had in its original context and the *significance* that it has in the context of the contemporary culture in question.

This is the contribution of 'contextualized' theology; to recognize it is to acknowledge that every cultural context will offer both barriers and avenues of approach in a formal sense, even though the sinner's heart is hostile to the truth of God.

But the task of biblical interpretation is to support the proclamation of the whole counsel of God. Indeed, the interpreter carries a particular responsibility to present those metaphors that may be misunderstood or found offensive. Only in this way can balance be gained, and only in this way can the misinterpretation of favourite models be avoided.

The denominational divisions of the church do exist in part because of hermeneutical failure. Consider the effects of those isolated and distorted models of the church that Dulles describes in his survey. Think not only of the sacramentalist and hierarchical model of the Middle Ages, but of the universalist 'servant church' of ecumenical theology. So long as one metaphor is isolated and made a model, men are free to tailor the church to their errors and prejudices. The answer, however, is not a pluralistic theology grounded in a hermeneutical principle of relativism. The answer is found in comparing Scripture with Scripture, relating metaphor to metaphor, and gaining that growing understanding that leads to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace as we discern one body and one Spirit in one hope of our calling.