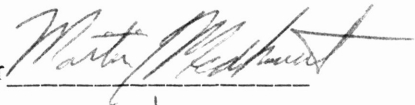


**A Metaphorical Analysis of New Testament Church Typology  
in Selected Sermons of John Wesley**

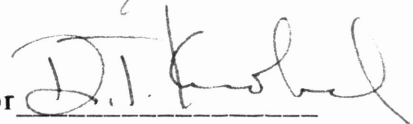
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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### PROBLEM AND JUSTIFICATION

John Wesley had a tremendous impact on eighteenth century religion in both England and America. His reform movement in the Anglican church resulted in the labeling of a sect of "people called Methodists." The evangelical fervor of his ministry reached across the ocean to America, where it blazed the Christian trail on the western frontier. The success of his ministry is indisputable. A key factor in that success was his oratorical ability. It is the goal of this research to understand the rhetorical dynamics generally, and the use of metaphor specifically, in a selected number of John Wesley's sermons with respect to New Testament typology of the "Church."

The objective of any sermon is to relate scripture to the audience in a relevant, applicable, and meaningful manner. Such a presentation is inherently biased by the preacher's interpretation of the scripture. While the *Bible* is the common source, the perspective of the reader colors the understanding of scriptural significance. For this reason, it is critical that scripture be understood as clearly and completely as possible before a particular perspective can be assessed within its historical context.

John Wesley was selected for this study because of his historical impact on religion in eighteenth-century England and America. He is a particularly good subject for this kind of research because he left a well-defined rhetorical trail through his published sermons. His legacy springs more from his abilities as an orator and as an evangelist rather than from his theological contributions. Nevertheless, his theology is best presented through his sermons.

## Wesley's Audience and Theology

The eighteenth century in England was a period of supreme intellectual achievement. Names such as Newton, Locke, and Purcell dominated the period as scholarly pursuits were highly valued. As William Hansen notes, "the educated eighteenth century mind was inclined toward reason and common sense and away from emotion and enthusiasm. Even theological concepts and doctrines were subject to empirical examination. Skepticism emerged to replace blind faith based upon revered authority."<sup>1</sup>

Experience was considered a teacher and was highly regarded. The implications of this belief contributed to Wesley's doctrine of perfectibility. Hansen asserts:

The reasonable man joined Locke in abandoning the Platonic doctrine of innate ideas in favor of the doctrine of experience, which led to a belief that in the conditions of society the roots of good and evil could be found. A better society would make better men. A rational readjustment of social institutions could make men virtually perfect in the distant future. This doctrine of perfectibility of mankind, in vogue during the century, underlaid nearly all eighteenth century thinking, whether conservative or radical.<sup>2</sup>

Wesley's greatest theological contribution was his doctrine of perfectibility.<sup>3</sup> Christian perfection was slammed by Wesley's contemporaries as temporal and unattainable. To Wesley, however, perfection was an ideal for which one should strive. From this doctrine springs its corollary notion of scriptural holiness. Scriptural holiness was understood as the process of sanctification or striving for Christian perfection.

Another unique contribution of Wesley was his understanding of theological foundations. As the United Methodist Book of Discipline notes, "Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified

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<sup>1</sup>William A. Hansen, "John Wesley and the Rhetoric of Reform," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1972, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, (New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 1972.) p. 326.

in personal experience, and confirmed by reason.”<sup>4</sup> Scripture was considered primary, “revealing the word of God ‘so far as it is necessary for our salvation.’”<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on scripture held Wesley faithful to the Scriptural text. It is important to note that his usage of metaphor is primarily scriptural. Rarely does he engage in novel extensions, and when he does, it is carefully related back to the Biblical text. His emphasis on tradition explains his desire to remain affiliated with the Anglican church for the richness of its history and tradition. Personal experience is also central to his thinking and became a major factor in his theology. The roots of his individualism can be seen here as a statement affirming the importance of personal experience to the understanding of the Christian faith. Finally, reason is emphasized as a means for relating Scripture to wider fields of knowledge. This was especially important to the intellectuals of the eighteenth century.

John Wesley had a great impact on the eighteenth century church, not only as a theologian and scholar, but also as an evangelist. He was a central figure in eighteenth century revivalism in England and America. His contributions are here examined within the context of his relationship to the church.

The problem addressed in this thesis is threefold. First, a body of New Testament "Church" metaphors must be identified. These metaphors constitute the rhetorical storehouse from which Wesley could choose. Secondly, it will be determined which metaphors Wesley privileges and why those metaphors are employed more frequently than others that were available to him. Finally, I will assess how Wesley uses these metaphors to his rhetorical advantage and/or disadvantage within the historical context.

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<sup>4</sup>Ronald P. Patterson, ed., *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville, Tennessee, The United Methodist Publishing House, 1988.) p. 68.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

## METHODS AND PROCEDURES

As the title of this thesis implies, the primary method of analysis is metaphorical criticism. Kenneth Burke defines metaphor as "a device for seeing something in terms of something else."<sup>6</sup> For example, "one body in Christ" is a metaphor for the church in which the church is seen in terms of a body. Metaphor, however, is far more than a simple figurative expression. In expressing a thought or idea, the choice of wording is critical to its communication. That choice often belies a hidden bias in perspective. It is for this reason that the study of metaphor is important to the understanding of the underlying motives of rhetorical communication. To Burke, motives are distinctly linguistic products which are "shorthand terms for situations."<sup>7</sup> Burke writes, "Since we characterize a situation with reference to our general scheme of meanings, it is clear how motives, as shorthand words for situations, are assigned with reference to our orientation in general."<sup>8</sup> So it is that a metaphor, understood as a shorthand term, or motive, reveals a general orientation towards a situation.

### Approaches to Metaphorical Criticism

Metaphorical criticism is a scholarly pursuit designed to discover the fundamental elements of communication and understanding. Several eminent scholars, including literary theorist I. A. Richards, linguists Lakoff and Johnson, and rhetorical theorist Robert L. Ivie use metaphorical criticism as a research tool. Their methods are here acknowledged in brief for their contributions to the methodology of this research.

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<sup>6</sup>Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, (New York, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1945.) p. 503.

<sup>7</sup>Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change*, (Indianapolis, Indiana, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1954.) p. 29.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 31.

I. A. Richards defines metaphor as “the use of one reference to a group of things that are related in a particular way in order to discover a similar relation in another group.”<sup>9</sup> Richards continues, “Our thought process then is metaphoric. When we attribute meaning, we are simply seeing in one context an aspect similar to that encountered in an earlier context. Thus, two thoughts of different things are supported by a single word or phrase and derive meaning from their interaction.”<sup>10</sup> Richards points out the importance of metaphor in the thought process of interpreting the environment. He uses two terms for the discussion of the concept of metaphor. “Tenor” refers to the underlying idea or principal subject of the metaphor (i.e. what is meant.) The term, “vehicle” is the means of conveying the underlying, or borrowed, idea. It is that which the tenor resembles.<sup>11</sup> For example, in the metaphor, “the church is the body of Christ,” the tenor is the church and the vehicle is the body of Christ, an image that attributes the characteristics of a corporate unit to many members to the church.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson approach metaphor from a conceptual standpoint. In their book, Metaphors We Live By, they assert that “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”<sup>12</sup> For Lakoff and Johnson, all understanding is rooted in metaphor. Their publication analyzes certain aspects of human interaction in terms of fundamental metaphorical understanding. Of primary interest in their study is the idea of “metaphorical systematicity.” “The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept,”<sup>13</sup> they

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<sup>9</sup>I. A. Richards, The Philosophy of Rhetoric, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1936.) p. 93.

<sup>10</sup>Richards quoted in Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp, Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric, (Prospect Heights, Illinois, Waveland Press, Inc., 1985.) p. 33.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>12</sup>George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980) p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

argue. In other words, by favoring one metaphor over another, some aspects of the “tenor” are highlighted while others are hidden, or not accentuated. By using a different vehicle, different aspects of the tenor would be emphasized and others hidden.

A third methodology is utilized by Robert L. Ivie. Ivie’s approach is based on Kenneth Burke’s four master tropes. Burke asserts that there are four master tropes--metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony--that guide human communication.<sup>14</sup> Ivie sees all of these as part of metaphor. To Burke and Ivie, metaphor is “seeing something in terms of something else.” Ivie extracts metaphors and categorizes them by theme. Although his primary research area is the rhetoric of war, the same method is applicable when categorizing scriptural text based on its metaphoric content.

The primary analytical methodology employed in this research, however, originates with Kenneth Burke. In his book, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke creates a loose methodology for the analysis of “symbolic action” through “statistical” accounts of “associational clusters.” Symbolic action is essentially metaphor in relation to poetry. By “statistical,” he means symbolic or representative. Burke explains:

Let us suppose that a writer has piled up a considerable body of work; and upon inspecting the lot, we find that there has been great selectivity in his adoption of dramatic roles. We find that his roles have not been like “repertory acting,” but like “type casting.” This “statistical” view of his work, in disclosing a *trend*, puts us upon the track of the ways in which his selection of the role is a “symbolic act.” He is like a man with a tic, who spasmodically blinks his eyes when certain subjects are mentioned. If you kept a list of these subjects, noting what was said each time he spasmodically blinked his eyes, you would find what the tic was “symbolic” of.<sup>15</sup>

He goes on to explain the nature of “associational clusters” and their relationship to statistical analysis and “motives.”:

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<sup>14</sup>Burke, *Grammar*, p. 503.

<sup>15</sup>Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1973.) pp. 19-20.



Now, the work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations. He uses "associational clusters." And you may, by examining his work, find "what goes with what" in these clusters--what kinds of acts and images and personalities and situations go with his notions of heroism, villainy, consolation, despair, etc. And though he be perfectly conscious of the act of writing, conscious of selecting a certain kind of imagery to reinforce a certain kind of mood, etc., he cannot possibly be conscious of the interrelationships among all these equations. Afterwards, by inspecting his work "statistically," we or he may disclose by objective citation the structure of motivation operating here. There is no need to "supply" motives. The interrelationships themselves *are* his motives. For they are his *situation*; and *situation* is but another word for *motives*. The motivation out of which he writes is synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values together when he writes; and however consciously he may go about such work, there is a kind of generalization about these interrelations that he could not have been conscious of, since the generalization could be made by the kind of inspection that is possible only *after the completion* of the work.<sup>16</sup>

The search for New Testament church metaphors was a combination of concordance cross referencing and critical review of scriptural text. A computerized word search program was utilized to locate various key words and metaphoric patterns. Sifting through the amassed information, metaphoric patterns or clusters began to emerge. These cluster patterns then became the object of analysis within their scriptural context. Thus a typology of New Testament church metaphors was created.

In this study, the metaphors of the church in the New Testament were examined within their scriptural context first as literary entities, each individually contributing to the overall New Testament conception of the "church." The King James Version of the Bible was used in analyzing these metaphors to insure accuracy when investigating their application in Wesley's sermons because Wesley himself used the authorized King James Version as his scriptural text. Although many of the images may seem to be so similar that an examination of each individually would be redundant, it is the nuances of perspective within each image that are rhetorically significant.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

The primary focus of this thesis, however, is not the significance of New Testament church metaphors as literary devices, but rather their manifestations as rhetorical motives in John Wesley's sermons. A literary device is reflective of its fixed literary context, whereas rhetorical motives reflect the dynamics of the rhetorical situation. Wesley's choice of metaphors is significant in that it testifies not only to his own conception of the church, but also to his reaction to the rhetorical situation in which he found himself and which he, himself, helped to create. The rhetorical situation is created by the set of metaphors in play in any given situation and reflects the underlying motives present. Thus it is possible for Wesley the theologian to be rhetorically at odds with Wesley the evangelist, depending on the rhetorical situation: audience, occasion, exigences, constraints, and purposes.<sup>17</sup>

Wesley's sermons were selected on the basis of their relevance to the topic of the church. Being an evangelist, Wesley was concerned less with the affairs of the church than with the spread of scriptural holiness. Nevertheless, as a church man, he was forced to deal with the issue of the church to some limited extent.

When reading and analyzing the sermons, it is critical to keep a sense of the rhetorical context. The specific audience as well as the time and place of the presentation are all important in determining rhetorical strategy. The actual metaphoric clusters, then, are seen as part of an overall rhetorical strategy. The choice of metaphors reflects not only Wesley's strategy, but also his intent and bias. Wesley's rhetorical advantage and/or disadvantage can thus be gauged relative to the rhetorical context.

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<sup>17</sup>Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, (1968.) pp. 1-14.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### John Wesley and Methodism

There is an extensive bibliography on the subjects of John Wesley and Methodism. It would be impossible to review all of the works by and on Wesley and Methodism for a project of such limited scope, therefore only the most relevant literature is reviewed here.

Among the biographies of Wesley that were the most helpful in researching his background and character were Stanley Ayling's John Wesley,<sup>18</sup> and Robert G. Tuttle, Jr.'s John Wesley: His Life and Theology.<sup>19</sup> Beyond these biographies is Richard P. Heitzenrater's two volume work, The Elusive Mr. Wesley.<sup>20</sup> This work cast a particularly interesting historical perspective on Wesley by using him as his own biographer in the first volume, and by representing him as he was seen by contemporaries and biographers in the second.

The most helpful book for this research was Albert C. Outler's John Wesley.<sup>21</sup> Outler masterfully outlines Wesley's theology in Wesley's own words by using his sermons, journal entries, and letters. One segment deals with Wesley's view of the church and sacraments. Here, Outler comments on Wesley's doctrines before letting his sermons tell their own story. Another work by Outler, Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit,<sup>22</sup> was a series of lectures delivered to the United Methodist Congress on Evangelism in 1971 at New Orleans. The lectures brought Wesley's evangelical spirit into a modern day context.

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<sup>18</sup>Stanley Ayling, John Wesley, (New York, William Collins Publishers, Inc., 1979)

<sup>19</sup>Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., John Wesley: His Life and Theology, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.)

<sup>20</sup>Richard P. Heitzenrater, The Elusive Mr. Wesley, 2 vol. (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 1984.)

<sup>21</sup>Albert C. Outler, ed., John Wesley, (New York, Oxford University Press, Inc., 1964.)

<sup>22</sup>Albert C. Outler, Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit, (Nashville, Tennessee, Tidings, 1971.)

They were most instructive, especially regarding Wesley's evangelical methods and his understanding of evangelism.

Primary texts were found in Edward H. Sugden's John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons,<sup>23</sup> and Outler's four volume set of The Works of John Wesley.<sup>24</sup>

Regarding Methodism, three texts were particularly helpful. Sydney E. Ahlstrom's A Religious History of the American People<sup>25</sup> placed early Methodism within the context of the American religious scene. Frederick A. Norwood's The Story of American Methodism,<sup>26</sup> gave a good general overview of the roots of American Methodism, but was not particularly helpful with respect to Wesley's influence. The most specific and helpful work found was the three volume set of The History of American Methodism.<sup>27</sup> This work went into great detail about the origins of American Methodism, especially with regard to John Wesley's role in the American church. Beyond a simple chronology with comments, this work accounts for theological concerns that bothered Wesley. Although sometimes excruciatingly detailed, it provided an excellent reference for the topic.

### **Metaphorical Analysis**

As has already been noted, there are several sources in the field of metaphorical criticism which have influenced the work in this paper. I. A. Richards, Lakoff and Johnson, and Kenneth Burke have all contributed to the methodology used in this research.

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<sup>23</sup>Edward H. Sugden, ed., John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons, (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 1983.)

<sup>24</sup>Albert C. Outler, ed., The Works of John Wesley, 4 vol. (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 1986.)

<sup>25</sup>Ahlstrom, 1972.

<sup>26</sup>Frederick A. Norwood, The Story of American Methodism, (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 1974.)

<sup>27</sup>Emory Stevens Bucke, gen. ed., The History of American Methodism, 3 vol. (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 1964.)

I. A. Richards's The Philosophy of Rhetoric, and Practical Criticism<sup>28</sup> both explained Richards's notion of metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson's Metaphors We Live By, was also formative in the understanding of metaphorical criticism. Kenneth Burke, however, had the greatest impact upon the methodology adopted for this research.

Burke's Philosophy of Literary Form established the method of cluster analysis, while his theories on the relationship of metaphor to motive were extracted from his book, Permanence and Change. His book, A Grammar of Motives, laid the foundational understanding of metaphor in its discussion of the four master tropes. Other Burkean works consulted were A Rhetoric of Motives,<sup>29</sup> and Counter-Statement.<sup>30</sup>

### **Theses and Dissertations**

Although there have been several dissertations and theses written concerning John Wesley's general concept and doctrine of the church, none approach the topic from a metaphorical perspective. Indeed, I found only one dissertation which examined his work rhetorically, but that dealt primarily with his rhetoric of reform. Nevertheless, a review of these works provides insight and depth to the specific topic of this thesis.

The most comprehensive dissertation in this field is Ronald Williams's "John Wesley's Doctrine of the Church."<sup>31</sup> Williams asserts that Wesley's view of the nature of the church can be ascertained by examining three images of the church commonly used by Wesley: the Israel of God, the Communion of Saints, and the Body of Christ. For Williams, these distinctions provide a perspective on the church in terms of "the Trinitarian God, who works through the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices of Christ to bring life

<sup>28</sup>I. A. Richards, Practical Criticism. (London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1929.)

<sup>29</sup>Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, (New York, Prentice-Hall, 1950.)

<sup>30</sup>Kenneth Burke, Counter Statement, (New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1931.)

<sup>31</sup>Ronald Gordon Williams, "John Wesley's Doctrine of the Church," Th.D. dissertation, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, 1964.

to the church."<sup>32</sup> While each of these images is well developed and supported by Williams, the choice of these particular images subordinates the scriptural influences on Wesley's doctrine to his theological foundations. It is important to note that Williams' investigation is of Wesley's church *doctrine*; mine is of his church *rhetoric*. Discrepancies in our perspectives can thus be attributed to these differing points of view.

Williams includes in his master image of the "Israel of God" the scriptural metaphors referring to the church as New Jerusalem, the Temple, the Vine and the Flock, the Family of God, and the Household of God. While this mass grouping of metaphors may have been advantageous to Williams in discussing the prophetic nature of the church in Wesley's doctrine, for this rhetorical study, the individual metaphors and their implications are the focus.

It is interesting that Williams would choose the "Communion of Saints" as a significant Wesleyan image. While it is indeed an important metaphor historically in the doctrine of the church, its significance to Wesley does not seem to be derived from any of the scriptural church metaphors. Williams uses the image as a guide in his discussion of the Holy Spirit and its relation to the church.

The third and final image Williams sees as fundamental to Wesley's doctrine is the church as the "Body of Christ." Here, he explores the different roles of the body in the life of the church. The relation to Christ is also of primary significance in this metaphor. This examination of doctrine corresponds particularly well to a rhetorical analysis of Wesley's sermons.

Another thesis, less comprehensive yet nonetheless significant to the topic of my study, is Lawrence L. Dunn's "A Contemporary Analysis of John Wesley's Doctrine of the

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

Church."<sup>33</sup> Dunn asserts that "because of the outworking of [his] spiritual experience . . . Wesley fashioned a new church."<sup>34</sup> In exploring Wesley's writings and reflections on the church, Dunn concludes that unity was indeed a primary motive for Wesley. Nevertheless, he also concludes that

Undergirding all is the concern for the salvation of souls. For Wesley the Church's reason for being is the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers. He believed that even if a church is made up of only two or three believers, its function is to provide spiritual nourishment, thereby enabling the members to witness to the truth of the gospel and to bring others into spiritual union with Christ. This union will include the witness of the Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

Although he does not focus on it, Dunn here recognizes the fundamental rhetorical tension in Wesley's sermons, as the primary motive of unity competes with the evangelical concern for the salvation of souls.

Most significant to the conclusions of this paper, however, is Jack Moore's thesis, "The Relationship of John Wesley's Concept of Holiness to his Concept of the Church."<sup>36</sup> Moore asserts that Wesley's notion of "scriptural holiness" became a "dominant and determinative religious idea" for him.<sup>37</sup> Moore continues:

The preaching of this new and challenging gospel produced the powerful Methodist revival in England. . . . Wesley effectively organized this revival through the Methodist Societies. [He] tried sincerely to keep his new movement within the organized Church of England. He little realized that his religious ideas were to create a community whose inner spirit was ineluctably hostile to ecclesiasticism.<sup>38</sup>

Moore's "inner spirit" of the community is seen, however, not only in the contrast of Wesley's concept of holiness with his concept of the church, but also in his rhetorical

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<sup>33</sup>Lawrence L. Dunn, "A Contemporary Analysis of John Wesley's Doctrine of the Church," M.Th. thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore Kentucky, 1969.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>36</sup>Jack Warren Moore, "The Relationship of John Wesley's Concept of Holiness to his Concept of the Church," B.D. thesis, Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina, 1945.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

approach to the church. As Moore indicates, Wesley's concept of holiness is central to his evangelical efforts. Scriptural holiness is a concept inextricably tied to the individual. Thus, as Wesley preached on scriptural holiness, he was forced to focus on the individual. The ideal of unity was subordinated to the undercurrent of holiness in his rhetorical dealings with the church.



## Chapter II

### THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

#### A METAPHORICAL TYPOLOGY

The first step in this study was the creation of a typology of metaphors available to Wesley in his preaching about the church. The typology was created in order to establish the set of metaphors from which Wesley could choose. The choices he made reveal his rhetorical strategy and give insight into his theological biases.

Four major clusters of church metaphors appear in the New Testament. Every effort was made to identify these clusters within their contexts. The first of these clusters is the agricultural imagery identified most clearly in John's gospel. The metaphors of the vine and the flock are the primary focus of this cluster. Second is the cluster of family metaphors springing from the images of the church as the bride of Christ and as children of God. A third cluster is identified as building metaphors because of their focus on the church as a physical structure such as a temple or household. Finally, the body metaphor is examined, with the church being the one body of Christ having many individual members or parts. While many of these metaphors relate to one another, each of them has an individual flavor and features different connotations.

Within each major cluster are two minor variations. While each supports the others in the overall metaphorical concept of the church, each differs in its approach to the construction of that image. These differing approaches can be seen as perspectives emphasizing opposing motives within the same overarching metaphorical concept. The motives are antithetical with respect to their view on the unity of the church. One motive focuses on the unity of the church, the other on the relationship of the individual to the church. The paradoxical interaction of these antithetical motives creates within the scripture

a rich, balanced perspective on the church. The church is a unified entity in which the individual's place is valued and extolled.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on each of the four clusters individually, and on the differing motives within each master metaphor. The understanding of how these metaphors relate to each other will clarify the significance of the choices Wesley made in his sermons concerning the church.

## **AGRICULTURAL METAPHORS**

Agricultural metaphors center around two distinct images, the shepherd and his flock and botanical metaphors. These two images are related not only in that they share an agricultural theme, but also in that they convey a sense of husbandry and stewardship. Two of the finest examples of these images can be found in John's discourses on the good shepherd and on the vine and the branches.

### **The Good Shepherd**

The metaphor of the good shepherd is, of course, not unique to John's gospel. Indeed it is a very familiar image from both the Old and New Testaments. King David was a shepherd<sup>39</sup>, relating Christ to a fondly remembered time in Hebrew history. The comforting discourse in Psalm 23 begins, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want..."<sup>40</sup> Shepherds abiding in the field and keeping watch over their flock by night went with haste upon hearing the angel's proclamation to pay homage to the Christ child, born in a stable<sup>41</sup> and called "Lamb of God."<sup>42</sup> Many times in both prophesy<sup>43</sup> and

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<sup>39</sup>1 Samuel 17:15. To many of the Jewish people, this connection with King David helped to authenticate Christ's messianic claims. See also Matthew 1:6 and Revelation 22:16.

<sup>40</sup>Psalm 23:1.

<sup>41</sup>Luke 2:8-20.

<sup>42</sup>John 1:29.

<sup>43</sup>Isaiah 53:6, Jeremiah 50:6.

gospel<sup>44</sup> the *Bible* refers to the lost sheep of Israel. Thus the images of sheep and shepherd were very familiar ones. Christ's claim to be the good shepherd was therefore easily understood by the people, making the metaphor all the more powerful.

In the tenth chapter of John, Christ elaborates His relationship to the church in terms of this familiar relationship of a shepherd to his fold.

*1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. 4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. 5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. 6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.*

*7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. 10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. 12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. 13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. 15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. 17 Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.<sup>45</sup>*

In this discourse, Jesus claims two metaphorical identities relative to the sheep who are the church. He is the door through which all enter the fold, and He is the good shepherd. As the door, He guards and protects the entrance into the fold. Any who enter in by other means are thieves and robbers. As the door, He is protection from those thieves and robbers. The notions of enclosure and security are clearly a part of this metaphor.

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<sup>44</sup>Matthew 10:6.

<sup>45</sup>John 10:1-17.

Central to the metaphor of the good shepherd are the notions of recognition, protection, sacrifice, and unity. His sheep know his voice and follow Him before all others (vv. 3-5,8,14.) They are protected from thieves and wolves, even at the price of the shepherd's life (v. 11-13, 17.) He brings together other sheep which are not of this fold and unites them all in one flock. (v.16.)

Relating this metaphor directly to the church, entrance into the flock is gained only through Christ, who protects His fold and leads them to green pastures. Christ sacrificed Himself that the church might live. Critical also is the notion of unity. The sheep are considered only as part of the larger flock. The shepherd even says that there are other sheep not of this fold which he should bring to be a part of one fold with one shepherd. This metaphor views the church primarily as a unified entity.

On one occasion, however, Christ turns this metaphor into an extremely individualistic image. The parable of the lost sheep values the individual, as the shepherd is pictured as willing to search for even one of a hundred if it has gone astray.

11 *For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.* 12 *How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?* 13 *And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.* 14 *Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*<sup>46</sup>

Although the basic emphasis of this metaphor is related to a unified flock, or church, there is an element of the image which values the individual. It is important to recognize this reciprocal relationship inasmuch as it reappears in all of the unity images.

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<sup>46</sup>Matthew 18:11-14.

## Botanical Metaphors

In contrast to the unity motive in the shepherd metaphor, botanical metaphors of the New Testament tend to highlight the individual's relationship to Christ and the church. The botanical metaphors for the most part concentrate on the individual in terms of sowing seeds, spiritual growth, bearing fruit, and harvest time. The parable of the sower,<sup>47</sup> for example, highlights the individual's reaction to the gospel in terms of growth. Likewise, Paul identifies "fruit of the spirit"<sup>48</sup> as outgrowths of individuals' spiritual living. Thus as general botanical metaphors highlight the individual, it is not surprising that when these metaphors relate to the church, the individual is central.

In John's discourse on the vine, Christ relates himself to the church in terms of the relationship of vine to branches.

*1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. 2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. 3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. 6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. 8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. 9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. 10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*<sup>49</sup>

The focus of this metaphor is the concept of *abiding*, which relates a group of individuals to Christ, the central "vine" figure. The individual branch, by itself, cannot bear fruit, but only through the vine. The branches together through the vine can produce

<sup>47</sup>Matthew 13:1-23.

<sup>48</sup>Galatians 5:22-23.

<sup>49</sup>John 15:1-11.

much fruit, thus it is that although the individual is stressed, the church is present in this metaphor too.

## **FAMILY METAPHORS**

The general cluster of what can be labeled “family metaphors” have two distinct and important component parts. The church is related to Christ through the images of bride and children. Each of these metaphors center around the human institution of the family and assert a familial relationship. The relationship of Christ to the church is central to these images.

### **Bride and Bridegroom**

Established in the second chapter of Genesis, the family paradigm is echoed throughout the scriptures. No less than five times does the phrase appear, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”<sup>50</sup> Although the laws of different cultures have varied over the ages, this premise has held constant in Judeo-Christian traditions. With this relationship so central to the everyday lives of the people, it was an obvious choice for metaphorical extension. Christ told the parable of the ten virgins to illustrate the point of readiness. The wise virgins were prepared for the coming of the bridegroom.<sup>51</sup> Paul uses this relationship as the basis for the relationship of Christ to the church.

22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it,

<sup>50</sup>Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7, 1 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 5:31.

<sup>51</sup>Matthew 25:1-13.

even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31 FOR THIS CAUSE SHALL A MAN LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL BE JOINED UNTO HIS WIFE, AND THEY TWO SHALL BE ONE FLESH. 32 This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.<sup>52</sup>

Although this appears at first glance to be Paul's understanding of the marital relationship, verse 32 belies the real focus of this passage, the relationship of Christ to the church. Critical to this metaphor is the focus on the church as a united bride rather than as individuals. The family here is a simple relationship of bride to bridegroom, church to Christ.

## Children

Scriptural children appear in a variety of contexts with an even greater variety of roles. There are children of the flesh<sup>53</sup> who ignore their relationship with God. There are also the children of Israel<sup>54</sup> who are aware of their relationship with God, but who cannot live up to parental standards. Finally, there are the children of God who mirror the children of Israel except for their metaphorical rebirth. These children represent the new covenant,<sup>55</sup> the new creation out of the old Adam.<sup>56</sup> Although images of children appear frequently throughout the scriptures, in several instances they refer specifically to the church. Paul identifies the relationship in terms of a "spirit of adoption."

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Ephesians 5:22-33.

<sup>53</sup>Romans 9:8.

<sup>54</sup>Luke 1:16.

<sup>55</sup>Romans 8:16.

<sup>56</sup>1 Corinthians 5:17.

<sup>57</sup>Romans 8:14-17.

Worthy of note here is the emphasis on the individual's relationship to Christ with respect to the church rather than the relationship of the church as a whole. The "Spirit of adoption" includes all metaphorical children, freeing them from bondage to become "joint-heirs with Christ." Christ himself said, "*Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*"<sup>58</sup> The children are part of the family, but the relationship that is emphasized is individual rather than corporate.

Family metaphors emphasize the interrelationships of humans to one another in the church by comparing those relationships with those found in a family. The bride and the bridegroom metaphor highlights the love and sacrifice of the marital relationship to call attention to the relationship between Christ and His church, while the children images focus on the growth potential and simplicity of faith necessary to be the church.

## **BUILDING METAPHORS**

The cluster of metaphors that relate the church to structures or buildings also have two related manifestations. The images of the household and the temple both convey the notion of a physical, structural entity as the church. Each metaphor, however, has its own distinct emphasis. The household metaphors highlight the collective and unified aspects of the church while the temple images emphasize the place of the individual.

### **Household**

The metaphorical household has many implications beyond its relationship to the church. The term "house" immediately implies not only a structural dwelling place, but also a familial connection, a lineage as in the "house of David."<sup>59</sup> These houses of

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<sup>58</sup>Matthew 18:3.

<sup>59</sup>Luke 1:27.



heritage were extremely important to the Hebrews; indeed, they considered themselves to be all of one house, descendants and heirs of the “house of Israel.”<sup>60</sup> This rich heritage was a strong tradition and dominated Hebrew thought. Indeed, Jesus himself appealed to this tradition when he proclaimed that “a house divided against itself shall not stand.”<sup>61</sup> The appeal to unity in this metaphor is perhaps the strongest of all possible images for the Hebrews. Paul realized this and used this appeal to unite Jews and Gentiles in one understanding of the church.

11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; 16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: 17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. 18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. 19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.<sup>62</sup>

This tremendous uniting image of the household brings together the circumcised and the uncircumcised, Jews and Gentiles, those who are far off and those who are near. While “fellow citizens” unites them in a metaphorical municipality as members of a household, they are drawn into an even more intimate union as a church family within a physical household or temple as a “habitation of God.” “Household” is, therefore, an extremely important and powerful metaphor of unity.

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<sup>60</sup>Matthew 10:6. “Israel” was the name given to Jacob after his struggle with the angel in Genesis 32:28. Jacob was the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the father of the Hebrew lineage. The “house of Israel” refers to this lineage as the basis for the nation-state.

<sup>61</sup>Matthew 12:25.

<sup>62</sup>Ephesians 2:17-22.

## Temple

The temple is another very important element in Hebrew society. It is the focus of worship and prayer, devotion and sacrifice. The Western wall in Jerusalem, as the last remnant of Solomon's temple, is a focus of Jewish prayer and devotion even today. The temple originated as a tabernacle for the ark of the covenant.<sup>63</sup> As a holy place, rites and rituals were performed in the temple. Significantly, it was at the temple where Christ first realized his identity.<sup>64</sup> When he was twelve years old, Jesus and his parents went to Jerusalem for the passover feast. Jesus lingered behind at the temple, where his parents found him after three days in the midst of the teachers engaged in a constructive dialogue. When questioned, Jesus replied, "*How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*"<sup>65</sup> As the center of Hebrew society, the significance of temple imagery in relation to the church makes it a powerful metaphor indeed.

Metaphors of the temple, unlike household metaphors, focus more on the individual part of the corporate structure than on the unified structure itself. The stones of the temple take on significance as each has an unique and designated place in the overall structure. Christ is here related to the building as the corner stone, the central and foundational element. Included in the temple metaphor is the building process. The individuality of the builders is emphasized for its contribution to the whole building or temple.

9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If

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<sup>63</sup>Exodus 40.

<sup>64</sup>Luke 2:41-52.

<sup>65</sup>Luke 2:49.

any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

<sup>16</sup> Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? <sup>17</sup> If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.<sup>66</sup>

Every person's unique contribution to the church is work built upon the foundation of Christ. The individual's work is valued in the construction of the holy temple which is the church. Paradoxically, the individual is also valued as a metaphorical "temple," wherein the Spirit of the Lord dwells. The paradoxical twist to this metaphor only strengthens its emphasis on the individual, not only in terms of contributions to the temple, but also as individual "dwelling places."

Peter adds yet another twist to the metaphor by referring to believers as "lively stones." A spiritual house is built by these "lively stones," and Christ is the "chief corner stone." The holy priesthood would ritually offer sacrifices to God in the temple as a sign of devotion. Likewise, spiritual sacrifices are a portion of the individual's devotion to God in the metaphorical context of the temple as the church.

<sup>4</sup> To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, <sup>5</sup> Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, BEHOLD, I LAY IN SION A CHIEF CORNER STONE, ELECT, PRECIOUS: AND HE THAT BELIEVETH ON HIM SHALL NOT BE CONFOUNDED. <sup>7</sup> Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS DISALLOWED, THE SAME IS MADE THE HEAD OF THE CORNER, <sup>8</sup> AND A STONE OF STUMBLING, AND A ROCK OF OFFENCE, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. <sup>9</sup> But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; <sup>10</sup> Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.<sup>67</sup>

As lively stones, builders of the temple, individual temples, and a holy priesthood, the individual is emphasized in the metaphor of the building as the church. By contrast, unity is built in terms of a spiritual household. The emphasis of building metaphors is on a

<sup>66</sup>1 Corinthians 3:9-17.

<sup>67</sup>1 Peter 2:4-10.

physical and corporate presence of the church. Lost in this imagery is the movement associated with the other metaphors. A building is a static presence. While it may be growing in terms of adding stones, there is a lack of dynamism in such structural growth. Even with the modified “lively” stones, the individual is relegated to a place in the structure rather than a role in its movement. Only in the designation of individuals as “temples” is there a dynamic element. This twist of the metaphor harkens back to the vine imagery and the concept of abiding wherein the Lord dwells within the temple of each individual.

## **BODY METAPHORS**

Perhaps the most recognizable of the church metaphors is that of the body. Closely related to the building metaphors in that they both relate the church to a physical corporate unit, the body metaphors have the added dynamics of life and mobility. Body imagery is used to identify the church as the body of Christ. Christ is, of course, the head of the body.

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.<sup>68</sup>

As in previous metaphors, there are two complementary perspectives on the body, a focus on the one body as a uniting motive, in contrast with an individual focus in the imagery concerning the members.

### **One Body**

Like the agricultural metaphors, body imagery is easy to use and is readily understood. There can be no question about the uniting force behind the metaphor of the one body. Unity is a primary motive found in the one body image. This unity, however,

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<sup>68</sup>Romans 12:5.

has a common source in Christ. There may be “one body,” united in “one Spirit,” but it is united by the “one God and Father of all who is above all, and through all, and in all.”

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, even in the strength of the unity appeal of this passage, there is a recognition of the fact that it takes individuals to create unity. The audience is beseeched to “walk worthy of their vocation . . . forbearing one another in love.” This exhortation recognizes the process by which unity is achieved and is further highlighted in the discourse on the roles of the individual members.

## Members

The metaphors concerning the role of individual members of the body also deal with the unity motive, but the focus has shifted to the member rather than the body. The individual’s role, which was hinted at in terms of the one body, is made explicit in terms of the metaphors of membership. Although the individual is the focus of this passage, there is an underlying current of unity which ties it closely to the one body imagery.

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? 18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 19 And if they were all one member, where were the body? 20 But now are they many members, yet but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. 22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: 23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less

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<sup>69</sup>Ephesians 4:1-6.

honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. 24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked. 25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. 26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. 28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? 30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? 31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.<sup>70</sup>

The discourse on gifts works rhetorically to focus on the individual contribution to the work of the collective body. Functions are delineated hierarchically, but each role is valued for its contribution to the smooth and efficient functioning of the body of the church.

Of the four master metaphors concerning the church in the New Testament, the metaphor of the one body is the most consistent and complementary in its multifaceted perspectives. The melding of member-body relations is a major factor in the strength of this metaphor.

## CONCLUSIONS

In each of the four master metaphors concerning the church in the New Testament, there are multiple perspectives which focus on different aspects of the church. Although often overlapping, each metaphor has its own rhetorical flavor which distinguishes it from the others. These differences, no matter how small, can make a large difference in the rhetorical dynamics established through use. It is true that these metaphors are closely interrelated and artificial distinctions may detract from their contextual power. Therefore, a careful analysis must recognize these interrelationships with the goal of enhancing the understanding of the relation of text to context. This analysis is not intended to lock the

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<sup>70</sup>1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

scriptures into static categories, but rather to use the natural distinctions which arise to better understand their rhetorical significance. Every effort has been made to maintain the scriptural integrity within this analysis.

Agricultural metaphors highlight the pastoral and growth nature of the church. Christ is the good shepherd and the vine, the church is the flock and branches. Family metaphors emphasize the interrelationships within the church and the relationship of the church to Christ. Christ is the bridegroom, the church his bride. His children are all joint heirs to the kingdom of God. Building metaphors focus on the physical manifestation of the church as a house and as a temple. Christ is the chief corner stone for these metaphorical church structures. The body metaphors integrate the concepts of unity and individuality as members of a spiritual body of Christ. Christ is the head of the body and central to its growth and direction. In all of these metaphors, Christ is a central character. The church is an institution inextricably tied to Christ as a central feature in each of these images. Whether the focus is on unity or individuality, the church metaphors never stray from this basic tenet of their existence.

## Chapter III

### THE CHURCH IN JOHN WESLEY'S SERMONS

John Wesley was concerned less about the church than about the church members. He rarely addressed the topic of the church in his sermons, favoring instead issues of significance to the individual members. Albert Outler, one of the foremost scholars on Wesley concedes that, "His publication in this theological domain consists of sermons and tracts, all having more to do with the practical issues of churchmanship than with its theological foundations."<sup>71</sup> Although Wesley did not focus a great deal of his efforts on the church, he was compelled to take a stand as the issue of schism between the Anglicans and the Methodists began to loom on the horizon. This issue became the center of his discourse on the church as he tried in vain to preserve the unity and integrity of both the Anglican tradition and the Methodist movement.

Within his sermons, Wesley's rhetoric is not clearly defined in terms of the opposing motives of individualism and unity. The Wesleyan emphasis on evangelism and scriptural holiness are major themes of his theological doctrines. These themes, fraught with individualism as a central motive, appealed to the enlightened audience of the eighteenth century. By contrast, when faced with the possibility of schism, Wesley appealed to unity. His efforts were to no avail, however, as the undercurrent of individualism, established in his evangelical style, swept over the unity motive towards the inevitable schism. In essence, while Wesley emphasized the unity of the church in his sermons designed specifically to prevent separation, these efforts cut across the rhetorical grain of individualism which permeated the style and substance of his sermons in general. This research pursues the dynamic interaction of these seemingly conflicting motives by

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<sup>71</sup>Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley*, (New York, Oxford University Press, Inc., 1964.) p. 306.



analyzing Wesley's use of New Testament church metaphors within his unique rhetorical context.

## **WESLEYAN INDIVIDUALISM IN THE HOLY CLUB**

John Wesley's sermons are primarily of an individualistic perspective. As an evangelist, Wesley structures his appeal around the individual. As a result, even when speaking of the church, the individual is emphasized. Another major factor in this individualistic bent is audience appeal. Any good orator must identify with the audience. Eighteenth-century England and America valued individualism and Wesley appealed to this value. Doctrinally, his concept of scriptural holiness focused mainly on the individual. His dealings with the church were an offshoot of these factors.

### **Evangelism**

John Wesley was, first and foremost, an evangelist. This one-time Oxford scholar and theologian "understood his own mission primarily as that of a minister extraordinary, called forth by God to help remedy the insufficiencies of the ordinary ministry of the established church. This made him something rather like the superior-general of an evangelical order within a regional division of the church catholic,"<sup>72</sup> (universal.)

Evangelism today often carries with it the negative connotations associated with such performers as Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart. The picture is one of highly emotional appeals to salvation, repentance, and conversion. To Wesley, however, evangelism carried a much greater meaning and responsibility. Conversion was merely the first step in the long and arduous journey toward Christian perfection. As Outler notes,

. . . . "preaching Christ" was aimed beyond confession and conversion toward the fullness of faith and the endless maturing of life in grace. "Follow the blow," said he, "never encourage the devil by snatching souls

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

from him that you cannot nurture.” “Converts without nurture are like still-born babies.” Thus, the evangelist accepted a continued responsibility for his converts’ growth in grace; thus, sanctification became the goal and end of all valid evangelistic endeavor (and this implies a lifelong process).<sup>73</sup>

Wesley’s Holy Clubs, the small covenant groups whose members were known contemptibly as “Methodists,” were not an outgrowth of his evangelistic efforts, but rather the essence of them. They were formed not as a response to his evangelism, but rather to fulfill his efforts. These societies of people called Methodists were the covenant communities of nurture and fellowship. They fulfilled the evangelical effort by encouraging members to live according to the standards of their heart-felt Christianity. They lent credence to the witness of the Spirit by striving to live the lives to which they were called. These societies emphasized the individual’s participation in the group and the fellowship of the group only as means to an end: individual scriptural perfection. Wesley, himself, was obsessed with his own salvation. These groups were a means of effecting peer pressure and discipline upon the living of the Christian life. Outler observes,

For Wesley, the essence of faith was personal and inward, but the evidence of faith was public and social. “It is expected of all those who continue in these Societies that they shall continue to *evidence* their desire of salvation--first, by doing no harm. . .; second, by doing all the good they can,. . .; and third, by attending upon all the ordinances of God,. . .” The scope of evangelism was never less than the fullness of Christian experience--“holiness of heart, and a life conformable to the same” --and he never faltered in this insistence, even when his Societies began to bulge and Methodism began to be respectable.<sup>74</sup>

For Wesley, the church was “best defined *in action*, in her witness and mission, rather than by her form of polity.”<sup>75</sup> This emphasis was played out by the Societies as they became the *Word made visible*. The societies became “evangelistic agencies in their own right.” “It was not only their preaching that made its impact in the world,” Outler argues, “but also their lives--on the job, in the marketplace, in their redemptive involvement in the

<sup>73</sup>Albert C. Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Tidings, 1971.) p. 23.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 24-25.

<sup>75</sup>Outler, *Wesley*, p. 307.

social agencies of their times.” They represented “both initiation and maturation in Christ and in Christian fellowship--and an implicit, indirect, social revolution.”<sup>76</sup> Thus Wesley’s effect was multiplied by the sending out of myriad evangelists from the Societies. “God’s good news is proclaimed in words and symbols, it is celebrated in liturgies and rituals, but it is communicated by corporate life and example.”<sup>77</sup> John Wesley’s evangelical efforts and self-concept are significant as one manifestation of his emphasis on the individual.

### **Scriptural Holiness**

John Wesley’s evangelical commitment was firmly rooted in theological doctrine. His concept of scriptural holiness not only emphasized the individual, but also served as the theological foundation for his evangelism. Wesley often expressed his desire to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land. He declared:

I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to do; and sure I am, that His blessing attends it.<sup>78</sup>

“Scriptural holiness” was Wesley’s term for the Christian experience, including the initial conversion and the process of sanctification. Ahlstrom notes, “the life of every sincere Methodist became a quest for complete sanctification or holiness (i.e. sinlessness).”<sup>79</sup> Just as evangelism became a Wesleyan motive manifested in the Methodist societies, so also did the doctrine of scriptural holiness affect their growth and development. Most important to the societies was the sanctification of the individual

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<sup>76</sup>Outler, *Evangelism*, p.28.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>78</sup>John Wesley, as quoted in Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *John Wesley: His Life and Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.) p. 259.

<sup>79</sup>Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, (New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 1972.) p. 326.

members. Thus the societies were organized around the principles of this sanctification process with stern discipline and rigorous requirements.

The individual could best engage in the process of sanctification or scriptural holiness by joining a holy community wherein each could separate from the world to pursue a holy life. Here, an individual could work towards Christian perfection within the confines of a community dedicated to assisting the individual “by supplying the discipline necessary to carry out the holy demands. If any fell short of the mark and failed, it was the duty of the community to excommunicate the offender, lest the witness of the group be impaired.”<sup>80</sup> The exclusivity and individualistic focus of the society, although surprising when contrasted with Wesley’s inclusive concept of the catholic (universal) spirit, is produced by the imperative of scriptural holiness.

### ***Scriptural Christianity***

In his sermon, “Scriptural Christianity,” Wesley expresses the motive of scriptural holiness in three contexts that parallel the above discussions of the individual, the Holy Club, and evangelism. Wesley views Christianity:

- I. AS BEGINNING TO EXIST IN INDIVIDUALS
- II. AS SPREADING FROM ONE TO ANOTHER
- III. AS COVERING THE EARTH.<sup>81</sup>

This sermon was preached at St. Mary’s Oxford before the University on August 24, 1744. It was his last sermon preached before the University. “Scriptural Christianity” also demonstrates clearly Wesley’s vision for the church, juxtaposed with the reality of the situation. He masterfully uses scripture to establish the basis of the Christian experience, Christian activity, and a Christian world. Individualism dominates the first two sections,

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<sup>80</sup>Moore, p. 97.

<sup>81</sup>Edward H. Sudgen, ed., *John Wesley’s Fifty-Three Sermons*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 1983.) p. 59.

but Wesley comes back with a strongly unified vision of the church “as covering the earth” in the third section. This unified vision is only a vision, apparently, because Wesley then turns to the practical theology of the church in the next section wherein he again emphasizes the individual.

Introducing “Scriptural Christianity,” Wesley draws upon the images of the children of God in the “infancy of the Church.” He also refers to the spiritual gifts which were divided among the “members” as the holy “fruits of the Spirit.”<sup>82</sup> The metaphorical foundation of individualism being laid, Wesley continues:

Without busying ourselves, then, in curious, needless inquiries, touching those *extraordinary* gifts of the Spirit, let us take a nearer view of these His *ordinary* fruits, which we are assured will remain throughout all ages;--of that great work of God among the children of men, which we are used to express by one word, ‘Christianity’; not as it implies a set of opinions, a system of doctrines, but as it refers to men’s hearts and lives.<sup>83</sup>

Already strongly individualistic in perspective, Wesley continues with a discourse on the Spirit of adoption and the notion of children of God, developing the image into a discussion of brotherhood. Section two widens the metaphorical perspective, but continues to emphasize the individual. He calls on the image of the great Shepherd who spared no pains to bring back the ‘sheep that had gone astray.’<sup>84</sup> He also uses the image of the temple of God as the Church built upon a rock.<sup>85</sup> All of this stresses the role of the individual in the growth of the church and Christianity.

In the third section, Wesley establishes the church in a unified vision in which he emphasizes how the church should be. Metaphorically, it was represented in prophesy as “the mountain of the Lord’s house,”<sup>86</sup> a place where the wolf shall dwell with the lamb.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 63. (1 Peter 2:25.)

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 66, (Isaiah 2:2.)

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., (Isaiah 11:6.)

All would be united by one body, by one spirit, with one heart and one soul.<sup>88</sup> This whole section, however, was presented in the future tense. This was an ideal picture of the church as Wesley saw it. He even asks rhetorically, “Where does this Christianity now exist?”<sup>89</sup> Realizing the fantasy, Wesley then calls upon those members gifted with the fruits of the Spirit to be “ministers of the new covenant.”<sup>90</sup> Again the individual is paramount in the life of the church. While Wesley dreams of a unified church, he settles for the practical focus on the individual to carry out the mission of the church.

Wesleyan individualism is more than a matter of practicality, however. It is fundamentally rooted in the notion of scriptural holiness. The community of the Methodist societies served to discipline the individual members and to perpetuate itself through identity as Methodists. John Wesley perpetuated the individualistic perspective in his sermons by using it as a fundamental element of scriptural holiness. Along the way, the ecumenical, or catholic spirit was lost in the exclusivity of the societies and in the metaphorical emphasis on the individual.

## **WESLEYAN UNITY**

Wesleyan unity is almost an oxymoronic phrase. While Wesley pushed for unity within the Anglican church, his statements belie an indisputable bent towards individualism. Nevertheless, there is an element of his rhetoric which is bent towards unity, especially when dealing with the issue of schism. It is true that his few overt statements dealing directly with the church are often flavored with the metaphorical seasoning of unity, but these statements deal more with the practical issues at hand rather than with theological foundations. Even the most unity-oriented statements smack of individualism and are fraught with individualistic metaphors.

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

## Ordination and the Unity Struggle

Wesley's only comprehensive sermon dealing with the topic of the church was first published in *The Arminian Magazine* in 1786 under the title "Of the Church." With its sister sermon, "On Schism," it appeared in the final edition of *Sermons on Several Occasions* (1788). Both were written during the furor over Wesley's ordinations for America in 1784.<sup>91</sup> This is significant, for, while Wesley continued to argue in favor of unity with the Anglican tradition, he was compelled by the revolutionary events in America either to ordain bishops himself or lose control of his own movement. Heretofore he had always refused ordination as a tool for preserving unity. Methodists ministers were itinerant preachers, not ordained to administer sacraments. Thus they were ministers *to* the Anglican church and not ministers *of* a separate church. Nevertheless, in 1784, Wesley ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey elders and appointed Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury to be joint Superintendents in America.<sup>92</sup> This effectively cut any ties with the episcopacy, thus establishing the Methodists, who already had an effective system of administration in the annual conference, as a church with its own independent ministers.

It was within this context that Wesley finally felt compelled to address the issue of the church directly. As Outler notes:

These two sermons constitute his tacit *apologia* for these drastic breaches within Anglican polity. The first sermon (Of the Church) defines the Church in such a way that Wesley's societies and his ordinations need not be adjudged as entailing "separation." The second (On Schism) defines schism in a manner plainly intended to exempt the Methodists from being taxed with it.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Outler, *Wesley*, p. 308.

<sup>92</sup>Emory Stevens Bucke, gen. ed., *The History of American Methodism*, vol. 1. (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 1964.) p. 201.

<sup>93</sup>Outler, *Wesley*, p. 108.

### *Of the Church*

Wesley begins his sermon, “Of the Church,” with a very strong, unity-oriented scriptural foundation. The passage corresponds with the typology identified in chapter 2. Wesley preached:

I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:1-6).

In the first portion of this sermon, Wesley constructs a litany of scriptural definitions of the church, focusing on the united aspects of such definitions. Primarily, he concentrates on labeling the church “a congregation or *body* of people united together in the service of God.”<sup>94</sup> He even quotes St. Paul in his obscure letter to Philemon mentioning “the church which is in his house;”<sup>95</sup> plainly signifying that even a Christian family may be termed a church.<sup>96</sup> Wesley continues in this vein always emphasizing the unity of the church and using unity metaphors such as body, family, and house in the early part of this sermon. As he expounds on the scriptural foundation for his characterization of the church, it becomes apparent that he is placing an uncharacteristic bias on the image he is creating, yet he cannot explore fully the richness of the unity metaphors without lapsing into his individualistic perspective. When exploring the image of the one God and Father of all, instead of focusing on the metaphorical family unit, he slips into a discussion of the “Spirit of adoption which crieth in their hearts, Abba, Father.”<sup>97</sup> Immediately thereafter, he quotes the Methodist Hymn Book: “Making your souls his loved abode, / The temples

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<sup>94</sup>Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3. (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 1986.) p. 46.

<sup>95</sup>Philemon 2; Colossians 4:15.

<sup>96</sup>Outler, *Works*, p. 47.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50.



of indwelling God.”<sup>98</sup> These distinctively individualistic metaphors inadvertently detract from the theme of unity which Wesley had tried to establish.

He further strayed from his initial rhetorical course in the second major portion of his sermon. His second point deals with what it means to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.” Wesley counseled,

It should always be remembered that the word “walk,” in the language of the apostle, is of a very extensive signification. It includes all our inward and outward motions, all our thoughts and words and actions. It takes in not only everything we do but everything we speak or think. It is therefore, no small thing “to walk,” in this sense of the word, “worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called”; to think, speak, and act, in every instance, in a manner worthy of our Christian calling.<sup>99</sup>

The second point continues on in this vein, creating a sense of the individual’s responsibility to the church. It is not until his conclusion that Wesley again returns to the original theme of unity. He exhorts the audience to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” in order “to preserve inviolate the same spirit of lowliness and meekness, of long-suffering, mutual forbearance and love; and all these cemented and knit together by that sacred tie: the peace of God filling the heart. Thus only can we be, and continue, *living members of that Church which is the body of Christ*. Unity is sought here, but not emphasized as the metaphor of the living members of the body focuses on the individual *in terms of* the body. In his final call for unity, Wesley makes reference to the sheep metaphors by observing that, without unity, “the wolves that surround the little flock on every side would in a short time tear them in pieces.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

### ***On Schism***

Wesley's sermon, "On Schism," does not contribute a great deal to his conception of the church, but it does exemplify his struggle to justify the ordinations in terms of church unity / disunity. He defines schism as "not a separation *from* any church (whether general or particular, whether the catholic or any national church) but a separation *in* a church. . . .a disunion in mind and judgement (perhaps also in affection) among those who, notwithstanding this, continued outwardly united as before."<sup>101</sup> In the conclusion of the sermon, Wesley takes this definition of schism and rhetorically "passes the buck" to the Anglicans, as he advises:

I entreat you, therefore, my brethren-- all that fear God and have a desire to please him, all that wish to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man--think not so slightly of this matter, but consider it calmly. Do not rashly tear asunder the sacred ties which unite you to any Christian society. This indeed is not of so much consequence to *you* who are only a *nominal* Christian. For you are not now vitally united to any of the members of Christ. Though you are called a Christian you are not really a member of any Christian church. But if you are a living member, if you live the life that is hid with Christ with God, then take care how you rend the body of Christ by separating from your brethren.<sup>102</sup>

Referred to as *nominal* Christians, it is clear that the Anglicans are the unnamed antecedent. Wesley distances them from the true church by stating that they are not vitally united with any *members of Christ*, and therefore cause separation within the *body of Christ*. Once isolated from the church, the nominal Christians can take the blame for its schism as rhetorical enemies of the church.

### **NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH TYPOLOGY IN WESLEY'S SERMONS**

The following table reflects generalized results of the investigation into Wesley's use of New Testament Church metaphors. The texts are drawn from seven different

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-61.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

sermons between 1738 and 1749 and typify his church rhetoric over the course of his ministry. The table shows the date the sermon was presented and its title. Key metaphors of the church are then introduced as a quote, followed by their placement in the church typology and comments about that particular metaphor's significance.

Wesley often chose metaphors of children to convey his understanding of the church. When these metaphors were not used outright, he often coupled them with other metaphors to enhance their significance. The other side of the family, the bride and bridegroom metaphor, was rarely used. Another set of popular images were the Botanical metaphors. Because the metaphor of the good shepherd was not utilized much, the emphasis on the botanical agricultural metaphor signals a distinct bias towards individualism. Building metaphors were utilized often also. Wesley's favorite unity metaphor was the church as the household of God. This often intermeshed with other building images such as the temple to signify the importance of this metaphor to Wesley. Finally, the body metaphor was used sparingly, with slight emphasis on the members of the body.

Date	Sermon	Quote	Typology	Comments
1738	Salvation By Faith	<p>Only corrupt fruit grows on a corrupt tree.<sup>1</sup></p> <p>As a new-born babe he gladly receives the 'sincere milk of the word, and grows thereby'; going on in the might of the Lord his God, from faith to faith, from grace to grace, until at length, he comes unto 'a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.'<sup>2</sup></p> <p>'Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ.' So then, that 'whosoever believeth on Him shall be saved,' is, and must be, the foundation of all our preaching; that is must be preached first.<sup>3</sup></p>	<p>Ag-Bot-Ind.*</p> <p>Family-Child-Ind.</p>	<p>Three individualistic metaphors manifest themselves in this sermon. Wesley's emphasis on salvation is focused here on the individual with respect to the church.</p>
			Bldg-Ind.	<p>Although the building metaphor does not specify either the image of household or temple, it still reflects an individualistic perspective.</p>

<sup>1</sup>Sugden, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.26.

\*Typology notation:

Ag=Agriculture, Shp=Shepherd, Bot=Botanical,

Family=Family, Bride=Bride & Bridegroom, Child=Children,

Bldg=Building, House=Household, Temple=Temple,

Body=Body, One=One body, Mbrs=Members of the body,

Unity=Unity metaphors, Ind.=Individualistic metaphors.

Date	Sermon	Quote	Typology	Comments
1739	The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption	<p>'If the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, he hath a building of God--a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; he groweth earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with that house which is from heaven.'<sup>4</sup></p> <p>He is a living witness of the 'glorious liberty of the sons of God'; all of whom, being partakers of like precious faith, bear record with one voice, 'We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!'<sup>5</sup></p>	<p>Bldg-House-Unity</p> <p>Family-Child-Ind.</p>	<p>Although this image looks forward to the "household" relationship of heaven, it is rooted in the eventualities of the future rather than the potentialities of the present. An element of ambiguity is present because this "unity" image refers to an individual's yearning for that Spiritual house.</p> <p>This is the central metaphor of this sermon. It is used in many other contexts as well. It also reflects a slight unity motive as the children cry with "one voice."</p>
1739	The Means of Grace	<p>So little do they understand that great foundation of the whole Christian building, 'By grace are ye saved'.<sup>6</sup></p>	Bldg-Ind.	<p>No reference to a specific building type, but this image is clearly related to the individual.</p>
1741	The Almost Christian	<p>'To as many as received Him, gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in His name.'<sup>7</sup></p>	Family-Child-Ind.	<p>Again, the children of God metaphor is the most common in Wesley's rhetoric. He emphasizes here the newness of life in the family of God.</p>

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

Date	Sermon	Quote	Typology	Comments
1745	The First Fruits of the Spirit	They are joined unto the Lord in one Spirit. They are ingrafted into Him, as branches into the vine. They are united, as members to their head, in a manner which words cannot express. <sup>8</sup>	Ag/Body-Bot/Mbrs-Unity	The mixing of metaphors here is important. Although these images are normally used to express individuality, here they are a uniting force. The flexibility of scriptural metaphoric perspective is expressed here.
		They who are of Christ, who abide in Him, feel the root of bitterness in themselves, yet they are endowed with power from on high to trample it continually under foot, so that it cannot 'spring up to trouble them'; <sup>9</sup>	Ag-Bot-Ind.	This metaphor, by contrast, is clearly focused on the individual.
		'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin. For His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God': he cannot, so long as that seed of God, that loving, holy faith remaineth in him. <sup>10</sup>	Family/Ag-Child/Bot-Ind.	The mixing of these metaphors produces a very strong individualistic bias.
		'Go again with the multitude, and bring them forth into the house of God.' <sup>11</sup>	Bldg-House-Unity	This image is slightly ambiguous in advocating the bringing forth of individuals into the united household of God.
1746	The Witness of the Spirit	All those pillars in God's temple were very far from despising these marks of their being the children of God. <sup>12</sup>	Bldg/Family-Temple/Child-Ind.	This is perhaps the most powerful individualistic metaphor in its mixing of the strongly individualistic bent of both metaphors.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 114.  
<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 115.  
<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 117.  
<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 119.  
<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

Date	Sermon	Quote	Typology	Comments
1749	Catholic Spirit	<p>Herein may all the children of God unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.<sup>13</sup></p> <p>Then love me with a very tender affection, as a friend that is closer than a brother; as a brother in Christ, a fellowcitizen of the New Jerusalem, a fellow soldier engaged in the same warfare, under the same Captain of our salvation. Love me as a companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus, and a joint heir of His glory.<sup>14</sup></p> <p>These particularly he watches over in love, as they do over his soul; admonishing, exhorting, comforting, reproving, and every way building up each other in the faith. These he regards as his own household;<sup>15</sup></p> <p>As friends, as brethren, in the Lord, as members of Christ and children of God, as joint partakers now of the present kingdom of God, and fellow heirs of His eternal kingdom--...<sup>16</sup></p>	<p>Family-Child-Unity</p> <p>Family-Unity</p>	<p>This sermon best exemplifies Wesley's notions of inclusiveness in the church. He tries to demonstrate the kinship of all Christians primarily through the use of Family metaphors.</p> <p>It is interesting to note that Wesley's Methodist societies were very exclusive, reserved for those who sought God earnestly in every aspect of the Christian life.</p> <p>While tolerance may have been Wesley's motive for this sermon, it is not reflected in the strict discipline of his societies. Individualism was still the primary motive for Christian life in the church.</p>
			Bldg-House-Unity	<p>The unity images that are used here are focused on bringing together individuals in a common faith rather than on creating a theology of unity for the church.</p>

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 493.  
<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 500.  
<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 503.  
<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 504.

In sum, each of the individualistic metaphors was employed often, while the unity images often lay unused. Significantly, Wesley often used basically individualistic metaphors to imply a corporate unity. This is important in that, while there was a wealth of unused unity metaphors from which to choose, he decided to exploit the multiplicity of the individualistic metaphors. Thus, while his avowed intent was to promote unity, his choice of these metaphors weakened his rhetorical stance by introducing the element of individuality into a program of unity. These choices diluted the power of the message and undermined his attempts at unity.

### **THE RHETORICAL STRUGGLE**

John Wesley had a great deal at stake in the late eighteenth century. The decision for ordination in 1784 was made under pressure from the American Methodists for the practical reason of keeping the movement alive. Wesley worked diligently to overcome rhetorically the implications of this momentous split, but he was thwarted by his own conflicting motives. While he earnestly desired to remain within the Anglican church, his theology of scriptural holiness created a rhetorical imperative which drove a wedge between the Methodists and the Anglicans.

The motive of scriptural holiness moved the Methodist societies to an exclusiveness which contradicted Wesley's own rhetoric of the "catholic spirit." The main concern was the individual's development towards Christian perfection through scriptural holiness. In the drive for Christian perfection, the holy clubs practiced such strict discipline that most people were excluded. While these societies experienced great success, their theological foundations led them inevitably to a split with the parent Anglican church. The societies adopted the identity of people called "Methodists." The theological and practical aims which focused on the individual in the pursuit of Christian perfection supplied a purpose for that identity. The motive of scriptural holiness that drove the societies then gave rise to



the identity that was self-perpetuating. Wesley's rhetoric focused on maintaining this identity even in the face of schism.

Wesley's other rhetorical motive was maintaining the unity of the Anglican church and preventing the very schism in which he unintentionally took part. He struggled, especially in the face of the ordinations of 1784, to promote unity. But this motive of maintaining unity fell into direct rhetorical conflict with the stronger and more established motive of maintaining identity in the pursuit of scriptural holiness. The final result of these conflicting motives was the division of the church.

## Chapter IV

### CONCLUSION

The examination of both scriptural and Wesleyan church metaphors has revealed a parallel rhetorical dialectic which has profound implications for the nature of the church. The scriptural metaphors provided a foundational set of images from which John Wesley built his theology of the church. His choices of metaphors used in his sermons reflected his own rhetorical biases and determined the form and style of this theology. These choices later became critical in his rhetorical struggle for unity.

Within the scriptural church metaphors, there is an underlying rhetorical dialectic rooted in metaphorical paradox. Manifested in each of the four principal church metaphors, this dialectic contrasts unity images with individualistic images. The interplay between these metaphors creates a successful dialectic in which each motive plays a role in providing perspective to the overall conception of the church. The best example of this is the dialectic between the metaphors of the one body and the members of that body. Both the individuality expressed in the members of the body and the unity of the one body are brought together in an integrated body image which fosters an appreciation of the richness of the differing perspectives.

John Wesley's use of scriptural metaphors of the church demonstrates an unsuccessful rhetorical dialectic rooted in theological rather than metaphorical paradox. Whereas in the scriptures, the resolution of metaphorical paradox was found in the dialectic itself, Wesley's theological paradox resolved itself in the adoption of a theological bias rather than by the creation of a logical synthesis. In other words, Wesley's rhetoric forced him into a theology based on the individual rather than on a unified church. Balance could

not be achieved because of the imbalance of rhetorical emphasis, which was reflective of Wesley's biased motives.

Wesley used the scriptural metaphors of the church to his rhetorical advantage in establishing the theological bases of the Methodist societies. In working out his theology of scriptural holiness and its extension to Christian perfection, Wesley established the individual as a focal point of the church. By choosing to feature individualistic metaphors in most of his sermons, he successfully rooted his focus in scripture and gave a definitive bias to his theology of the church.

When faced with the division of the church, Wesley promoted a united church theology which cut across the grain of his previously established theology of scriptural holiness as it was practiced in the Methodist societies. Even in the midst of promoting unity, Wesley was trapped within his own rhetorical bias. He used unity metaphors as they relate to the individual perspective and failed to pursue the richness of the unity imagery. His was an unsuccessful rhetorical dialectic because it gave rise to only one dominant theological perspective, leaving the other rhetorically underdeveloped. There was no synthesis of perspective as there is in the scriptural dialectic.

The implications of Wesley's dialectical failure were an unbalanced theology which emphasized the individual. This played a role in the division of the church by disabling Wesley from effectively addressing the issue of unity. The choices of metaphors which he used reveal a theological bias toward the individual which was, at least in part, a manifestation of the historical context. The popularity of individualism in the social, economic, and political realms implicitly affected its parallel popularity in religious rhetoric. Whatever the cause, John Wesley had a definitive theological bias toward the individual which was a primary motive in his church rhetoric. His choices in the use of New Testament church metaphors were to his disadvantage inasmuch as he was unable to meld

the motives of unity and individuality into a rhetorical synthesis capable of resolving the theological paradox.

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