

The Divine and Mystical in Figurative Language

Although God exists in a divine, mystical, and invisible realm (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; Col. 1:15; Rom. 1:20), He desires to communicate the realities of the divine and mystical realm to us. On the one hand, creation testifies of the characteristics of the divine and mystical realm, and on the other hand, God and the writers of the Bible employ figurative language, taking images from the physical realm, using literary devices such as symbols, types, figures, metaphors, similes, and allegories to communicate the realities of the divine and mystical realm. God's ultimate goal in His economy is to mingle Himself with redeemed humanity. This is revealed in the greatest allegory of all—the New Jerusalem, the consummation of all the symbols, types, figures, and metaphors revealed in the Bible.

The Reality of the Divine and Mystical Realm

Some question whether the physical, material things are real or whether they just point to an invisible reality. Others deny reality to the divine and mystical realm, assigning it to myths, legends, and religious superstition. The Greek philosophers debated this. Plato considered that there was “a transcendent, non-sensible world of Forms or Ideas....the Forms [being unchanging and eternal] alone are truly real” (Kelly 16). These Forms are “universals common to all particulars of a class” underlying or corresponding to the material world (17). Unlike Plato, his student Aristotle “accepted the reality of the material world” (17). He believed that the Forms are present in material substance.

It is questionable philosophically which view corresponds more closely to the Bible, but by the Bible's use of referents to the Greek word *alētheia* (truth, reality), it is clear that the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit (John 14:6; 1 John 5:6)—the Word (17:17), the faith, and the expression of the human virtue of truthfulness (4:24), which comes from recognizing our true need and condition before God and the experience of God in Christ as the Spirit embodied in the Word, are all reality. They are all interrelated; as Witness Lee states,

[God, Christ, the Spirit, the Word of God, and the contents of the faith] refer to the same reality in essence. God, Christ, and the Spirit—the Divine Trinity—are essentially one. Hence, these three, being the basic elements of

the substance of the divine reality, are actually one reality. This one divine reality is the substance of the Word of God as the divine revelation. Hence, it becomes the revealed divine reality in the divine Word and makes the divine Word the reality. The divine Word conveys this one divine reality as the contents of the faith, and the contents of the faith are the substance of the gospel revealed in the entire New Testament as its reality, which is just the divine reality of the Divine Trinity. When this divine reality is partaken of and enjoyed by us, it becomes our genuineness, sincerity, honesty, and trustworthiness as an excellent virtue in our behavior that enables us to express God, the God of reality, by whom we live; and we become persons living a life of truth, without any falsehood or hypocrisy, a life that corresponds with the truth revealed through creation and the Scripture. (Recovery Version, 1 John 1:6, note 6)

There is an interesting paradox between the two realms. On the one hand, the Bible reveals that the physical universe will pass away (Rev. 21:1; cf. 1 John 2:17) and that the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18). Hence, it seems that the material universe is not real in the sense of having a lasting, permanent existence. However, the Bible also testifies that there is the mingling of the divine and mystical realm with the physical realm in God's economy. This mingling took place first in the person of Christ and then occurs in the members of the church as His Body and consummates in the New Jerusalem, the greatest allegory of all. According to 1 Corinthians 15:53-54, the mortal, physical realm represented by our physical body will put on the immortal, divine and mystical, eternal realm.

The Communication of the Divine and Mystical Realm

The physical, material creation testifies to the characteristics of the divine and mystical realm. The heavens declare the glory of God; the expanse proclaims the work of His hands (Psa. 19:1). The heavens also declare His righteousness (50:6; 97:6). The invisible things of God, both His eternal power and divine characteristics, can be clearly seen by creation, being perceived by the things made (Rom. 1:20).

Man can perceive the invisible things of God by observing the visible things created by Him. Both the eternal power

of God and the divine characteristics that express God's intrinsic nature are manifested in God's creation. For example, the abundance of light in the universe shows that light is a divine characteristic, a divine attribute of the divine nature (James 1:17). The same is true of beauty and life. (Recovery Version, Rom. 1:20, note 2)

The Scriptures, or the Word, also has a particular function in making us aware of and conveying the realities of the divine and mystical realm into us. The Word, using figurative language, speaks about the divine reality in terms of physical, material entities, and it also conveys the divine reality to us in essence. The substantiation of, or realization of, the divine and mystical realm, indeed the mingling of the two realms, takes place through the Word and by faith. "The Word of God as the divine revelation...not only reveals but also conveys the reality of God and Christ and of all the divine and spiritual things. Hence, the Word of God also is reality (John 17:17)" (Recovery Version, 1 John 1:6, note 6). "Faith is the substantiation of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). We also walk by faith and not by appearance (2 Cor. 5:7).

Figurative Language in the Bible

Figurative language employing images from the physical realm is often used to describe the divine and mystical realm. Physical things function as signs, symbols, types, and shadows (signifiers) of divine and mystical matters (the signified). When the focus is on the signified, a different kind of figurative language is used to transfer meaning from the physical realm to the divine and mystical realm directly by metaphor or in comparison with it indirectly by simile. An extended metaphor can become an allegory or parable by incorporating other symbols.

Signs and Symbols

In the Old Testament the word *'ot* (sign) is used to indicate that an object has a deeper, perhaps not so obvious, significance. For example, the sun, the moon, and the stars are set as signs in the heavens (Gen. 1:14). Sometimes the significance of the sign is immediately indicated. For example, the rainbow is the sign of a covenant between God and the earth (9:12). For other signs we have to wait for the New Testament for the full significance. For example, circumcision, a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham (Gen. 17:11), points to the seal of the righteousness of his faith (Rom. 4:11). The Passover with the blood and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are signs of our redemption in Christ and the progression of the Christian life (Exo. 12:13-15; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7), and the Sabbath is a sign of our rest in God's accomplished work and the millennial kingdom reward (Exo. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12, 20; cf. Heb. 4:9). Sometimes the significance of signs is not clearly specified but can be understood by spiritual experiences in the New

Testament. Examples of these include the burning thorn-bush that was not consumed (Exo. 3:2, 12), Moses' staff becoming a serpent, his hand becoming leprous, water turning to blood (4:2-9), and the ten plagues in Egypt (7:3ff), which testify of fallen human nature and the satanic world system. Sometimes the prophets themselves were signs of events about to take place in Israel's history (Isa. 20:3; Ezek. 12:6). Jonah was a sign that God in Christ would turn from Israel to the Gentiles, be buried in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights, and then be resurrected, becoming the unique sign to that generation for salvation (Matt. 12:39; 16:4). The notion of signs also occurs frequently in the writings of John; both as a noun (*sign*) and as a verb (*signify*). The miracles that the Lord Jesus carried out were called signs (*semeion*)—changing water to wine (John 2:11, 23), healing the dying (4:54), feeding the hungry (6:14), giving sight to the blind (9:16), and resurrecting the dead (12:18)—all of which illustrate the Lord as life meeting the need of every human being. At His second coming, He Himself becomes a sign, the sign of the Son of Man, who will appear in heaven, coming on the clouds particularly to the nation of Israel as a testimony of the consummation of His process and the mingling of the divine and mystical realm with the physical realm (Matt. 24:30). The verb *semainō* is used to indicate the kind of death that the Lord would die: He would be lifted up (John 12:33), and He would be crucified, rather than stoned by the Jews (18:32). The entire book of Revelation, the revelation of Jesus Christ, is made known by signs (see "Opening the Book of Revelation" in *Affirmation & Critique* III.2 (April 1998): 50-52, which deals with the significance of the verb *semainō* in understanding the symbolic nature of the book).

Types, Shadows, and Examples

As an extension of the notion of signs, the Bible presents signs as types or patterns. A type (Gk. *typos*, from *typtō*, "to strike") is a stamp, pattern, or mold, indicating that a pattern or idea is applied to someone or something else. The analogy of a typeface in printing and its corresponding image is helpful. The typeface produces an impression, or antitype (Gk. *antitypos*). A type has significance future to itself; it is "a figure or representation of something to come; an anticipative figure, a prophetic symbol" (Conner 84). Types may be persons (Adam), offices (the priesthood and kingship), entities (the tabernacle), or events (the Passover and Israel's wandering in the wilderness).

The children of Israel with their journeying from Egypt, through the wilderness into the good land serve as types (*typoi*) of, or examples to, us (1 Cor. 10:6, 11). Paul, the apostles, the believers in Thessalonica, Timothy, Titus, and the elders are also types, or patterns, to be impressed on and reproduced in their fellow believers (Phil. 3:17; 1 Thes. 1:7; 2 Thes. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:3).

A type may consist of a number of symbolic elements that are not in themselves types; for example, the Feast of the Passover is a type of Christ, and items such as the unleavened bread, the blood on the doorposts and lintel, and the hyssop to apply the blood are symbols of Christ as our food, our redemption, and our faith respectively. A type may be associated with and lead to other types. For example, Adam as a type of Christ

was the head of the old collective man (mankind). Whatever he did and whatever happened to him is participated in by all mankind. In this respect he is a type of Christ, who is the Head of the new corporate man, the church (Eph. 2:15-16). (Recovery Version, Rom. 5:14, note 4)

Adam's being put to sleep symbolizes Christ's death on the cross, and the rib extracted from his side being built into a woman (Gen. 2:21-23) symbolizes the building of the church with Christ's resurrection life. Eve is a type of the church in the aspect of the church being produced, as well as a type showing the nature of the church. The relationship between Adam and Eve, as a type of Christ and the church, can be extended to include other couples in the Old Testament, each emphasizing particular and distinct features. Isaac as the only begotten son obeying his father even unto death and being resurrected from death typifies Christ (22:9-10; Heb. 11:19), and Rebekah typifies the Gentile component of the church being chosen from the world. Joseph being persecuted by his brothers typifies Christ being persecuted by the Jews, and his wife Asenath typifies the church being obtained by God in the world (Egypt). Moses typifies Christ as God's Prophet leading His people out of Egypt, and Zipporah typifies the church in the wilderness; Boaz typifies Christ as the Redeemer, and Ruth typifies the church being redeemed from the Gentile world.

David typifies the [warring] Christ who passed through all kinds of sufferings, and David's wife, Abigail, typifies the [warring] church in the midst of sufferings. Solomon typifies the glorification of Christ, and the Shulammitte, the queen of Solomon, typifies the church reigning in glory and enjoying the resurrected Christ. (Lee, *Three Aspects* 107-108)

God was serious in ensuring that the types in the Old Testament would be set up properly and not spoiled. God

charged Moses to see that he made all things according to the pattern that was shown to him in the mountain (Exo. 25:40; Heb. 8:5). When Moses struck the rock a second time after God charged him to just speak to it, He forbade Moses from entering the good land because he failed to sanctify God before the children of Israel, "spoiling" the type of the smitten rock, which testified that Christ only needed to be smitten once for our sins and for the release of the divine life as the reality of the water flowing from the rock (Num. 20:8-13; cf. Exo. 17:6).

The imprint of a type or figure of something is the antitype. The holy places made by hands are the antitype, or figure, of the true tabernacle in the heavens (Heb. 9:24), which had to be constructed according to the type or pattern of the heavenly tabernacle shown to Moses at Mount Sinai. As Goppelt points out, Acts 7:44 and Hebrews 8:5 develop out of Exodus 25:40 "the sense of the heavenly

'original' in distinction from the earthly ἀντίτυπος or 'copy'" (249). Baptism is an antitype of the waters of the flood at the time of Noah, which in turn is symbolic of our death and resurrection with Christ (1 Pet. 3:21).¹

Another term, *shadow* (Gk. *skia*), is also employed to refer mainly to rituals and practices in the Old Testament that por-

tray Christ. Shadows are distinct from types, which refer mainly to persons or things that signify Christ. The dietary regulations pertaining to eating and drinking (daily), the feasts (annually), new moons (monthly), and Sabbaths (weekly) are all shadows of things to come; the body that casts the shadow belongs to Christ and is Christ (Col. 2:16-17). Although the Sabbath was a rest, it was not the real rest, for the real rest is Christ. "As with a man's physical body, the body here is the substance. And like the shadow of a man's body, the rituals in the law are a shadow of the real things in the gospel" (Recovery Version, v. 17, note 2).

The law has a shadow of the good things to come (Heb. 10:1). "The law as a testimony of God described what God was like. As a description and explanation of God, the law was a testimony of God. In this it was a shadow of Christ as the real explanation, definition, and testimony of God" (Lee, *Life-study* 261-262). Indeed, we could say that because Christ is the body of all the shadows, the reality of every positive thing in the universe (Col. 2:16-17), all the positive things in the universe (such as light, air, food and drink) are merely shadows of Christ.

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The tabernacle, the priesthood, and the offerings also serve as an example (Gk. *upodeigma*, literally *upo* (under) and *deigma* (something shown or indicated) and a shadow of the heavenly things (Heb. 8:5; 9:23). Other occurrences of the word *upodeigma* are, positively, the Lord Jesus setting Himself as an example of love by washing the disciples' feet to maintain fellowship (John 13:15) and, negatively, the children of Israel as an example of disobedience in not entering into the rest of the good land (Heb. 4:11), the prophets as examples of suffering evil and of long-suffering (James 5:10), and Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of the punishment to those who intend to live an ungodly life (2 Pet. 2:6).

Metaphors and Similes

When the focus is on the signified (the reality), another literary device, a metaphor or a simile, is employed. A metaphor carries across meaning from one entity to another (from the Greek *meta*, "after, across," and *pherō*, "to carry") and "involves understanding *one kind* of entity or experience in terms of *another kind*" (Lakoff and Johnson 178). Thus, our understanding and experience of the divine and mystical realm are enhanced by using illustrations of phenomena in the physical and material realm.

Metaphors are usually used in the Bible because the things spoken of are rich, deep, and experiential and may require our further meditation and prayer. For example, in talking about Paul's use of five metaphors in 2 Corinthians, indicating that we believers in the new covenant ministry are captives, incense-bearers, letters, mirrors, and vessels (2:14—4:7), Witness Lee states, "Ordinary words are not adequate to speak of them...We need to consider these metaphors again and again" (*Divine Dispensing* 353).

A metaphor "is an aid to understanding, but always, beyond the metaphor, there lies a reality that is more than the metaphor" (Williams 1). For example, when Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to talk about the church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-26, cf. v. 27), we should not lose sight that the Body of Christ is itself a reality; our human body is a metaphor to help our understanding and experience of the Body of Christ. We should not dismiss the term *Body of Christ* as merely a metaphor, depriving it of its divine and mystical reality. The church is the Body of Christ (Col. 1:24), which indicates that the church is the means for Christ to have a "corporeal presence" on the earth today (Williams 90).

In transferring images from one realm to another, certain shared features come to light that may not be so obvious at first glance. For example, using the metaphor of a human body applied to the church as the Body of Christ, a body has both a circulatory system, which connects the members to one another (signifying the fellowship in the

Body of Christ), and a central nervous system, which connects all the members directly with the head (signifying the direct relationship that each member has with Christ the Head). On the other hand, not all features are transferable from the signifier to the signified. In the metaphor "all flesh is grass" (Isa. 40:6), the feature of temporariness is transferred but not physical appearance or color.

When compared to similes, metaphors make the image more powerful since they are presented as equivalent, and this leads the reader to consider perhaps more deeply where the similarities between the two should end. On the other hand, similes indicate the similarity or resemblance of one matter to another, but also imply that there are differences.²

Usually similes are marked by the adverb *like* or *as* or the verb *liken* before them. The kingdom of the heavens is likened to mustard seed, leaven, and treasure hidden in a field (Matt. 13:31, 33, 44). Perhaps similes are used in these cases since the connection is not so obvious or is unexpected, e.g., Jesus is coming *as* a thief (Rev. 3:3). Similes may be used when an attribute or quality of a person is portrayed as a physical substance. For example, in Revelation the Lord has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like shining bronze (2:18). He is like jasper stone and sardius in appearance (4:3). His head and hair are as white as white wool, as snow; His eyes are like a flame of fire (1:14); His feet are like shining bronze, as having been fired in a furnace; His voice is like the sound of many waters (v. 15); and His face shines as the sun shines in its power (v. 16).

Parables

The word *parable* (Gk. *parabolē*, lit. thrown or cast alongside) is translated "figure," "symbol," or "illustration." Parables may function as extended metaphors or similes placed alongside the signified, such as, the kingdom of the heavens being likened to ten virgins going forth to meet their bridegroom (Matt. 25:1). Parables may also present a figure or illustration that is usually more detailed or complex than a single symbol and often refer to a situation or story.

The tabernacle, particularly with the way of the Holy of Holies, is a figure or parable for the present time of "the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not of this creation" (Heb. 9:8-11). Into this tabernacle Christ entered after He offered Himself as the reality of the sacrifices (vv. 11-14), thus affording us the way to enter the Holy of Holies in the heavens, into the presence of God in our mingled spirit, and to become an enlarged tabernacle, an enlarged Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God among men on this earth (Rev. 21:3).

Abraham, after offering Isaac, received him back from the dead in figure (Gk. *parabolē*) (Heb. 11:17-19). This means

that the account of Abraham and Isaac is a figure, a parable, an account, to be placed alongside God the Father's offering up His only begotten Son on the cross.

Parables may also be stories used to illustrate a point. The Lord Jesus spoke in parables primarily to the disciples because of the hardness of the heart of the religious Jews opposing Him to illustrate deeper matters concerning the kingdom of the heavens. The parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23), the parable of the tares (vv. 24-30, 36-43), the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 31-32), and the parable of the leaven (v. 33) indicate the development of the kingdom of the heavens from its inception, including its abnormal and mixed growth, unto its consummation at the end of this age. The Lord also indicated that the kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure in the field (v. 44), a pearl of great value (vv. 45-46), and a net cast into the sea (v. 47). He also told two parables about vineyards (21:28-30, 33-39), the parable of the wedding feast (22:1-14), and the parable of the fig tree (24:32), drawing from Old Testament imagery concerning Israel as a vine or vineyard and a fig tree.

Other stories are called parables, such as: Satan casting out Satan dividing a kingdom and house against itself (Mark 3:23); the new garment and new wine (Luke 5:36); the blind man leading the blind (6:39); the foolish rich man who built barns (12:16); the fig tree without fruit (13:6); those choosing the places of honor at the wedding feast (14:7); the shepherd seeking a lost sheep, the woman seeking a lost coin, and the father receiving his lost son (15:3); the unrighteous judge (18:1); and the Pharisee and tax collector praying (v. 9).

Allegories

An allegory (from the Greek *allos*, "another [of the same]" and *agoreuō*, "to speak [in the *agora*, "market or place of assembly"]", proclaim, declare") is an extended metaphor. The only explicit allegory in the Bible (in which the Greek word occurs) is in Galatians 4, although we could say that there are a number of allegories to be found in the New Testament. The gerund *allegorizing* has also been used in a general sense to describe the whole process of bringing out a spiritual sense from the literal words of the Bible. Philo [and Origen] allegorized to bring out the deeper spiritual meaning from the text, as opposed to

focusing only on the literal sense of the Bible (Büchsel 261). They also tried to avoid extremes, either to disregard totally the literal sense and just spiritualize everything or just focus on the literal, ignoring any spiritual sense. Most interpreters of the Bible since have avoided both extremes, choosing a middle path, but perhaps emphasizing one sense over the other.³

Galatians 4:22-26 is a complex example. It speaks concerning the two sons of Abraham, who were born from two women, Hagar and Sarah, who are presented allegorically as two covenants. Hagar corresponds to the law given at Mount Sinai requiring natural human effort and strength, and Sarah corresponds to the promised birth of Isaac carried out according to grace (with the women functioning as types). These covenants also correspond to two cities, the Jerusalem of Paul's present, in slavery under the law with her children, and the Jerusalem above, signifying all those born according to grace, as our mother (a metaphor).

Hanson cites other examples of allegory in the New Testament (78-79). These include the metaphor of leaven as sin that needs to be purged out of the church as the new lump (1 Cor. 5:6-8), the metaphor of those laboring

in the gospel as oxen that should not be muzzled in order to partake of the supply from those on whom they are laboring (9:8-10), and the journey of the children of Israel in the wilderness as a type of our spiritual journey. We are baptized into Christ; we feed on Him as the real manna and drink of Him as the spiritual water from the rock, yet we need to be careful not to lust after evil things (idolatry, fornication) and not to murmur lest we fall (10:1-11).

The New Jerusalem: the Greatest Allegory in the Bible

The greatest allegory of all in the Bible is the New Jerusalem, which is the consummation of the entire Bible, including all its symbols, types, figures, metaphors, and similes. The New Jerusalem is the consummation of the mingling of divinity with all God's people. As Witness Lee states,

in order to interpret the significance of this allegory, we need the proper understanding of the spiritual revelation in the entire Bible and also the experience of all the crucial points of God's revelation in the New and Old Testaments. (*Economy* 397)

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Figurative language is used throughout the description of the New Jerusalem. It is portrayed symbolically as a tabernacle (Rev. 21:3), a city (vv. 2, 10), a bride or a wife (vv. 2, 9), and a lampstand (v. 23; 22:5).

As a tabernacle, the New Jerusalem is the fulfillment of the tabernacle of the Old Testament, which was God's moveable dwelling place, and was in turn a type of the incarnation of God in the flesh; as John 1:14 states, "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." The New Jerusalem is the enlarged tabernacle of God manifested in the flesh as His eternal moveable dwelling place on earth among men, the nations who dwell on the earth in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:3; 1 Tim. 3:16).

As a city, it is the *New Jerusalem*, the consummate city of God, containing and indeed functioning as the temple of God (Rev. 21:22), an enlarged inner sanctuary or Holy of Holies (Gk. *naos*), the fixed dwelling place of the redeeming God and His priests. This city has a number of features, all of which are symbolic of the consummation of different aspects of God's salvation, including a base of gold (v. 18), a street of gold (v. 21), a wall with gates and foundations (vv. 18-21), a throne, a river, and the tree of life (22:1-2).

Gold with its unchanging, incorruptible nature, constituting the base and the street of the city,

signifies the divine nature of God, the city's being of pure gold signifies that New Jerusalem is altogether of God's divine nature and takes God's divine nature as its element. *Pure gold, like clear glass* indicates that the whole city is transparent and is not in the least opaque. (Recovery Version, 21:18, note 3)

The twelve gates of the wall consist of pearls, which have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel written on them (vv. 21, 12). As Witness Lee states,

pearls are produced by oysters in the waters of death. When an oyster is wounded by a grain of sand, it secretes its life-juice around the grain of sand and makes it into a precious pearl. This depicts Christ as the living One coming into the death waters, being wounded by us, and secreting His life over us to make us into precious pearls for the building of God's eternal expression. That the twelve gates of the holy city are twelve pearls signifies that regeneration through the death-overcoming and life-secreting Christ is the entrance into the city. This meets the requirement of the law, which is represented by Israel and is under the observing of the guarding angels (v. 12). (Recovery Version, v. 21, note 1)

The wall of jasper with its foundations of twelve kinds of

precious stones, which all have the same basic chemical composition (silicon dioxide, the most common substance found on earth, which has been transformed through heat, pressure, and the addition of different trace elements to provide their distinct colors), signifies the transformation work of the Spirit on the believers. The foundations inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles connect the New Testament apostles and their teaching to the building work of the wall (Acts 2:42).

The New Jerusalem lies square, its breadth, length, and height having the same measurements (Rev. 21:16). On the one hand, sides with the same measurements tie the New Jerusalem to the Holy of Holies, the innermost chamber of the tabernacle and the temple; on the other hand, the New Jerusalem appears as a mountain, the consummation of all the mountains in the Bible, especially Mount Zion (Heb. 12:22), the site of the temple.

The throne of God and of the Lamb indicates God's ruling authority, His headship over the entire universe (Rev. 21:3; 22:1, 3). The fact that the throne is the throne of the Lamb indicates that it is the throne of the redeeming God and hence approachable (Heb. 4:16; Rev. 7:17). The Lamb signifies the One who has fulfilled all of the offerings of the Old Testament to solve our problems before God and paid the price to redeem us to God through the shedding of His blood (1:5; 7:14; 12:11).

From the throne of God and of the Lamb proceeds a river of water of life, as bright as crystal (22:1). This river is the consummation of all the rivers in the Bible, beginning from the river flowing from the garden of Eden in Genesis 2, to the river in God's house flowing out (Psa. 36:8; Ezek. 47:1), bringing us to the city of life, the New Jerusalem (John 4:14). The river signifies the Spirit (7:38-39; cf. Rom. 8:2). On either side of the river grows the tree of life, which also consummates the tree of life in Genesis 2. The tree of life signifies the crucified and resurrected Christ as the embodiment of the divine life (John 14:6; 15:1).

The New Jerusalem is presented as a bride, the wife of the Lamb, adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2, 9; 19:7). She is the fulfillment of all the women who function as types of the church in the Bible. She is made ready, or adorned, through the growth in life and transformation to match her Husband. He is God who became human, passed through death and resurrection to uplift His humanity into divinity and became the life-giving Spirit to prepare the way for His human wife to become divine through regeneration, transformation, and glorification.

The New Jerusalem also appears as a great lampstand, as the consummation of all the lampstands in the Bible (Exo. 25:31; Zech. 4:2; Rev. 1:12; 22:5), shining out the glory of God as light (1 John 1:5), through the Lamb as the lamp,

with the city being a great diffuser of the light (Rev. 21:23-24). Her light is like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal (v. 11). She is also transparent, the city and its street being pure gold, like clear transparent glass (vv. 18, 21).

Conclusion

The Bible uses figurative language to unveil to its readers a revelation of the divine and mystical realm for them to enter into and experience. It is necessary to go beyond the literal sense of the letter (2 Cor. 3:6) to a deeper spiritual sense indicated by the use of signs, symbols, figures, types, metaphors, and allegories. The Word itself is also the means to convey this divine and mystical realm to the believers. The images presented by the figurative language of the Bible consummate in the New Jerusalem as the greatest allegory of all. It is the ultimate mingling of the divine and mystical realm with the physical and material realm.

by Roger Good

Notes

¹As Hanson, quoting Lundberg, points out, the authors of Hebrews and 1 Peter,

are using the word *antitype* in different senses. To the author of Hebrews, 'antitype means that which is inferior and imperfect in comparison with the type [cf. Plato].' But in 1 Peter...Christian Baptism, which is called the *antitype*, is obviously intended to be the reality and fulfillment. (67)

The tabernacle made by hands is the antitype, or imprint, of the true, heavenly tabernacle (Heb. 9:24), the example and shadow of heavenly things (8:5; 9:23), and a figure, or *parabolē*, of a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not of this creation (vv. 9-11). So the earthly tabernacle is both patterned after a true heavenly tabernacle and points to a consummate tabernacle, i.e., Christ and the church as the enlarged tabernacle (Rev. 21:3), which is the mingling of the divine and mystical realm with the human and physical realm.

²Sometimes the Bible employs a simile and a metaphor for the same notions. All flesh is *like* grass emphasizes more obvious similar qualities, such as transience (1 Pet. 1:24). All flesh is grass implies that grass represents flesh. In the sight of God, flesh is grass worthy only of being burned at the time of judgment (1 Cor. 3:12-13). We are *like* sheep that go astray (Isa. 53:6), considered *as* sheep for the slaughter (Psa. 44:22), but we *are* the sheep of God's pasture (79:13; 100:3).

³Some try to make a hard break between allegory and typology by defining allegory as an interpretation that reduces or eliminates the literal sense of the Word in order to avoid or negate a difficult historical sense. They suggest that allegory is unrestricted interpretation that freely reads into the meaning of Biblical texts by utilizing vague linguistic clues. In contrast, they define typology as an interpretation that takes seriously the historical events and personages of the Old Testament and was practiced by the writers of the New Testament. However, setting a hard break between the two does not work, since both methods of interpretation share common elements.

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