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An Outline of Symbolism in the Bible

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**AN OUTLINE
OF
SYMBOLISM IN THE BIBLE**

by

Paul E. Schuessler

Submitted in partial fulfillment
for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity
in Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

Approved by:

Harold E. Quinn
Richard H. Cadmus

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PREFACE

The following projects, submitted in partial fulfillment for the B.D. degree, resulted from research in the field of Christian symbolism:

1) The research and writing of Our Redeemer -- A Cathedral of Gospel Art, submitted as the bulk of the writer's material;¹

2) Research for the Reverend Luther A. Schuessler's origination of the Sermon on the Mount Memorial Shields;²

3) The research and writing of this thesis, which serves the following purposes: to provide a more academic introduction to the monograph mentioned above; and to supply a comprehensive bibliography as evidence of the writer's research in this field.

Full-hearted acknowledgement goes out to the writer's father, the Reverend Luther A. Schuessler, for his encouragement and guidance in the study of Christian symbolism, his fostering spirit in providing opportunities for

1. Printed privately in Chicago, Illinois, by Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, 1948; two copies of which are available in the Pritzlaff Memorial Library. This monograph is 93 pages long, contains about 1400 words, and required about 300 hours in preparation.

2. Ibid., pp. 55-77.

development in this field, and his astute supervision of the writing of Our Redeemer -- A Cathedral of Gospel Art.

The writer is also grateful for the kindly interest and profitable suggestions offered by Professor Walter E. Buszin in the composition of this thesis.

May, 1949.

P. S.

Part I: Introduction to Symbolism

Symbolism permeates almost every human activity. The Christian man thinks in symbols (mental images: Heaven and hell), talks in symbols (singing: Ein' Feste Burg), sees symbolically (pictures: the cross), and acts in symbols (gestures: kneeling). These activities are recognized as symbolic, and, for the most part, are easily translated into the moral or spiritual truth for which they stand.

Furthermore, the Bible being what it is, the Grand Epic of divine and human activity, will likewise be permeated with symbolism. Because of its Oriental setting, we will have to deal with the typical Eastern proclivity toward symbolism. And, most important of all, the Bible is the Word of Life, the Dictum Dei.

Therefore, a systematic study of Bible symbolism is highly warranted by the Christian's desire to learn from, to be strengthened in, and to teach from Holy Writ's inexhaustible resources.

Finally, this thesis proposes an outline for study in Biblical symbolism by 1) submitting a definition of the subject, its Biblical warrants, and revealing its opportunities for employment; and 2) submitting a workable outline for further analytical study.

1. Definition of Symbolism

"The word 'symbol' is derived from the Greek 'sym-ballein' which means 'to piece together.' It was a widespread custom in the antiquity that the host broke a potsherd or a ring and gave one half to his guest, retaining the other half. When the guest came back, the one half of the potsherd fitting into the other proved him a guest with the right of hospitality. The 'symbol' made him at home."³

While the German language has the word Symbole, it also uses the expressive compound Sinnbild, meaning "a picture for the mind."

The word "symbol" again, was "used by the Greeks, much in the same way as we use the word 'coupon', where one part corresponded with or represented another part."⁴

According to Webster, symbolism is not an end in itself, but "a method of revealing or suggesting immaterial, ideal, or otherwise intangible truth or states...by reason of relationship, association, or convention."

Limiting our field, we shall be interested only in

3. Winzen, Symbols of Christ, from the introduction.

4. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, p. 769.

such symbolism as is found in Holy Scriptures; and this symbolism will reveal by representation some moral or spiritual truth. Furthermore, it divides itself into three modes of expression (according to our outline): Concrete, Abstract, and Supernatural Symbolism.

A few definitions given by Webber are worth noting: "A symbol is a story told by a familiar sign....also a mark of identification.... Symbols have been used to express abstract ideas."⁵

Bennett has a particularly lucid explanation of symbolism:

All sensuous things to which a higher meaning, aside from the natural significance, is attributed, are symbols. All religions are measurably symbolic in character. The expression of spiritual truths and abstract notions by analogous phenomena in the physical world has been common to all peoples and religions. To communicate these conceptions to others, and fix them by the laws of association, it is necessary to give them formal expression. Hence, the successful teaching of the doctrines of religion must in some sense involve symbolism. (6

5. Webber, Church Symbolism, p. v f. See also Ralph Adams Cram's Introduction to the same book for a provocative discussion on the philosophy of symbolism.

6. Bennett, Christian Archeology, p. 72.

2. Biblical Warrants

"The language of the Holy Scriptures, in both the Old and in the New Testament, is extraordinarily rich in symbolism and gives the highest warrant for the use of it. The Bible strongly favors symbolism when legitimately used for instruction, and condemns it when it is converted to idolatrous ends. Such condemnation will always be needed. From the earliest times 'Eye-gate' has been an important entrance to the soul of man. Modern psychology has demonstrated that our actions are governed not only by ideas but by that which appeals to the subconscious mind."⁷

For a more definitive viewpoint, we read in Bullinger: "The word [symbol] does not occur in the New Testament, and nothing is said in Scripture as to one thing being so used. The assertion as to anything being a symbol rests entirely on human authority, and depends for accuracy on its agreement with the teaching of Scriptures [the analogy of Scripture]."⁸

7. Stafford, Christian Symbolism, p. 27f.

8. Bullinger, op. cit., p. 769.

A. Words Employed by Scripture⁹

σηῖν is the Old Testament word translatable in a good share of the cases as "symbol;" although it is actually translated in the Authorized Version as "ensign" (2), "mark" (1), "miracle" (2), "sign" (60), and "token" (14). It is translated in the Septuagint as σημείον.

σημείον appears seventy-seven times in the New Testament, where it is translated as "miracle" (22), "sign" (51), "token" (1), and "wonder" (3; although in two of these cases "sign" appears in the margin). It does not seem, however, that the word can be as easily equated with "symbol" as in its Septuagint usage. Compare: "For a sign which shall be spoken against" (which seems close to "symbol")¹⁰ and, "An evil...generation seeketh after a sign" (which seems further away).¹¹

ἀλληγορεῖν means "to speak allegorically" or "in a figure." This word occurs only once in the New Testament: "which things are an allegory,"¹² referring to

9. Materials for this section were gathered from Young, Analytical Concordance to the Bible, and Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: sub loc.

10. Lk. 2,34.

11. Mt. 12,39.

12. Gal. 4,24.

the symbolism of an heir in the Kingdom of God.

In the New Testament, as stated before, the word "symbol" itself does not appear; although it is practically synonymous with the later use of μυστήριον as in Revelation 1,20 (where "the mystery of the seven stars...and the seven golden candlesticks" is explained).¹³

B. Thoughts Expressed in Various Passages

After a long time of speaking in parables and uttering dark sayings Christ came, and after His resurrection He "opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures."¹⁴ We feel safe in concluding that such interpretation would also include the explanation of symbolism. And even before our Lord's resurrection, for example, He explained the symbol of Jonah's being swallowed by a large fish as meaning, "so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."¹⁵

In the New Testament epistles we have further enlightenment shed on the meaning of certain Scriptural symbolism.

13. Bullinger, op. cit., p. 769. Cf. Rev. 27,5.7.

14. Lk. 25,45.

15. Mt. 12,40. In early days this symbol was used as a popular symbol of the Resurrection. Cf. Webber, op. cit., p. 79.

Referring to Abraham, St. Paul wrote, "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also."¹⁶

Especially in regard to Old Testament symbolism, the student must thoroughly examine the book of Hebrews. For example, "...priests that offer gifts according to the law: who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount."¹⁷

16. Ro. 4,11.

17. Heb. 8,4f.

3. Employment of Symbolism

A. Values Gained From a Study of Symbolism in the Bible

a) In Bible Study

Little, in the way of a systematic study, has been written on the subject of Biblical symbolism. True, its symbolism has been touched on frequently in various specific fields such as the parables of Christ; and, of course, one constantly comes across the explanation of isolated symbols in references, commentaries, and the like. (Witness the broad scope of symbolism.) However, the general subject remains almost untouched.

One need only glance into Patrick Fairbairn's classic, *The Typology of Scripture* to see the rich rewards awaiting such a study.¹⁸ In spite of certain dangerous pitfalls (of which we shall speak later), this symbolism is still another profitable method of examining the Word of Life.

b) In Homiletics

Common consent and opinion give well-chosen Biblical

18. See bibliography. Note the author's opening words (vol. I, p. 2) "The typology of Scripture has been one of the most neglected departments of theological science."

illustrations first place in the construction of interest-appealing sermons. While narrative illustrations are heard most frequently, illustrations taken from the field of symbolism carry much weight in concrete "eye-appeal."

Lest anyone think that "human interest" is lacking in symbolism, let him study the field closer. Both divine and human elements appear in almost all Biblical symbolism. For example, "I am the vine, ye are the branches," says Christ;¹⁹ and, St. Paul writes, "Ye are our epistles written in our hearts, known and read of all men."²⁰

Finally, and more importantly, we see the Divine Will revealed in symbolism. Note the third chapter of Genesis already where God placed "cherubim and a flaming sword" at the entrance of the Garden to stand for His grace and justice towards man.²¹

c) In Artistry

"Symbols have been used in all ages because of their recognized educational value. Even pagan nations have made use of them. A symbol, as Mr. M. Williams has noted, must be a representative of something and not a

19. Jn. 15,5.

20. II Cor. 3,6.

21. Fairbairn, op. cit., vol. I, p. 185ff.

representation. In other words a picture of Samson slaying the Philistines is not a symbol of Samson, but the jawbone of an ass is."²²

Through the ages Biblical symbols have been a never-ending source of inspiration in ecclesiastical art and literature. From the construction of the Temple, to the catacombs of Rome, to Albrecht Durer's "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," to the latest church designs, its symbols permeate and nourish Christian life.

In literature, already the Divine Authors borrow and interpret from each other; the early Church and the Middle Ages seem enflamed with symbolic interest; Bunyan writes his Pilgrim's Progress, and C.S. Lewis his Screwtape Letters in the Twentieth Century.

Whereas most symbolism communicates to the eye or the mental image, music finds its appeal in the ear. In sacred as well as secular music we discover strong evidences of this. For example, the great J.S. Bach of post-Reformation times saw the import and value of this medium. It is a well known fact that his music is full of sharply defined symbolism, as Albert Schweizer emphasizes in his popular tome on the master.

22. Webber, op. cit., p. 7. Italics, ours.

Moreover, through the centuries sacro-secular art and literature finds its genesis in Christianity; and its most popular symbols likewise draw from the Source Book. A cursory reading in Our Roving Bible by Lawrence E. Nelson²³ graphically attests to this fact.

d) In the Enrichment of Faith Life

As an artist friend recently told the writer, "When people see Christian faith described or painted on canvas, there is something definite about it. Either they accept the scene portrayed as fact or they reject it; there can be no argument -- except, of course, from a purely technical viewpoint."²⁴

The analogy is easily carried over to symbolism proper. Scriptural symbols, like the great hymns of the Church, are graphic representations of faith; and in the employ of current believers, such symbols become a powerful mode of faith-expression.

23. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c. 1945.

24. Mr. Siegfried Reinhart of St. Louis.

B. Dangers Involved in Such a Study

a) For Theology (Thought)

"Symbolism can become a means of teaching sound doctrine, but we must avoid careless blunders which would make it teach bad theology," is Webber's clear warning.²⁵

As always, there is the danger of misinterpretation or re-interpretation to suit false doctrine (examples of which will be quoted in the following historical section). Then we are always confronted with the pendulum-swing towards overemphasis, which only rehearses the symbol and fails to probe the meaning. Finally, from Philo to the Nineteen Forties, allegory has dangerously transgressed the sharp lines of the analogy of Scripture.

b) For Religion (Faith Life)

In active religion, where false theology gains momentum, we are confronted with two monstrous misuses of symbolism that fly in the face of the First Commandment: idolatry or fetishism (the modern garb of the former) and dead formalism (referring, of course, especially to the liturgy).

25. Webber, op. cit., p. viii.

C. Historical Usage of Symbolism

a) In Antiquity (B.C.)

The symbolism of the Old Testament differs "essentially from the mere cosmic symbolism of any pagan religion. To pagan thinking symbols like the sun or the tree are embodiments of the healing powers inherent in nature. They never point to a Saviour,"²⁶ or the divine dispensations of Jehovah.

Mackenzie points to the close association between myths and symbols in ancient worship by quoting Polybius. The ancient author describes the international games at Daphne about 165 B.C. He enters into detail about the gala procession of thousands of warriors: "The number of images of gods it is impossible to tell completely; for the images of every god or demi-god or hero accepted by mankind were carried there,...and the myths belonging to each according to accepted tradition, were represented by the most costly symbols."²⁷

We find the most prolific use of symbolism in the

26. Winzen, op. cit., from the Introduction.

27. Mackenzie, The Migration of Symbols, p. ix.

Old Testament which, as Webber points out, form the foundation for all future Christian symbolism.²⁸

Especially in regard to the poetry of the Bible, the Occidental mind is wont to criticize an apparent unwarranted amount of detail. This redundancy may seem to be the case in Ezekiel's description of the Temple (although its form is not properly poetic). However, it should be brought out that this love of detail is typical of the Oriental.

Furthermore, "where western poetry rests mainly upon imagery, the poet of the east adds to imagery symbolism. Imagery paints pictures, appealing directly to the imagination; symbolism is analytical comparison, importing ideas as standards of excellence, which may be incompatible with pictorial effect."²⁹

Fairbairn enlarges our scope of Old Testament symbolism by saying:

...God's method of instruction and discipline in respect to the Old Testament Church, consisted in the use of symbol and action. It was chiefly by means of historical transactions and symbolical rites that the ancient believers were taught what they knew of the truths and mysteries of grace. For the

28. Webber, op. cit., p. 25.

29. Moulton, The Literary Study of the Bible, p. 220.

practical guidance and direction of their conduct they were furnished with means of information the most literal and express; but in regard to the spiritual concerns and objects of the Messiah's kingdom, all was couched under veil and figure. The instruction given addressed itself to the eye rather than to the ear. It came intermingled with the things they saw and handled; and while it necessarily made them familiar with the elements of Gospel-truth, it not less necessarily left them in comparative ignorance as to the particular events and operation in which the truth was to find its ultimate and proper realization. (30

At this point the reader will recall Philo, the ancient arch-enemy of orthodox interpretation. In an early effort to Hellenize the Scriptures, he turned to allegorizing beyond warrant.

Not only the Old Testament, however, is rich in symbolic import (e.g., Isaiah's word picture of the "Lamb without spot or blemish"); but the New Testament also operates successfully in the field of simile, metaphor, parable, and even visionary symbolism.³¹

How easily the Bible is converted into a picture book! A moment's concentration will call to mind numerous volumes of Bible art. In conclusion, the writer likes to refer to a whimsical book published about thirty-five years

30. Fairbairn, op. cit., vol. I, p. 140f.

31. See Part II of this thesis.

ago: Biblische Symbole oder Die Bibel in Bildern für Jung und Alt by Frank Beard and others.³² This 182 page volume quotes Scripture passages, interspersing and substituting line drawings for certain phrases in a style particularly popular with children's books today.

b) In the Early Church³³

The Hellenization of the Roman Empire brought with it the philosophy of Plato (and later, Neo-Platonism) which "found in material facts illustrations or symbols of ideal truths and principles of human life. Stoicism [also] was interested in them as affording a foundation for ethics. None of these systems was seriously interested in facts apart from their symbolical amplification of truth...."³⁴

These philosophic concepts were reflected in the early church fathers. For example, Clement of Alexandria would allegorize the Old Testament narrative of Abraham's (the perfect Christian) bigamy with Hagar (human wisdom) and

32. Chicago: John A. Hertel Co., c. 1909. It first appeared in an English edition.

33. See Gutts, Early Christian Art, p. 357ff for a short outline of symbolic developments from the First to the Fifth Centuries.

34. Taylor, the Mediaeval Mind, vol. I, p. 57.

Sarah (Christian wisdom) as exemplifying Christian intellectual development.³⁵

The same ancient churchman "urges Christians to give attention to symbolism, even in the decorations of their household utensils."³⁶

However, as Morey points out, there is no unanimity of interpretation either by the Fathers, who were on the scene, or by the scholars of today in their analysis of current symbolism.³⁷

The catacombs of Rome have always interested students of symbolism, where the remains date from the Third to the Fifth Centuries primarily. The most popular symbol was the anchor (hope); the fish (strange conotation with the Lord's Supper) also appears frequently, as well as the dove (heavenly bliss or peace). Some of the less frequent representations were the Good Shepherd, the palm branch (victory), the ship (the Christian Church), and the Old Covenant figures of Noah and Jonah (God's deliverance).³⁸

35. Fairbairn, op. cit., p. 13f.

36. Webber, op. cit., p. 7.

37. Morey, Early Christian Art, p. 60f.

38. Ibid., p. 60. Contrary to popular opinion, the early Christians worshipped in their homes, not the Catacombs. Cf. Gutts, op. cit., p. 24ff.

The most common theme of the catacomb symbolism was deliverance either from death (symbols coupled with the words vivas in Domino) or from sin and the misery thereof (coupled with the words in pace).³⁹

c) During the Middle Ages

"The mediaeval man thought and felt in symbols, and the sequence of his thought moved as frequently from symbol to symbol as from fact to fact."⁴⁰ The Middle Ages have been aptly termed the "Golden Age of Symbolism."

The intellectual pace was set by such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas. Harking after the Greek philosophers, he would make statements like this: "It is impossible that the mind, in the state of the present life, wherein it is joined to the passive body (passibili corpori), should know anything actually (actu) except by turning itself to images (phantasmata)."⁴¹

In literature, symbolism expresses itself as allegory. Not only was the allegorical interpretation of Scripture in the whole limitless mass of mediaeval sermons,⁴² but

39. Morey, op. cit., p. 61. Cf. Noah and Jonah.

40. Taylor, op. cit., vol. II, p. 69.

41. Qu. lxxxiv. Art. 7., quoted Ibid., vol. I, p. 496.

42. See next page.

it was reflected in such literary masterpieces as Dante's Divine Comedy and the Romance of the Rose.⁴³ In fact, exhaustive dictionaries of Scriptural allegory were compiled by such men as Rabanus (Allegoriae in universam sacram scripturam)⁴⁴ and Alanus (Liber in distinctionibus dictionum theologialium).⁴⁵

In the ecclesiastical art of this period (especially the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries), symbolism found its highest expression. "The theory was that the ear is not the only avenue to the soul, nor the printed page the only method of expressing truth. It was believed that men might be trained to interpret symbols, and that an emblem of the Fall of Man might remind...and...a symbol of the Crucifixion

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42. (Cont. from p. 18) Ibid., vol. II, p. 85. Taylor also refers to the most popular handbook of sermons at this time by Honorius of Autun (Speculum ecclesiae) as making constant use of allegory to set forth moral advice. (p. 77.)
43. Considered by some to be the greatest allegorical poem of this period. It was written by William de Lorris (some 4200 lines) and John de Meun (more than 18,000 lines). Ibid., p. 127.
44. Ibid., p. 73f., where the author also points to the earliest of these dictionaries as having been compiled by Eucherius, Bishop of Lyons, who died in 450. Title: De Formulis spiritalis intelligentiae.
45. Ibid., p. 120.

might recall to his mind the only way of salvation."⁴⁶
 Webber goes on to say that symbolic carvings were found in almost every available place so that even the organ-tuner, climbing high above the choir loft "might see delicately wrought reminders of man's sin and the fact of redemption."⁴⁷

It was an age of "Art for religious publicity's sake." Symbolism was a medium in which the artists proclaimed their faith and not their art (that came later)."⁴⁸ Taylor adds in praise:

They rendered the sacred drama of mankind's creation, fall, redemption...etc...in all its dogmatic symbolism, and with a plastic adequacy showing how completely they thought and felt in the allegorical medium.... They also created matchless ideals of symbolism in art. The statuary of the portals and facades of Rheims and Chartres are in their way comparable to the sculptures of the pediment of the Parthenon. But unlike the masterpieces of antique idealism, these Christian masterpieces do not seek to set forth mortal man in his natural strength and beauty and completeness. Rather they

46. Webber, op. cit., p. 14. We might add another reason for making cathedrals "Picture Bibles;" namely the high illiteracy of the people.

47. Ibid., p. 15.

48. Taylor, op. cit., vol. II, p. 111. Probably the best primary source material on this subject comes from the hands of the chief mediaeval encyclopaedist, Vincent of Beauvais, and his assistants (Speculum magus) who labored during the best period of Gothic art. "From their work, industry may draw an exhaustive commentary upon the series of topics presented by the sculpture and glass of a cathedral." Ibid., p. 109.

seek to show the working of the human spirit held within the power and grace of God. (49)

This cathedral art was really an extenuation of the allegory and symbolism of the Mass. Taylor describes part of the liturgical service as follows:

The bishop clad in his sacred vestments, at the end of the procession, emerging from the sacristy and advancing to the altar, represents Christ, the expected of the nations, emerging from the Virgin's womb and entering the world, even as the Spouse from His secret chamber. The seven lights...seven gifts of the Holy Spirit descending upon the head of Christ. The two acolytes preceding him signify the Law and the Prophets, shown in Moses and Elias who appear with Christ on Mount Tabor. (50)

Such strongly symbolic hymns as the famous Salve caout cruentatum, attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, date from this period. "It is the seventh and last of a series of poems (Rhythmica Oratio) addressed to Christ on the cross, each poem addressing itself to a separate member of the Lord's body: the feet, the knees, the hands, the side, the breast, the heart, and the head."⁵¹

49. Ibid., p. 111.

50. Ibid., p. 103.

51. Paul Gehardt translated the last section into the popular hymn O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden during post-Reformation times. It appears in the Lutheran Hymnal under number 172. Material gathered from Polack, The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal, p. 135ff.

d) From Reformation Times

The Reformation age pulled sharply at the reins of allegorical misinterpretations and the indiscriminate employment of symbolism.

Luther denounced mystical and allegorical interpretations as "trifling and foolish fables, with which the Scriptures were rent into so many and diverse senses, that silly poor consciences could receive no certain doctrine of anything." Calvin, in like manner, declares that "the true meaning of Scripture is the natural, and obvious meaning, by which we ought resolutely to abide...." (52)

And yet, how Luther's language rings with Scriptural metaphors, similies -- symbolism! It should be emphasized that Luther was no "altar-wrecker" as were the Calvinists who became rabid iconoclasts. Not only did Luther have an appreciation for expurgated liturgical forms, but he held ecclesiastical art to be of true value (if it were not tauted above the Word). These facts are effectively brought out by Hans Preuss in Martin Luther Der Künstler.⁵³

In the post-Reformation era, Protestant theology still harked back, from time to time, to the old Mediaeval errors. The Cocceian school (middle of the Seventeenth Century)

52. Fairbairn, op. cit., p. 17.

53. Note especially, "1. Teil. Luther und die Bilder," pp. 11-98.

stumbled in loose allegory.⁵⁴ Later, the Hutchinsonian school (England) developed all sorts of "physico-theological" interpretations especially in the Old Testament, stating: "Every passage of the Old Testament looks backward and forward and every way...."⁵⁵

Probably the most diabolic curse in this field came with Symbolo-Fideism in the Nineteenth Century. Certain Frenchmen carried their interest in symbolism too far, saying that we cannot contemplate the abstract, cannot attach ourselves to the infinite. Of course, the Bible was held up as the best medium by which we can come closest to the infinite. Furthermore, these false postulates led to the wildest concept of all: "we are saved by faith independent of beliefs."⁵⁶

e) Today

The liturgical churches have remained relatively unchanged, at least in their employment of symbolism, since the Reformation. There was a time, however, in the

54. Fairbairn, op. cit., p. 17ff.

55. Ibid., p. 25f.

56. Recently the school has often been going under the name of "Fideism" only. See Menegoz, "Symbolo-Fideism" in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. XII, p. 151f., for more data.

American Lutheran church when this body conformed somewhat to artistic (Galvanistic) puritanism; but today, this idea hangs on only by the coat-tails.

There is a movement, among the remaining Christian bodies, towards a re-evaluation and use of symbolism, especially in the ecclesiastical arts. Many writers on the subject attest to this trend.⁵⁷

Modern psychology and all contemporary analyses bring this fact to the fore: eye-appeal! The market is flooded with picture magazines, television is entering more and more homes, newspapers highlight their copy with "pix," and almost all organizations are employing the motion picture.

These facts are reasons why we need a systematic study of Scriptural symbolism in order to form a strong foundation in Christian sermonizing, teaching, publicity, and art. Even the "barn-like simplicity" (a favorite expression used by some critics) of yesterday's church edifices can be transformed into an atmosphere of worship.

57. Cf. Webber, *op. cit.*, p. 5ff; and Stafford, *op. cit.*, who has a chapter on the subject: "The Restoration of Forms and Symbols," pp. 21-31.

On this subject, Webber writes, "There is a close analogy between the correct use of symbolism and the use of church music.... It is only a means to an end. Its purpose is to express beautifully certain religious truths...."⁵⁸

The symbolism of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church (Chicago, Illinois), described in our monograph, is strong contemporary evidence of effective, harmonious treatment. Its symbolic art portrays the wedding of tradition and current, creative effort. In such monumental productions as the Sermon on the Mount Memorial Shields (created by the Reverend Luther A. Schuessler),⁵⁹ we find symbolic art preaching in modern idiom.

Truly, the "silent sermons of symbolism" are dynamic accouterments to the written, spoken, and sacramental Word. They can be made to speak the language of today.

58. Webber, op. cit., p. vii.

59. Schuessler, op. cit., pp. 55-77.

Part II: Specific Use of Symbolism

1. Concrete Symbolism

- A. Material or Formal (Memorial)
 - a. From the Old Testament
 - aa. Tabernacle and Temple accouterments (the Ark of the Covenant)
 - bb. Ceremonial laws (sacrifices)
 - cc. Prophetic examples (Jeremiah and the linen girdle)
 - b. From the New Testament
 - aa. Current religious practices (Rabbinical Sabbath laws)
 - bb. Some comments on the Christian Sacraments ("signed Word" and not "symbolic" Word)
- B. Representative (Emblematic)
 - a. From the Old Testament (the bored ear)
 - b. From the New Testament (the holy kiss)

2. Abstract Symbolism

- A. Linguistic
 - a. Hebrew poetry (Song of Songs, Psalms, and isolated examples)
 - b. The simile and metaphor (Ye are our epistle)
 - c. The allegory (Galatians 4,21-31)
- B. Parabolic
 - a. Ten examples from the Old Testament (Nathan to David)
 - b. The parables of Christ (the mustard seed)
- C. Typological
 - a. Definition of type (shadow of things to come)
 - b. Types of Christ (Melchizedek)
- D. Nomenclative
 - a. Use of Name and names in the Bible (attributive and characteristic)
 - b. Divine names (Emmanuel)
 - c. Most prolific use of symbolic names in the Old Testament (Hosea's children)
 - d. Some examples from the New Testament (Simon Peter)

3. Supernatural Symbolism

A. Visionary

- a. Primarily from Old Testament sources (Ezekiel's temple)
- b. Almost the whole of Revelation in the New Testament

B. Numerical

- a. General approaches to the literal problem (Chiliasm)
- b. Specific numbers and their interpretation (seven)

The End

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