

TEACHING BIBLICAL METAPHORS OF THE CHURCH
IN THE INDONESIAN PLURALISTIC CONTEXT
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Abstract

Ecclesiology is one of the central doctrines that must be understood by believers. Matthew 16:18 should be the main basis of the establishment of the church in the world: "and upon this rock I will build my church." This truth shows that teaching about church is quite important. In the Indonesian pluralistic context, correct teaching about ecclesiology (including the teaching of the metaphor of the church) is indispensable. However, not all churches in Indonesia provide a sufficient teaching of on ecclesiology. Indonesia is a country that consists of over 17,000 islands, 350 ethnic groups and languages. It is this context of diversity that makes the churches in Indonesia unique. The diversity of the denominations in Indonesia is not only based on theology, but also on ethnographic factors (ethnicity). This diversified cultural and ethnographic context has led to a wide range of tribal churches. The diversity of the church denominations in Indonesia also has caused various reactions from the outsiders. Many charge that Christianity is being torn apart. The fact that there are many denominations brings resistance for the Indonesian churches. Some say that the various different "names" (brands of denominations and non-denominational churches) of the churches just a strategic ploy to Christianize Indonesian people. These kinds of reasons make teaching of Biblical metaphors for the church in Indonesian in its pluralistic context an urgent issue to be discussed.

Understanding Metaphors In The Bible

Definition of Metaphor

According to the Webster Dictionary, a metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denotes one kind of object or idea that is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them.³ A metaphor also can be defined as a figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or by analogy. Technically the metaphor is a

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³ "Metaphor" in Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield : Merriam-Websters inc., 1983), 746.

comparison in which one thing *is, acts like, or represents another*, though the two are basically unlike. The key is the verb “is.” A metaphor asserts that one thing is *like* another thing. The metaphor is a “comparison by representation.” It is one noun representing another noun.

Purpose of Metaphor

Biblical metaphors allow us to understand more clearly the “mysteries” of God. It stirs the mind to understand the representation or comparison is being made. Metaphors can add vividness and make abstract ideas more concrete. Some opine that metaphors are a language of convenience to help in our understanding. A metaphor is a useful aid to understanding in that it paints a picture for us. It illustrates something about our subject, that can be perceived through the metaphor. For example, when Psalm spoke about how deep God’s love is, he used the image about the father’s love to the son (Ps. 103: 13).

Biblical Metaphors For The Church

The Body of Christ

The metaphor that expresses the unity and diversity of the church is *body*. There are five passages relevant to the body of Christ: Rom. 12:5; I Cor.12:12, 27; Eph. 4:12, 16. Like a physical head has authority over the body and gives direction to it, so Christ is the head of the church has authority over His church as a body. Paul developed his theology of church largely by expounding on pictorial images from the human realm. In Ephesians 1:22-23, we read : “and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”⁴ In Colossians 1: 18 we find : “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Col 1:18 ASV).” Then in verse 24, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." From these passages we establish the fact that the church is the body of Christ, or that the body of Christ is the church. The image of the body (*soma* - greek) fundamentally connotes unity. As the human body is one, so believers are baptized by the Spirit into the one body of Christ (Eph. 4: 4-6).

⁴ All Scripture quotation are taken from the *Holy Bible, American Standart Version*.

The body image also connotes diversity; as the human body possesses many parts, so the church of Christ has many members with differing gifts and functions. The bible also teaches us that the body is not only united but also diversified, the church has many members with many functions. In Ephesians 4:4, it says, "There is one body" In Romans 12:4-5 we read, "for as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." This refers to the individual members of the body (church), showing that each has a vital function. By virtue of natural abilities and spiritual gifts members of the body differ in identity, in function, in utility, and in honor.⁵ The apostle Paul says this same point in 1 Corinthians 12:20 when he says, "But now are they many members, yet but one body." This passage emphasize that eventhough the members of the body (church) are many, but in fact they are one and in essential unity. From God's perspective the church as social reality cannot be devided by nationality, race, social standing, or economic status (Gal. 3:28). Participation in elements of comunion express the church's unity as the body of Christ. As a Chief of church, Christ gives grace to church leaders so that the church can be grown to the maturity and be built up as one body in Christ (Eph. 4: 12, 16; Kol. 2: 19).

The Flock

The other metaphor for church is a flock of sheep. This metaphor defines the church's relationship to its leadership. Church as a flock, needs the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. This metaphor expresses how sweet and tender is relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church. In Luke it Christ calls His disciples His "little flock." This is the precedent of the flock metaphor and is applied to that small body of men following Him. The next occurrence is Matt. 26:31, "Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." Here Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7.

In Old Testament, we find this term used for God's people and ordinally for Israel (Zec. 13:7; Ps. 80:1; Jer. 13: 17). And then the usage of this metaphor in New Testament is extended. When church is called as "flock," it refers to all church members, Jews and "gentiles." This fact is revaeled in John 10:16 "And other sheep I have (gentiles), which are

⁵ Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vol. (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 99), 265-266.

not of this fold (Jews) : them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice: and they shall become one flock (Church that will consist of Jews and gentiles), one shepherd.” This verse expresses the beautiful relationship between Shepherd and the flock. The church belongs to Jesus; and the church is safe in His hands (vrs. 26, 27). And furthermore, there is an intimacy between the Shepherd and the flock; the Shepherd knows the flock and the flock follows the Shepherd.

In Acts 20:28-30, Paul admonishes the elders of Ephesus to be on guard and mindful to keep both themselves and the flock from “grievous wolves” that might enter among them. Paul gives a warning that Church is under the same threat as the sheep of a flock. Both the church and the sheep in a flock face wolves that would attack anytime if there is an unguarded moment. Grievous wolves in this passage is metaphor for cruel and destructive groups that would attack the church members’ faith. The image of flock for the church expresses how vulnerable and weak is the church without God’s grace and guidance. God himself is the good shepherd as seen in David’s confession, but also God is placing spiritual leaders among the flock. Plainly the intention is for pastors to be watching over the welfare of their congregations and tending to their spiritual needs.

In John 21:15-17 we read Jesus had challenged Peter three times as to the sincerity of his love and told him to “feed My sheep/lambs.” Jesus uses this metaphor as an identity for the believers. With this special experience, Peter uses the same metaphor to encourage the elders in I Peter 5:1-3. Particularly we find in verse 2: “Feed the flock of God which is among you ...” These Elders are to nourish their congregations teaching them the Word of God. Verse 3 “being examples to the flock.” They are to live godly lives setting the example of Christian morals and conduct. While this does not exhaustively define the nature of flock/church, it does paint a picture of a local body of Christ.

The Temple of God

The Bible also employs the image of a building, specifically a temple (1 Cor. 3: 16), to describe the relationship of God to His church. In the Old Testament, the temple was the place where God revealed Himself to His people. From the pillar of fire by night and smoke by day, to the wilderness tabernacle, to the temple of Jerusalem, God was personally present with His people. But when the Son of God came in human flesh, He referred to His own body as the temple (John 2:20-22). In the person and work of Jesus Christ, the concept of the

temple and its religious implications were thereby radically transformed. The old covenant, temple, priesthood, and sacrifices were surpassed and fulfilled in the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the high priest, who has established a new covenant (Hebrews 5-8).

Paul instructed the Corinthian church that they were "God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9-15). In this metaphor Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. According to Peter, the Son has come to the earth in Christ as a "living stone," who was rejected by men but elected by God (1 Peter 2:4). As in architecture, the cornerstone is a main reference for the anchor point of the whole wall.⁶ According to Paul, the church is built upon the foundation of Christ, "the chief cornerstone," as well as the apostles and prophets, whose words reveal Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3:11 we read, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Both Peter and Paul regarded the church as a living building.

In Ephesians 2:20-22, we find: "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." In Christ all the building material to build the whole structure is cemented together. The phrase "fitly framed together" is translated from greek term *sunarmologoumene* that literally means fit or precisely joined together.⁷ Every "lively stone" or "joint" has a responsibility and must supply its part toward the building up of the body of Christ and not toward the tearing it down.

Like their Lord, Christians are "living stones" who are being built into a "spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). The church is built upon only one foundation, Jesus Christ, and none other can be laid. Put these together and we have Christ as the foundation and chief corner stone which the apostles and prophets built on and upon which they themselves rest. We know that a building is just as strong as its foundation. The temple of God has Christ as the foundation and is built thereupon.

The apostles and other Christian ministers build on this foundation and the quality of their work will be judged by fire (1 Corinthians 3:9-15). Paul applies the image of the temple to individual Christians (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), to the local congregation (1 Corinthians 3:16-17), and to the universal church (Ephesians 2:21). Taken together, these three passages

⁶ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vol. (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 4: 528-529.

⁷ Fritz Reinecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, ed., Cleon Rogers (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1980), 527.

teach us that the temple is owned by the Father, made holy by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and intended to be built up in the Lord Jesus.

The Bride of Christ

The metaphor of the Church as Christ's bride is an analogy to compare the relationship between husband and wife to Christ to His bride. This metaphor expresses how noble and deep Christ's love is for the Church (Eph. 5: 2, 25). Another emphasis of this metaphor is to raise the bride position.⁸ This metaphor has an eschatological dimension. Batey claims that the metaphor of the Church as the bride of Christ stresses the eschatological nature of the Church.⁹ The terms "Bride" and "Wife" are used interchangeably in the Bible and in Jewish culture. In oriental marriage culture there are several stages in the marriage ceremony. First is the stage of engagement when the bride receives a promise of a future with her bridegroom. This image, therefore, becomes "a metaphor of hope for the future," a bride awaiting her wedding.¹⁰ Thereby the church as a bride is waiting for Jesus Christ return in His glory.

Furthermore, in oriental marriage culture the next stage after the engagement is the marriage itself. This happens when the bridegroom comes to pick the bride up to be with him. It will be a very beautiful moment for the Church to be gathered to Jesus Christ in His eternal kingdom (John. 14; 1-3; 1 Thes. 4: 16-17). After the coming of the groom there is the wedding, which in the analogy is the wedding of the Lamb and His Bride (Rev. 19:7, 8; 21:9). There will be a great celebration and joy because of this divine and eternal unity between bride and bridegroom, that is the church and Jesus Christ.

The truth that revealed in this metaphor is that church as Christ's bride should be faithful in waiting for the time of the bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The bride symbolism signifies moral purity, devotion, and exclusive allegiance to Christ.¹¹ The Church as a Bride must respond with submission, loyalty, and dedication—looking to Him to understand her origin, define her purpose, and insure her future.¹² This analogy gives an admonition that church

⁸ Earl D. Radmacher, *What the Church is all About: A Biblical and Historical Study* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 256-265.

⁹ Richard Batey, "Paul's Bride Image: A Symbol of Realistic Ecclesiology," *Interpretation* 17 (2001): 176-82.

¹⁰ Richard A. Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 68-69.

¹¹ Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vol., 266.

¹² Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery*, 68-69.

should be live in purity and holiness while waiting for the great coming of the bridegroom. In one sense, the Church as bride is entirely holy and unfailing, sanctified and cleansed by the word (Eph 5:26). In another sense, the frailty of this bride is continually manifested in her spiritual adultery, requiring that her bridegroom, Jesus Christ, continually liberate her from her whoring ways and purify her by his union.¹³ When church is analogized as the bride, it means the church has a precious promise from Jesus Christ. When the time is come, Christ will return in His glory and pick the church up to take it to His glorious and eternal Kingdom.

The Family of God

Paul clearly views the church as a family when he tells Timothy to act if all church members are members his larger family. Paul advises Timothy he should exhort the older men as if they were his father; treat the younger men as brothers; older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters (1Tim 5:1-2 NIV). In Ephesians 3: 14, Paul says that God is the believers heavenly Father (Cf. 2 Cor. 6: 18). From this passage we know that all believers as the church have a special relationship with eachother and with Christ. The members of the church are brothers and sisters in God's family and God Himself as a Father of the household.

In Hebrew 3: 6, we find that Christ is a Son, yet He is over the House of God. Then, further in Hebrews 2:11-12, we see that we, as Christians, are His brethren. God's family, the church are those who have been obedient to the truth, and they are God's children (Gal. 3:26-27), His household, His family, His church. God has no children outside His family; hence, those outside the church are not members of the family of God. Ephesians 2:19 says, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

The implication of this metaphor is the church members' life should always be in keeping with that royal family name they wear (Eph. 5:6; 1 Peter 1:14). As a family, the church members should be loving one another (1 John 4:7); It is love that holds the family together. Love will cause church members to work for a brother or sister to the uttermost and to see past the faults to the good. When God is the Father in the family, it means that God is

¹³ Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 112.

responsible for the whole family, the church. This fact gives confidence to the church that God will never leave or forsake the church. He is a good and perfect Father.

The Royal Priesthood

In 1 Peter 2: 5, Peter combines the figure of a building and a priest, “. . . ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood . . .” This statement is related with Exodus 19: 5-6, where God established Israel as a royal priesthood.¹⁴ However in Israel, just the Levites were allowed to serve as priests. But here Peter says that all believers are priests, members in the royal priesthood. Further, Peter says in 1 Peter 2: 9 that the believers are “royal priesthood.” Believers are a royal priesthood because they serve the Kingdom. This verse tells about the unique position of the believers. In Old Testament, the priest should be a descendant of Levi. When the church is defined as a priesthood, it means the church has access to enter to God presence anytime and anywhere.

When we talk about royalty or a kingdom, we think of a king. Christ, of course, is king over His kingdom (Lk. 23:1-3; Jno. 18:37). He is reigning on His throne now (Lk. 1:32-33) with all authority (Matt. 28:18-20) at the right hand of God (1 Pet. 3:22). Hence, He is the "blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). As citizens, we must do the will of the Lord. Christ's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, and not an earthly material kingdom (John 18:36; Lk. 17:20-21). God's real spiritual kingdom, where Christ rules in the heart, must be entered by faith in the King; all who remain as citizens in that kingdom must do His Will (Matt. 7 :21). As we enter the kingdom (through the new birth), we must unite under the banner of our King (Lk. 11:17) and go forth to do battle against His enemies, realizing that we will be victorious in the end (2 Thess. 1:5-10).

The Vine and the Branch

In John 15 Jesus explains the very close relation that believers live in with God as a union like branches with the vine. Jesus is the true vine (John 15: 1), and Father is the vinedresser, who takes care the vineyard so the branches bear fruit. The church as the

¹⁴ Even though the explanation about the church in 1 Pet. 2:9 similar with what we find about Israel in Old Testament; it doesn't mean that the church is replacing Israel and receive the same national blessing as Israel has. In this passage, Peter just uses the similar terms to views the similar truth. Roger M. Raymer, “1 Peter” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2 vol (Wheaton : Victor, 1983), 2: 845-846.

branches should be remain in Jesus, who is the true vine (John 15: 4, 5). This metaphor expresses the dependence of the church to Jesus. Without Jesus the church can do nothing and the church would be perish. The power and grace of Jesus give life to the church and makes it a community of life. The Church without Jesus is dead church.

God desires a very special relationship where His life flows into the church. This relationship not only pictures Jesus as the resource of “life” but also expresses how God loves the church so very much and how He just wants to be vitally connected to her. This relation also explains the togetherness and fellowship between believers in church itself with Jesus.¹⁵ Jesus says that the church should be continue abiding in Him. “Abide” comes from the Greek word “*meno*” that essentially means “Remain (as NIV translation),” “dwell” or “live,” and in this context the word means to be held, kept or continually in certain place.¹⁶ The command to abide in Jesus is a command to live in Him and keep trusting Him¹⁷ (1 John 2: 22, 24, 28).

The purpose for the branches to abide in vine is to bear fruit. Every branch that bears no fruit will be cut away and every branch that does bear fruit will be pruned so that it will be even more fruitful (Joh 15:2). The word “prune” is translated from Greek word “*airei*” that can be translated to raise up, elevate, lift up, raised from the ground.¹⁸ According to the Arndt and Gringrich Translation, “lift up” for “*airei*” is a term matched with the Israelites’ culture in its agricultural context. The detailed explanation about treatment for the branches is demonstrated the vital relation between church and Jesus Christ and the Father.

Conclusion

The bible has many beautiful metaphorical pictures for the church. In God’s eyes the church is a special institution because He is the one who established the church in His world (Matt. 16:18) . These many metaphors found in the bible show how lavishly the church is loved by Christ. In the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ we see that Christ is the leader of the church, which means that diversity in the church is not a problem to be

¹⁵ James E. Rosscuo, *Abiding in Christ: Studies in John 15* (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1973), 16-19.

¹⁶ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, revised by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: U. Of Chicago, 1979), 505.

¹⁷ Homer A. Kent, Jr. *Light in the Darkness: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids : Baker, 1974), 183.

¹⁸ Arndt and Gringrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 24.

overcome, but rather that every member has differing roles, yet each member completes and helps the other members. In the metaphor of the church as the flock we come to view Christ as the shepherd who must be followed; Christ knows each sheep, and He has full responsibility for His church. The church as the bride of Christ shows the depth of love of Christ for His church, which is His prized possession. The church has the great hope and expectation that Christ will come in glory to take His bride to His eternal kingdom.

The picture of the church as God's family shows the honored position of every believer in the church. They are not merely servants or people who are not known by God, but they are His cherished children. Furthermore, when the metaphor of the royal priesthood is given to the church it tells us that God is the king of the church, which is His kingdom. Every believer is a citizen of His kingdom, and moreover is a priest. Each priest has access to God's holiness as is fitting of the role of the Old Testament priest. Finally, the church described as the branches connected to the vine speaks of a church that is fully dependent on Christ. Christ and the church have a beautiful relationship where He gives life to the church. The church can not live if it is not vitally connected to Christ.

The Application of the Metaphors for the Discipleship of the Church in Indonesia

It is not enough that we know and understand the various metaphors for the church, we must also be able to in practice apply these metaphors to the everyday life of the church in Indonesia. Since the church is the believers, Sidjabat writes, "This sort of theological view gives birth to implications for our understanding of educational strategy for the discipleship of the church, so that the the believing church will achieve its calling to grow into adulthood.¹⁹"

According to Jack Seymour and Donald E. Miller, theology must be applied in the life of the church:

Theology is an activity of the church where a believer works to help other believers to think theologically, and to communicate a faith that can be comprehended and applied in real life. Theology is the reflection of the church in its sociological context on how

¹⁹ B.S Sidjabat. *Strategi Pendidikan Kristen, suatu Tinjauan Teologis-Filosofis*. (Yogyakarta: ANDI, 1996), 92.

to understand and respond to being accepted, sent and called by God into the world. This is the work of Christian education.²⁰

The Indonesian context in which the church finds itself is unique and requires a special understanding of itself and its duties in the midst of its unique situation. In an effort to help gain this needed understanding this first part will discuss the condition of the church in Indonesia and then will move on to discuss the implementation of a discipleship process that will strengthen the believers. Also, this paper hopes to find some solutions for the problems faced by the Indonesian church in the area of discipleship and the effort to make its presence felt in the Indonesian society.

The Condition of the Church in Indonesia

The church in Indonesia has been shaped by two unique situations, the first of which is being firmly planted in a pluralistic society. The pluralistic characteristics are caused by three main realities: geographical, ethnicity, and faith. In the geographical realm, Indonesia is a nation made up of 13,579 islands, 6,035 of which are inhabited. Indonesia is a spacious country with 2,027,087 square kilometers of land and 3,166,163 square kilometers of ocean. In the area of ethnicity, the Central Bureau of Statistics has noted that there are 1,128 distinct tribes scattered throughout the islands of Indonesia. In the opening of the Asia-Europe English Language Meeting Diversity Forum in Jakarta in September 2012, Deputy Minister of Education Nuryanti Windu said that according to research results Indonesia has 743 languages. This means that 10% of the total number of languages on earth are in Indonesia. This diversity of geography and ethnography has then led to diversity in social and cultural fields, including in religious matters. Indonesia has six official religions, and, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in 2003 it was revealed that in Indonesia there are more than 245 traditional faiths. This context of amazing diversity has impacted the churches in Indonesia in unique ways.

Currently in Indonesia there are 350 different denominations. The denominational spectrum is not only based on theology, but also on ethnographic factors (ethnicity). In the context of this diversity, the cultural ethnographic approach led to a wide variety of

²⁰ Jack Seymour & Donald E. Miller. *Theological Approach to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 24.

tribal/regional churches. For example: GKJ – *Gereja Kristen Jawa*, the Java Christian Church (traditionally Javanese); GKSBS – *Gereja Kristen Sumatera Bagian Selatan*, the Christian Church of South Sumatra (traditionally Javanese and Malay); GMIM – *Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa*, the Evangelical Church in Minahasa (traditionally Minahasa, NorthSulawesi); HKBP - *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan*, Batak Christian Protestant Church (traditionally Batak Toba); GBKP – *Gereja Batak Karo Protestan*, Batak Karo Protestant Church (traditionally Batak Karo); GKPS – *Gereja Kristen Protestan Simalungun*, Simalungun Protestant Church – (traditionally Batak Simalungun); BNKP – *Banua Niha Keriso Protestant*, Nias Protestant Church (traditionally Nias); GKKK – *Gereja Kristen Kalam Kudus*, Holy Word Christian Church – (Chinese); GKP – *Gereja Kristen Pasundan*, Pasundan Christian Church – (traditionally for Sundanese); GKR – *Gereja Kristen Rejang*, Rejang Christian Church (traditionally for the Rejang tribe, which is closed to other tribes); GKII – *Gereja Kristen Injili Indonesia*, Indonesia Evangelical Christian Church – (which serves the Anak Dalam tribe and indigenous people). It is within this context that the teaching on biblical ecclesia for the churches in Indonesia is very important.

The diversity of churches in Indonesia has also caused various reactions from outsiders. Because of these differences, many have accused the Christian churches of being torn apart. The large number of church “names” and ways/models of worship is often considered a kind of inconsistency in Christianity. The impact of this diversity on the church has also raised the stigma that churches in Indonesia are selfish and ethnocentric. There are those who attempt to politicize the issue by saying that Christians in Indonesia violate *Pancasila* (basis for societal unity of Indonesia), which contain the foundational precepts of Indonesian government. Added to this mix is the rapid statistical growth in the number of local churches in Indonesia. This is an interesting fact: in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, the number of churches far exceeded the number of existing mosques. This fact led to varied reactions. There are those who feel offended by this fact, and they often bring up the accusation that the many different names of churches is merely a sneaky strategy to proselytize and increase the apostasy of the Indonesians of other faiths.

In the area of religion the church in Indonesia finds itself as a minority group that faces various types of oppression and even persecution. Examples of this are the limitations on constitutionally guaranteed rights such as freedom to worship and the building of places of worship, any sort of evangelization effort, unwritten rules that limit the advancement of job

opportunities and careers of believers, and others. It should be understood that in these conditions Indonesian believers are prone to develop a minority complex, feeling small, unimportant, unable to advance, and a feeling that they will always be on the losing side.

In the context described above it is easy to understand how the church in Indonesia has felt pressed and has not seen itself in the light of biblical metaphors of the church, that is as precious and valuable in God's eyes. This condition can be overcome through a right understanding of the essence of the church as put forth by the biblical metaphors. Thus the metaphors of the church, which appear to be very simple, can be used as a foundation for discipleship. Such metaphors could help the church not only have confidence but also enable it to more effectively make a difference in its world. Hence the following portion of this paper will be about how to go about applying the metaphors of the church to the process of discipleship.

Application of Biblical Metaphors for the Church in the Area of Discipleship

The first way the meaning of these metaphors above can be used is in the effort to bring understanding that discipleship is the duty of the church, as is seen in the metaphor of the church as the community of faith, the family of God. Discipleship must be seen as “the intentional and systematic effort to impart knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and behavior that is consistent with the Christian faith. Discipleship that is led by the Holy Spirit should be the framework for personal and group change, renewal, and transformation that empowers believers to live in the obedience to God that is commanded by the Bible and by Christ Jesus.”²¹ Almost the same understanding is found in the writings of a Christian Education expert in Indonesia by the name of Ruth Shelan who says that discipleship is “shaping that is centered on Christ, based on the teachings of the Bible, which matures every member of the body of Christ.”²² Daniel Nuhamara states that discipleship is a “tool where the entire program of the church is equipped with people who are able to do the work of God. Discipleship prepares people to increase in quality in the areas of spirituality, knowledge and skills to do service (to be, to know, to do).”²³

²¹ Robert W. Pazmino. *Foundational Issues in Christian Education* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988) 81.

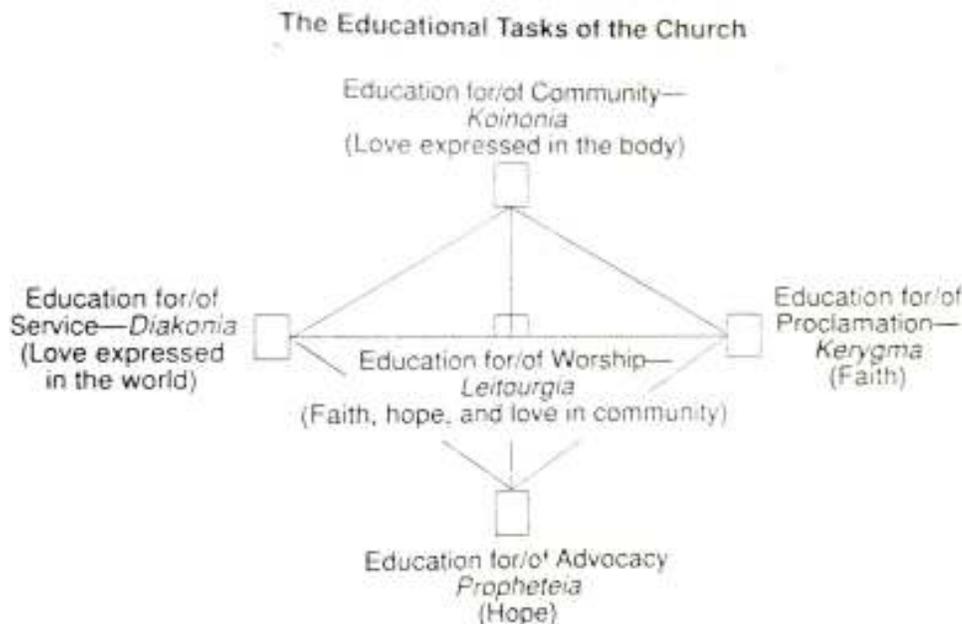
²² Ruth Shelan. *Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* (Bandung: Penerbit Kalam Hidup, 2005), 7.

²³ Daniel Nuhamara. *Pembimbing PAK* (Bandung: Jurnal Info Media, 2007), 8.

The church must create members of God's family who stand shoulder to shoulder in teaching each other and learning together to grow as obedient citizens of the Kingdom. Each individual believer needs to be aware that he or she, as the a part of the body of Christ, must join in the effort to equip one another as sheep of a flock that face various situations that try their faith. As the bride of Christ the church must beautify itself with with good character, with a love for each other. The church must become a kingdom of priests that are living in God's holiness, a church that is the branch connected to its Source in order to be fruitful.

Pazmino pictures this in the figure below:

Figure 1
The Role of Education in the Church²⁴



First of all, the above picture shows that Christian education is a part of every ministry of the church making the ministries of service, fellowship, prophecy, doctrine and liturgy more effective. Through Christian education the entire teaching of Christ about love can be applied.

Secondly, the church is pictured as a learning community. Kenneth O. Gangel states that “The church has a responsibility for education or discipleship.”²⁵ Based on Ephesians 4:11-16, Gangel opines that: “First, the ministry of education in the church must be done by people who have been given the gift of teaching. Second, the purpose of the ministry of education is to mature God’s people so that they are able to do ministry, thus the maturing process is discipleship and building up the believers. Thirdly, discipleship in the church will be effective when there is a link between truth and love so that the disciple produced understands both truth and lives in love. Fourth, education in the church best functions in the church not when there is one teacher and many students, but where there is discipleship throughout the church, each believer helping other believers develop spiritually.” For Gangel,

²⁴ Pazmino. *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 45.

²⁵ Kenneth O. Gangel. *Building Leaders for Church Education* (Chicago: Moody Press , 1998) 39.

“the main purpose of the church is to mature all the believers, and this can be accomplished through an educational program that is biblical and functions well.”²⁶ Richards says that “education in the church must strive to activate the discipleship of one another between believers, and this is called the concept of the socialization of Christian education.”²⁷

Further the church can use every program of the church and even non-church program as facilities for purposeful discipleship. Whether in the form of worship, fellowship, giving comfort and aid, bible study, retreat, visitation, or the celebrations and services for newborn children, birthdays, harvest, funerals and the like.

Thirdly, the family should function as the center of discipleship. The best learning communities start with the families of the congregation because the family is an important element in the church. For this reason guidance and discipleship for families is important. In this era of globalization and information that allows for advancement in the civilizations, families and family life is threatened, and this includes Christian families.

Pastors, ministry workers and church boards need to be made aware of and given insights to the need for family discipleship. Such entities also need to make sure that the discipleship of families occurs. The church must have a discipleship program that is orderly so that the families of the church can attain the quality that God has planned for them. We suggest a 3M approach of the church to the family: 1) Membekali (prepare). The church must prepare every member of the church at the point of getting married. This may be done by taking them through a premarriage catechism. This is an important step for the church because not doing so is like sending soldiers into war without being properly armed. It is not unusual for Christian families to not be happy and even fail and divorce because they were not properly prepared. 2) Memelihara (preserve). Constant guidance and advocacy is needed for Christian families, along with proper teaching for every topic that corresponds with felt needs in the family. Like gardens, Christian families need constant cultivation and enrichment so that they can be healthy, grow and be fruitful. 3) Menyembuhkan (healing). Christian families often face difficulties and hard times. Often there is conflict between family members and between families both in the general society and in the church. There are various situations that can cause sickness in Christian families. There is a need for family

²⁶ Gangel. *Building Leaders for Church Education*, 32.

²⁷ Lawrence O. Richard. *A Theology of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 76.

counseling to help with restoring the health of the families so that they can function in healthy ways and become a blessing to the church and the nation.

So that the church can fulfill its role as outlined above, it must think through a well planned program as follows: catechism classes before marriage, sermons on topics helpful for families, seminars that meet the needs of families, small groups for families, visitation of families, and family counseling.

Just as important in the context of Christian education for the family is the role of the parents. Families need husbands and fathers that are consistent in applying Christian principles and who are the spiritual heads of the family. Also necessary are wives and mothers who are ready to be led and who support their husbands in shaping children who grow up loving God. Hard work is needed for this to happen, as is stated by Sidjabat: "...parents must work hard so that their teachings are heard and accepted by their children."²⁸

Thus, these elements should be a part of every Christian family:

1. Worship as a family that is orderly.
2. Family members praying for each other.
3. Family bible study.
4. Times of sharing between family members.
5. The carrying out of healthy Christian discipline.
6. The parents being good examples for their children.

This entire program can be carried out well if the parents, especially the father (or a replacement who takes the role of the father) is well prepared beforehand by the church. The first ones to enjoy the outcome from family discipleship are the members of the family itself. They will become a happy family who interacts in an atmosphere of love that is healthy and that can fulfill the hopes and plans of God that every family will glorify God as a conduit of His love. Second, it will have an impact on the church, as is brought forth by Christenson that "when the families of the church are strong, the church is strong."²⁹ Thus it can be concluded that when families are disciplined well the church will grow and be healthy also. Third, there will be a positive impact for evangelism. It is understood that the family is the smallest community in society and in the church, so it is on the front line of the Christian witness in every place. Hence, when the quality of Christian families rises the name of Jesus also

²⁸ Larry Christenson. *Keluarga Kristen* (Semarang: Betani, 1970), 7.

²⁹ Richard. *A Theology of Christian Education*, 131.

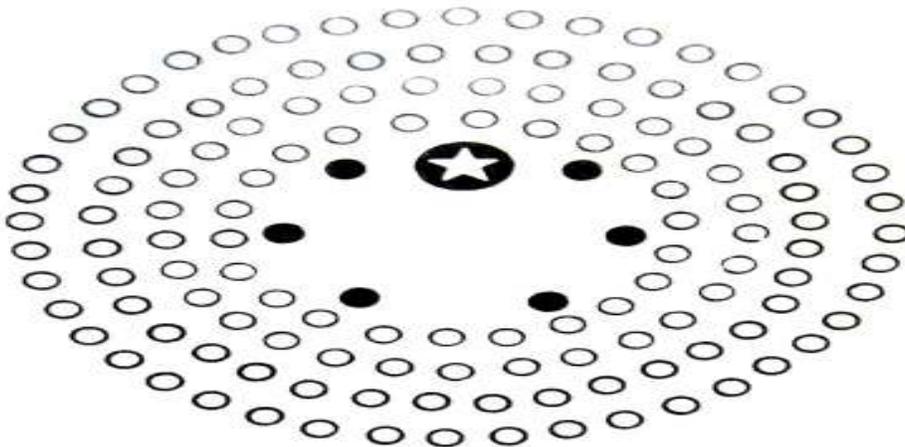
becomes more attractive and the name of Christ is better proclaimed. Fourth, there is an impact on the society. As the smallest unit in society, a healthy Christian family will become salt in its community, and thus becomes an asset to the society, to the church, and to the nation.

Fourth, there is the duty and the responsibility of the teacher. Teaching is the reality of God's walk with humans since the very beginning, before and after the exile and the era of Jesus and Paul. Teaching has been an important task throughout the ages for the development of the church. Who may teach? In the beginning God Himself taught humans. Then God appointed prophets, apostles, priests, judges, kings, sages, and others who believed in God to teach His people as He desired in every era. People can teach each other about God and about a healthy relationship between humans in everyday life. Parents teach their children, teachers teach their students, leaders teach the congregation. Thus God's commandment for humans to sharpen each other is carried out (Prov. 27:17). Teachers are chosen on a basis of quality that is determined by God. As the family of God, the body of Christ and God's flock, we must live to build each other up.

In this way anyone who fulfills the qualifications may become a teacher, but it must be remembered that the teacher must understand and articulate a proper biblical teaching and that he or she is a part of the community and family of God. Richards pictures this as follows:

Figure 2

The Leader and Teacher of God's People



What is meant by Richards in this picture is that the pastor and the church board members along with other leaders and teachers can not merely preach from the pulpit and

then leave the congregation to its own devices, but they must be integrated within the congregation to share their lives with the congregation and become examples to the congregation. Through this the leader or the teacher has a large duty and role to teach through example and thus can be followed by the flock to become more and more Christ like.

In accordance with an understanding of the church as seen in the biblical metaphors, Richards explains his theology by using the key word “life.” (John 10:10).³⁰ For Richards the key factor in the fellowship of believers or the church is life (*zoe*) that comes only from Jesus Christ. The implication of this is that Christian education must be so focused in order that those who are being discipled experience life, and this life brings transformation. Hence, effective Christian education will only occur in the context of personal relationships that are colored with love and closeness as should occur between sheep of the same flock, in the family of God, and in the body of Christ.

Fifth, the strategy and methodology of discipleship must be centered on people. In this we should look at our great example, the Great Teacher, who had a teaching strategy of discipling large crowds, large groups of 70 people, small groups of 12 people, and individual meetings with with people such as Peter, Thomas, Mary and others. The bible records that “all people were amazed at hearing His teaching.” (Matt. 7:28; 22:33; Mk 1:22; 4:32; Lk 4:36). It is amazing that in the era before nice facilities and sophisticated technology like we have now, Jesus’ teaching was extremely effective. One key factor in this effectiveness is found the the strategy and methodology of Jesus that created communities of active learning.

Robert H. Stein states that there are several factors the made Jesus’ teaching interesting, one of which was His techniques. In the second chapter of his book *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teaching* gives various examples of His techniques: He used overstatements to attract attention (Matt. 10:16; 12:40; Lk. 17:6); He used metaphors (Lk. 14:58); He used paradoxes (Mk. 4:22-25), He used irony (Matt. 16:23); and He used questions (Mk. 4:15). J.M. Price says that Jesus used methods based on the situation and the need He faced. According to Price, “it is clear that Jesus was very adept in using various teaching methods. This strategy was a usual thing for Him, and it grew from situations and needs.”³¹

³⁰ Richard. *A Theology of Christian Education*, 11.

³¹ J. M. Price. *Jesus The Teacher* (Bandung: Literatur Babtis, 1997), 99.

Futhermore Price, in the seventh and eighth chapter of his book Jesus the Teacher, mentions six main methods that were used in Jesus' teaching. These methods can be described as follows: First, He used visual aids. This method made the truths He taught more concrete for his disciples (Matt. 18:14). Examples of these visual aids are as follows: He washed the disciples feet (John 13:1-15) and He used a coin to teach about taxes (Matt. 23:15-22). Second, He used drama. An example of this is when Jesus cleansed the Temple of the money changers (Matt. 21:12-16). Third, He used stories and parables. According to Price this is the method that most sticks out and was used by Jesus about a hundred times. Examples of parables are: the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), and the four kinds of soil (Matt. 13:1-9). Fourth, He used lectures. See His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), His teaching on the end times (Matt. 24-25), and His departing words (John 14-17). Fifth, He used questions. While teaching Jesus often asked questions such as: Who do others say I am? (Matt. 16:13-15), Why do you say I am good? (Matt. 10:18), What do you want me to do for you? (Mk. 10:36). And sixth, He used discussion. Several times Jesus had discussions, such as the discussion with Nichodemus (John 3:21) and with the rich young ruler (Mk. 10:17-22).

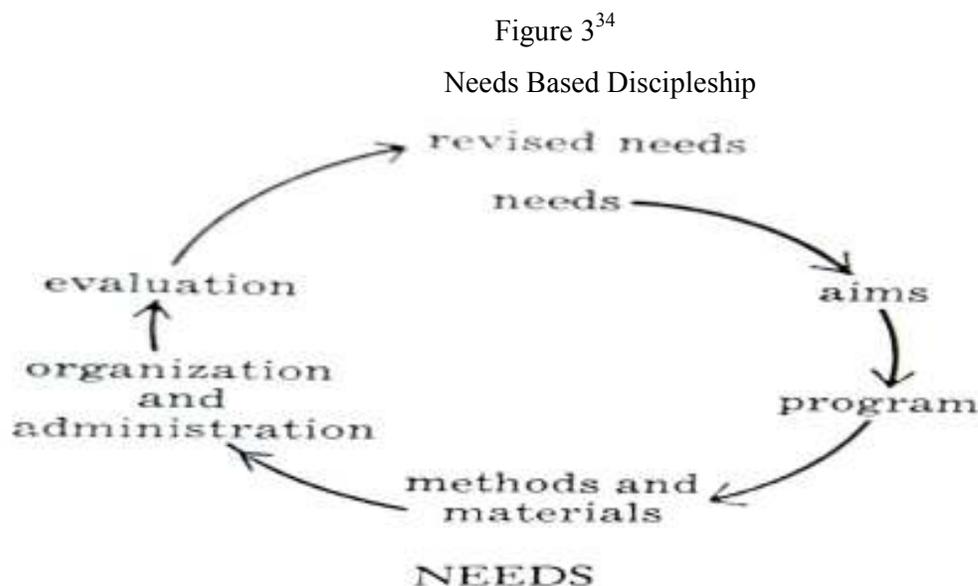
Another great person of the bible was Paul, who used various ways to teach. The method he used was dependent on who he was teaching and what the purpose of the teach was. Of the methods used by Paul we see: narriataion of his life as a life testamony, advice, rebuking, comparisons, and praise. To the church in Philippi Paul taught so that the congregation would learn through what he said and what he did (Phil. 4:9). With the church in Thessolonica Paul stressed teaching through example (II Thess. 3:6-7). According to Sidjabat, "Paul's methods of teaching included dialogue, question-answer times and discussion with the pupose of making his hearers more curious to know more about what he was teaching."³²

Richards states that discipleship must focus holistically on people. His assumptions are: 1) people are active and want to be activated. 2) People are always structurally tied together and dependent on each other to fulfill their needs. 3) People need a structured environment to grow and develop, and 4) people always show their growth in the relational realities."³³

³² B. S Sidjabat. *Menjadi Guru Profesional* (Bandung, YKH: 2000), 23

³³ Ibid, 76.

In her book Focus on People in Church Education, Lois E. LaBar explains that because education in the church focuses on souls, we must first begin with finding peoples' needs as a basis for making a discipleship program in the church. He draws the picture as follows:



The first step in creating a discipleship program is to find the needs, and only after that a purpose can be determined, a program can be shaped, methods and materials can be determined, the program can be organized and administered and evaluation can take place in order to see if the need has been fulfilled. This process needs to be carried out continuously so that new needs can be found and new discipleship programs can be created.

Sixth, the importance of discipleship. To create a dynamic atmosphere for discipleship as described above there must be a process that brings in new learners along with new teachers and leaders. This is only possible when there is healthy discipleship taking place. When we talk about discipleship we should look at how our Lord Jesus did His discipleship program as a part of His strategy to reach the world. Michael J. Wilkins has stated:

This view of the disciples results from observing the close relationship of the twelve disciples with Jesus in His ministry to the crowds and the opposition to him from the religious leaders. Minear states, we must remember that Matthew normally applied the

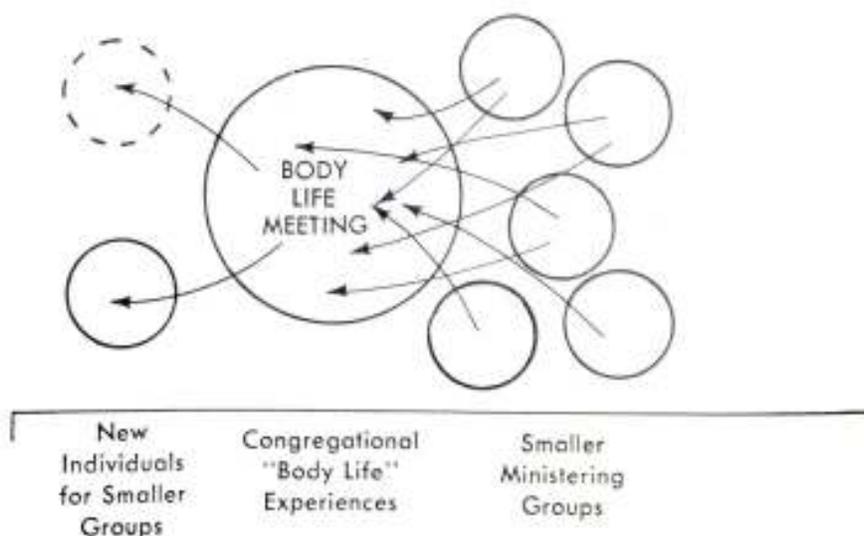
³⁴ Lois E Le Bar. *Fokus on People in Church Education* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1968), 27.

term disciple to the twelve only, who were being trained for a special vocation, and not to all believers or followers. The twelve disciples correspond to the prophets, wise men, and scribes who were leaders in the churches of the second generation. The crowds of followers match the lay members of the churches.”³⁵

There were times when Jesus was with crowds of thousands, but there were also times when Jesus communicated intensively with a small group, that is the twelve disciples and even His closest disciples such as Peter, John and Andrew. For this day and age this situation is pictured by Richards as follows:

Figure 4³⁶

Small Group Multiplication



The above picture explains that ministry to small groups can be coalesced to become large groups, which in turn can stimulate the creation of new small groups as a result of growth. It is obvious that with the appearance of new groups there must also be the appearance of new leaders. Where will these new leaders come from? From the discipleship that takes place in the small groups. In this way leaders can produce new leaders and these new leaders can produce new disciples, and this will cause multiplication.

³⁵ Michael J. Wilkins. *Discipleships in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 237.

³⁶ Wilkins. *Discipleships in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel*, 280.

Seventh: The church must proclaim itself. Only by doing this will the people of God and the church be able to give an answer to the world that often asks what the church is about. This is especially true when the church is in a minority context and oppressed and often the questions from the world demand an answer that the church is a special organization that is possessed by God, preserved by God, has the hope of a better future and salvation from God. Thus it is imperative that every child of God has the awareness that we all have the same mission to tell the Good News of Jesus as He is the owner of the church, both in internal and in external ministries. This is the reason Van Den End states that the “essence of the church is to proclaim the gospel.”³⁷ while Berkhof says that the “church and the proclamation of the gospel are one and can not be separated.”³⁸ The church must admit that and proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah. Thus the beautiful metaphors of the church must become teaching material for the discipleship of the members and for the church to know her own identity.

Remembering the beautiful and glorious understanding of the church should make her confident to proclaim herself to the world in order for others to join the church and enjoy all the hopes and promises of God.

Finally, the hoped for product of discipleship that is based on an understanding of the biblical metaphors of the church are: 1) the church will complete the Great Commission of Christ. 2) The facilitation of the development of the members both in quality and in quantity. 3) Create a space where the Holy Spirit can work. 4) Foster gifts and talents in the church. 5) Prepare for a new harvest and look to the future with great hope! This is especially true for the church in Indonesia as described above, a church that faces situations and challenges of a pluralistic society, so that it will not wilt and be without hope but will have passion and will see itself as being special, will guard the purity of its teachings and will proclaim them to the world. All this so the church will grow and spread throughout the earth.

³⁷ Th. Van Den End. *Harta Dalam Bejana* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1997), 82.

³⁸ H. Berkhof & I.H Enklaar. *Sejarah Gereja* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1991), 64.

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