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A Body of Consensus: The Church as Embodied Organization

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The Church as Embodied Organization

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Introduction

What does it mean to speak of ‘a consensus’ within an organization? A straightforward definition, provided by the Oxford Dictionary, is: ‘agreement of opinion on the part of all concerned’ but in a wider context, it is possible to see consensus as part of the professionalisation of organizations (Mintzberg 1989: 186) or as a gender issue, since building a consensus may be seen as a ‘female style of management’ (Morgan 1997 [1986]: 193). Alternatively a very different description is provided by Charles Hampden-Turner – a consensus is a ‘sloth-like beast of mythical properties, long thought to be of great value to hunters. In fact, a Consensus

of any size is very hard to find, and tends to vanish as mysteriously as it first appeared. Much time and effort can be saved by not seeking it’ (Hampden-Turner 1990: 121). This picture of ‘consensus’ is part of series of cartoons which embody a range of organizational problems as legendary creatures. Hampden-Turner justifies this approach by arguing that since

much organizational and business thinking is both rational and solemn, the use of humour can free people up to think through issues in a new way. While agreeing with this use of humour, I would add that the embodiment of such abstract

concepts (such as an impasse, a dilemma, qualms) in this way greatly enhances the reflexive process within an organizational context because in human terms, as Mark Johnson contends, bodily experience precedes propositional understanding.¹ This link



4 The Consensus. A sloth-like beast of mythical properties, long thought to be of great value to hunters. In fact, a Consensus of any size is very hard to find, and tends to vanish as mysteriously as it first appeared. Much time and effort can be saved by not seeking it.

¹ ‘propositional content is possible only by virtue of a complex web of nonpropositional schematic structures that emerge from our bodily experience.’ (Johnson 1987: 5) Furthermore he believes that consensus or, in his words, a ‘publicly shared understanding’ (Johnson 1987: 212) must be an

between ‘consensus’ and ‘embodiment’ will be used to explore the nature of the body as an organizational metaphor for the Church. First, I shall examine whether there is any consensus, in the sense of an ‘agreement of opinion’ on the use of the metaphor in the New Testament (*Historical Bodies*). Then I will explore the extent of consensus over the use of the body metaphor within some contemporary social analysis (*Social Bodies*) before setting out some of the different ways in which theologians have interpreted the term (*Theological Bodies*). I shall conclude by seeing whether an idea from social scientist John O’Neill might provide an embodied understanding of the Church and an indication that Hampden-Turner’s organizational consensus is not quite as legendary as he believes.

Historical Bodies

There is a widely perceived view that Christianity has taken a predominantly negative view of the human body throughout its history (Turner 1996 [1984]), an opinion which is well summed up in Feuerbach’s description of the archetypal believer:

The Christian sets aside his sensuous nature; he wants to hear nothing of the common, ‘bestial’ urge to eat and drink, the common, ‘bestial’ instincts of sexuality and love of young; he regards the body as a congenital taint on his nobility, a blemish on his pride, a temporarily necessary degradation and denial of his true essence, a soiled travelling garment, a vulgar incognito concealing his heavenly status. (Quoted in Van A Harvey 1995: 226)

Yet his notion of the Christian ‘who wants to hear nothing of the common, “bestial” urge to eat and drink’ is now particularly ironic in the light of the crucial role that Jesus’ table-fellowship plays in the different readings of the historical Jesus (eg Sanders 1985; Borg 1987; Crossan 1991; Dunn 1991; Chilton 1992; Witherington 1995; Wright 1996). While there may be little consensus over their portrayal of Jesus, historians are generally agreed that eating and drinking played an important symbolic role in Jesus’ life and teaching. This symbolism reached a conclusion in the final meal shared by Jesus and his disciples on the night before his death but was then extended and developed in the Eucharistic meals shared by the communities of his followers which sprang up after the resurrection. It is to those two historical experiences I now turn:

‘embodied understanding’ which takes account of our basic metaphors of meaning (Johnson: 1987: 205-09) of which the body is the most important.

- **The Last Supper**

There is a good deal of historical consensus that table-fellowship played an important part in Jesus' ministry but its *significance* is disputed. Certainly Jesus' symbolic action in the upper room on the night before his crucifixion seems to have provided the framework for his own interpretation of his death: 'During supper he took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them, with the words, "Take this; this is my body."' (Mark 14: 22 = Matt 26: 26 = Luke 22:19 = 1 Cor 11: 24). The final meal with his disciples provides the link between Jesus' ministry in Galilee (characterised by healings, open table-fellowship and parabolic teaching) and his ministry in Jerusalem (characterised by symbolic actions in the Temple, together with his journey to, and death upon, the cross). For some, the evidence that Jesus ate with those outside the purity markers set up by the established religious authorities; argued that exclusion from the religious institutions of Judaism did not mean exclusion from God's love, forgiveness or judgement; and stood in the prophetic tradition which believed God called for *purity of heart* before *purity of sacrifice* indicates that he was proclaiming a fundamental redefinition of Israel's religious institutions (eg Charlesworth 1988, Dunn 1991; Wright 1996). However, in his classic study, Sanders is clear that while Jesus did celebrate a symbolic banquet before his death (Sanders 1985: 307) he 'did not explicitly oppose the law, particularly the laws relating to Sabbath and food' (Sanders 1985: 326). Several commentators have linked Jesus' embodied discourse at the Last Supper with his understanding of the role of the Jerusalem Temple within Judaism. As a place of animal sacrifice and as a building with which the New Testament traditions consistently make some form of connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus' body and the Temple (Mark 14: 58=Matt. 26:61; Mark 16: 29-30; John 2:21) it seems to have had a significant place in Jesus' embodied understanding of his death. Nevertheless, there is a similar range of opinion over the symbolic meaning of Jesus' action in that building, especially prior to the Last Supper. Is it a 'symbolic destruction' (Crossan 1991: 357)? Or an act of 'restoration' (Sanders 1985: 71)? Or a prophetic 'critique' (Wright 1996: 417-18)? Robert Hamerton-Kelly has argued that Jesus used his body as a metaphor for a complete *inversion* of the sacrificial system (Hamerton-Kelly 1994). In the drama of the Last Supper, instead of the worshiper giving to the god, the god is giving to the worshiper. Furthermore the venue for Jesus' alternative Temple sacrifice, the breaking of bread and pouring of wine, is clearly removed from the boundary of holiness:

The room substitutes for the temple, the table for the altar, the sharing of the food for the killing of the victim. Normally, the worshiper brings the offering into the sacred space; here, the upper room is the nonsacred counterpart of the holy of holies, and so the offering is made outside of sacred space. Thus, the sacrificial system is subverted by the reversal of the direction of its ritual logic. (Hamerton-Kelly 1994: 44)

It may be that within the context of Second Temple Judaism, Christianity began as audacious cultural, organizational and ritual redefinition of boundaries based on the metaphor of a broken body and the actuality of a sacrificial victim. Although there is no overall historical consensus on this matter, it is clear that Jesus broken (and resurrected) body became the embodied basis for the continuing groups of his followers.² What then of Paul's use of the body image – is there more of a consensus regarding his use of the body metaphor within the early Church?

- **1 Corinthians**

The question of whether Paul employed the body, as a religious and organizational metaphor for complex social redefinition remains a matter of some debate. A number of historians and sociologists have noted the innately conservative and hierarchical nature of the body metaphor (Fiorenza 1994 [1983]; Schottroff 1995; Martin 1995; Turner 1996 [1984]) particularly in European cultures. For instance, in his fascinating study of the ideology of the body in Greco-Roman society Dale B. Martin has outlined a strong case for seeing how those in power used the image of the body as a means of maintaining their status in society:

The goal of upper-class ideology was not utter consistency but the maintenance of the hierarchical structure of society, the power of the ruling class and its control over the human body. In terms of that goal, apparently, its ideology of the body was eminently successful. (Martin 1995: 25-6)

² This understanding of the symbolic role that food played in Jesus' ministry resonates with Falk's anthropological reading of body and food in wider society: 'The body is characterized by a certain kind of *openness* – a theme which recurs in different variation within the anthropological field – primarily focused on the eating mouth. Sharing and incorporating food in a ritual meal implies the incorporation of the partaker into the community simultaneously defining his/her particular 'place' within it. Here the oral bidirectionality is actualized in and as eating: eating into one's body/self and being eaten into the community. The bond is created primarily by *sharing* (communion) and not by *exchange* ... Sharing

This question is particularly focussed by the issue of Paul and patriarchy. Thus, in his teaching about the place of women in the body church was Paul merely reflecting the standard views of his culture (Martin 1995; Turner 1996 [1984])? Or is he seeking to mitigate the patriarchal society of his time (Theissen 1982; Meeks 1983; Chow 1992)? Or is he laying the foundation for a more fundamental challenge to the hierarchy in all forms and providing a more egalitarian vision for the church and society as a whole (Fiorenza 1994 [1983]; Schottroff 1995)? Fiorenza notes that while it is difficult to ascertain with certainty Paul's position with respect to women and slaves in the community (Fiorenza 1994 [1983]: 218-19), she is nevertheless convinced that Paul shares a radical egalitarianism with the earliest Christian communities and that he sought to elaborate it in terms of the concrete situation in Corinth. By contrast Martin appears to dismiss this approach, believing that:

A critical stance vis-à-vis the sexism of traditional Christianity might better begin with a frank confession of the sexism reflected in biblical texts rather than attempting to reread those texts to de-emphasize the sexism. (Martin 1995: 296 n 15)³

Thus, just as with Jesus' use of the body metaphor, there seems to be no consensus on how Paul applied it within the early Church, at least within 1 Corinthians. That mythical creature, 'an agreement of opinion on the part of all concerned', remains elusive in the forests of New Testament history so we shall extend our search to the fields of social theory and examine whether a consensus over the body exists in different terrain.

implies a two-way open body while exchange implies a body and self which controls that which is given/said *for* what.' (Falk 1997 [1974]: 20)

³ However O'Neill notes the transformative nature of this metaphor: 'The body politic certainly emerges from a long allegorical history of the desire for the representation of unity and difference in a just society. It contains both a myth and a metaphysic which has been appended throughout the history of social and political conflict both for revolutionary and restorational purposes. It is a transgressive figure when opposed to caste interpretations of social division of labour, as well as a figure of difference and charismatic justice when opposed to the forces of rationalization and homogenization ... it is a transgressive figure because of its power to integrate what has been separated and to differentiate what has been homogenized. The body politic is a civilizational concept, to use the language of Frye, and it functions on the highest level of allegory to transfigure society in terms of the human body itself, imaginatively conceived as the universe of human potentiality.' (O'Neill 1995: 126)

Contemporary Bodies

There is a wide range of theoretical and practical literature which discusses the body as a metaphor for human social activity (eg O'Neill 1985, 1989; Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987; Featherstone 1991; Turner 1996 [1984]; Falk 1997 [1994]; Mellor & Shilling 1997). I shall contrast two wide-ranging and imaginative studies (O'Neill 1985; Mellor & Shilling 1997) to explore possible common ground may exist between them.

- **O'Neill's Five Bodies**

John O'Neill's anthropological study of the body as a social metaphor begins by positing two notions of body – the physical and the communicative. The physical body is an 'object like other objects that stand around us' and, as such 'can be bumped into, knocked over, crushed and destroyed' (O'Neill 1985: 16), whereas the communicative body, following Merleau-Ponty, 'is the general medium of our world, of its history, culture, and political economy' (O'Neill 1985: 17). O'Neill stresses that these two 'bodies' cannot be separated from each other. They interact so that social institutions rethink the body and we rethink institutions with our bodies. Indeed our embodied experiences form the foundation of our social lives:

What we see, hear, and feel of other persons is the first basis of our interaction with them. This is the carnal ground of our social knowledge. Because *society is never a disembodied spectacle*, we engage in social interaction from the very start on the basis of our sensory and aesthetic impressions. (O'Neill 1985: 22 – author's italics)⁴

Against this background O'Neill discusses five ways in human society is incarnated through our embodied experience:

⁴ For O'Neill there is an 'incarnate bond between self and society' (1985: 23) and it is in this context that primitive classifications of gender, kinship and replication are of enormous significance in understanding the social and historical matrix of humanity. Consequently for O'Neill: 'The myths of the first people are not the poor science of modern men: nor are they mere allegories or poetic embellishments of truths otherwise achieved by science. They are indispensable origins of human order and commonwealth apart from which the later achievements of humanisation and scientism are impossible conceits.' (O'Neill 1985: 28-29)

The World's Body

In different cultures and religions parts of the body have been symbolic sources in the search for microcosms of the universe. Furthermore, the 'world breathes as a body breathes' and both our bodies and the world are 'inhabited' by a material and spiritual soul. O'Neill follows Lévi-Strauss in arguing that we cannot separate ourselves from so-called primitive cultures on the grounds that they have no interest in objective science, since their mythological classifications anticipate science. The technical and social achievements of early men and women are impressive and should be respected, not least, their understanding of human kinship with the world's body.

Social Bodies

O'Neill draws extensively on Mary Douglas' ideas in his discussion of the human body and its kinship with social bodies, noting the importance of food rituals for the establishment of social boundaries which, in turn, are linked to ideas of purity. While some argue that such ritualistic categories are no longer applicable to western culture O'Neill believes that materialism is a 'form of consciousness through which bourgeois society hides from itself its nonrational economy' (O'Neill 1985: 61), illustrating this by analysing the place meat has within American society. On strict economic and materialistic criteria meat would should not be consumed in such quantity in the USA but because of social reasons (eg the perception that it is the 'poor' and 'unsuccessful' who do not eat meat) consumption stays at a high level.

The Body Politic

The body as a metaphor for the body politic has its roots in ancient civilisations, particularly in Aristotle, Seneca and Cicero. O'Neill traces its development through Christian usage (the Incarnation and St Paul), together with the 'legal fiction' of the King's two bodies and the role of the Eucharist within the Church. He concurs with Habermas that the administrative state has required the depoliticization of the public realm. Furthermore, the rational social agenda and excessive use of scientific language within social and caring agencies have led to an alienation of the young and marginalized from much political, economic and social life. To change this O'Neill proposes a three-level model of the body politic (bio-body, productive body, libidinal body) facilitating a move from 'mechano-morphism' and the 'therapeutic state' to a more embodied and relational way of human existence.

Consumer Bodies

O'Neill identifies the automobile as *the* symbolic good for the consumer body – it is the 'vehicle not only of bodies but of bodies who value the ideas of privacy and freedom' (O'Neill 1985: 97) – and as such it expresses key cultural values for western society (technology, private property, individual mobility, sexual rivalry, social competition). It is not just consumed as a part of the bio-body (a bodily need) but is also part of the productive body (part of the economic process) and the libidinal body (self-identity and happiness). However, consumer bodies must take into account that they cannot operate in isolation from the world body, social bodies or the body politic. O'Neill is particularly critical of how, within the consumer body, a relatively small part of humanity monopolises the resources of the world body and he argues strongly for 'a world right to life'.

Medical Bodies

O'Neill's picture of the management of modern medicine resembles an Orwellian nightmare. He describes it as 'supremely technocratic and bureaucratic'. Moreover, it is clean. As such it is the envy of all other forms of managerial power in the modern state' (O'Neill 1995: 119). The rationalization of the bio-body and our dependency on others to define the different forms of the body reaches its apogee in medicine. In his opinion, the most effective way of challenging this ideology is through a reinvention of the family. O'Neill insists that he is not lamenting the past but arguing for the family 'as a responsible unit of action regarding the welfare of its members in matters of education, consumption, and general health' (O'Neill 1985: 117).⁵ O'Neill concludes his study of the human body and society with an apocalyptic reading of Dylan Thomas' poem "Do not go gentle into that good night" stating that, in his view, humanity (in respect of these five bodies) as a *whole* stands upon the threshold of an eternal darkness which Thomas depicted in *individual* terms.

It is worth noting, before turning to Mellor & Shilling, that while O'Neill's five 'bodies' explore the diversity of the metaphor within human sociality there is also an underlying historical unity in terms of the use of the metaphor in the past and the present.

⁵ He also states: 'I do not believe that the individual can be sacred or free where society hollows out the family, selling it off to social agencies and otherwise condemning it to consumerism.' (O'Neill 1985: 146) On the conflicting roles of body and family metaphors in the Church see Roberts 1989.

- **Mellor & Shilling's Three Bodies**

Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling define embodiment as 'the stubborn enfleshment of humans' (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 4) arguing that such an understanding cannot be dissolved into thought, nor can it be reduced to a Foucauldian notion of discourse. This is not a purely individualistic approach which removes bodies from their locations but includes the study of the underlying structures of social contexts. It is within this framework that Mellor and Shilling discuss three re-formed concepts of embodiment – Medieval, Protestant and Baroque.

The Medieval Body – emerged out a pre-occupation with the body in Christianity in the Middle Ages. However, although this religiosity made much of the sinfulness of the body the result was not a distancing from the body but an intense 'flight into physicality' (Mellor & Shilling 1997: 37). Remedial action for physical sin could include excessive physical response (eg flagellation) yet this was responsible, in part, for the inherent stability of the medieval body.⁶

The Protestant Modern Body – is linked with the evolution of the 'individual' which began before *the* Reformation but, according to Mellor and Shilling was accelerated by the Protestant *re-formation* of the body. They identify three characteristics of the Protestant modern body: (i) *The autonomisation of language*; (ii) *Cognitive narratives of the self*; (iii) *Grotesque passions*. Mellor and Shilling note that: "This focus on reflexive thought and the text characteristic of Protestantism has much in common with the "disengaged reason" of the Enlightenment' such that modernity can be seen as "a secular form of Protestantism" (Mellor & Shilling 1997: 46-7). However, the sensuality which it sought to subjugate returned in a subsequent re-formation.

The Baroque Modern Body – this term embraces the priority of the cognitive with a recovery of the sensuous in a contemporary understanding of the body as an internally differentiated arena of conflict. This understanding is characterised by: (i) *Cognitively*

⁶ Carnival was another example of this paradox, which: 'usually occurred in the build-up to Shrove Tuesday of *mardi gras*, and was intended to represent and reveal the workings of sin in order that it might be got rid of before Lent. It included massive displays of consumption (in Nantes, Shrove Tuesday was dedicated to Saint Dégobillard – Saint Vomit) and sexuality (prostitutes were essential, as were symbols of lechery). Also central to these occasions were the symbolic overturning of hierarchies,

oriented bodies; (ii) *Cognitive body options*; (iii) *Sensuously oriented bodies*; (iv) *Dangerous crossings* (ie the full development of the baroque modern body remains a future possibility with society is in a state of transition).

Mellor and Shilling argue that all three forms of embodiment remain extant in contemporary society and that ‘the reappearance of sacred forms of sociality in certain areas of social life *and* the increasing elimination of the sacred’ (Mellor & Shilling 1997: 162) have helped to produce two distinct forms of social organization: (i) *Banal associations* – productive forms of sociality involving the creation of goods, services and relationships in advanced capitalist societies which are structured by rationality and have become separated from the symbolism of the sacred. (ii) *Sensual solidarities* – consumption-oriented forms of sociality, based on feelings and emotions which are derived from being with other human beings and most commonly characterised by a ‘one-sided syncretism of the grotesque, in which people can lose their individuality and cognitive control insofar as they choose to ‘open’ certain aspects of their sensuality to flux, interaction and absorption’ (Mellor & Shilling 1997: 174). While these forms may appear to be opposites, Mellor and Shilling see them as contrasting ways of managing the cognitive and corporeal flux of modern life.⁷

What is clear from these two wide-ranging studies is the diversity of use to which the body metaphor can be put. Furthermore, although we may not want to call it a ‘consensus’, there is some common ground between the two analyses. O’Neill began by outlining two notions of the body – the ‘physical’ and the ‘communicative’ – while Mellor & Shilling concluded with two forms of social organization which arose from their study of the body – ‘banal associations’ and ‘sensual solidarities’. The *paradoxical* nature of the body metaphor emerges from both approaches and is also noted by at the outset of Pasi Falk’s work on eating communities:

The human body occupies an ambiguous, even paradoxical role in cultural categorization – from the cosmologies of the archaic societies to the discursive and non-discursive practices of modern Western civilization ...

collective expressions of envy and jealousy, and a carnival figure who dominated the feast and was tried and condemned at the end of it.’ (Mellor & Shilling 1997: 41)

⁷ There is a strong similarity between Mellor & Shilling’s *banal* and *sensuous* groups and categories such as Carl S. Dudley’s *directional* and *relational* churches (Dudley 1982) and Nils Brunsson’s *action* and *political* organizations (Brunsson 1989) which are compared and contrasted in Roberts 1997.

The ambiguous nature of the body may be formulated by means of a number of binary oppositions which all posit the body in a double role. The body is both the Same and the Other; a subject and an object, of practices and knowledge; it is both a tool and raw material to be worked upon. (Falk 1997 [1994]: 1)

In terms of this study, the quest for consensus over the body metaphor has moved from conflict in terms of ‘historical bodies’ to paradox with ‘social bodies’ and so we turn, finally, to ‘theological bodies’.

Theological Bodies

For theologians much discussion of the body has focussed on Paul’s use of the term as an organizational metaphor. I have briefly discussed this in the historical context but within theology it is possible to identify a further, four-fold interpretation of this trope: (i) some commentators place the accent on the Paul’s use of the body as a metaphor for *unity* (eg Robinson 1952; Schnackenburg 1974 [1965]; Sanders 1977; Rowland 1985; Hamerton-Kelly 1992), (ii) others stress the inherent *diversity* of the metaphor (eg Richardson 1958; Moltmann 1977; Sykes 1984; McFague 1993; Hodgson 1994; Watson 1994), (iii) a third group highlights the *contingency* of embodiment (eg MacKinnon 1979; Loughlin 1996; Stamps 1996), (iv) while others note the *dialectical* nature of the image (eg Macquarrie 1982; Dunn 1991; Hultgren 1994).

• Body & Unity

John Robinson believes that the crucifixion of Jesus’ body forms the ‘lynch-pin’ of Paul’s understanding of Christianity and the Church (Robinson 1952: 48) and since the Church is now ‘the resurrection body of Christ’ (Robinson 1952: 51) the underlying concept is that the Church’s ‘unity is that of a single physical entity’ (Robinson 1952: 51). By comparison, in Rudolf Schnackenburg’s discussion of *people of God* and *body of Christ* as organizational metaphors, he stresses the elements of unity and bonding within the images. Thus, they both ‘express the inner bond of the New Testament People of God with Christ’ and the ‘union of its members through Christ’ (Schnackenburg 1974 [1965]: 165f). Meanwhile, Christopher Rowland acknowledges that each person will have their own contribution to make but that it is the Spirit which brings about ‘unity and breaks down divisions’ (Rowland 1985: 209). Hamerton-Kelly argues that Paul uses the

sacrificial imagery of the eucharist to ‘preach unity’ (Hamerton-Kelly 1992: 86) and Sanders also forges a strong link between the Paul’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper and his language in I Cor 12: 12f (Sanders 1977: 456).

- **Body & Diversity**

Alan Richardson’s perspective is to stress that Christ is the one who includes the many and see the image in terms of ‘corporate personality’ (Richardson 1958: 254ff) whereas Moltmann takes the openness of Jesus’ table-fellowship and applies it on a cosmic scale. Thus, a theological understanding of time will take its ‘bearings from the Lord’s Supper’ and that the diversity of *all* time is perceived in the light of the body and blood of Christ (Moltmann 1977: 243f). Stephen Sykes argues that within a Christian context: ‘Unity has only ever meant the containment of diversity within bounds’ (Sykes 1984: 285) and that this transformation of individualism is achieved through participation in baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Sykes 1984: 62). Francis Watson takes up some of the ideas about embodied authority in outlining his understanding of Paul’s image of the Body of Christ, in that:

the allocation of varying gifts and roles by the same Spirit establishes a formal equality – no-one is any more or less a member of the body than anyone else – within a diversity of roles which allows for hierarchical elements so long as these are strictly reciprocal rather than monological terms. (Watson 1994: 112)⁸

While Sallie McFague and Peter Hodgson make similar points in using the ‘body’ metaphor to make a wider identification between God and the universe (McFague 1993) or Christ and the world (Hodgson 1994).

- **Body & Contingency**

Donald Mackinnon argues that Jesus’ action of breaking bread with the stranger and the outcast actualises the love of God, which is also the dialectical reality of the human/divine relationship (Mackinnon 1979: 179f). However, a vital part of this parabolic communication is that it remains unfinished and incomplete:

Once that incompleteness is forgotten then the force of parable as indirect indication of the transcendent is gone. If eucharistic worship is a strangely dangerous reality, it is so because when effort is made to reckon with its many dimensions we are compelled to see that if it is the place of understanding, it is also the place where misunderstandings of many sorts may assume an obstinate permanence in the life of the spirit. (Mackinnon 1979: 181)⁹

The idea of the ongoing work of the eucharist and the body is also found in Loughlin's ideas about the Church as 'a community in which people *learn* to embody the story of Jesus Christ' (Loughlin 1996: 86 – my italics).¹⁰ This ongoing and incomplete nature of the body metaphor is also caught by Dennis L. Stamps who contends that Paul's reflections in this area are 'always situationally contingent' and that 'the church Paul worked with was a church full of problems and very much in process' (Stamps 1996: 139).

- **Body & Dialectic**

Others have seen the dynamic of unity and diversity in terms of a dialectic so, for example, James Dunn has argued that Paul's use of this metaphor is determinative for his whole understanding of ministry within the Church. Thus:

The body metaphor is and remains the classic illustration of unity in diversity, that is, a unity which does not emerge out of a regimented conformity, but a unity which results from a harmony of many different parts working together, and which depends on the diversity functioning as such. (Dunn 1977: 110-11)

⁸ and he goes on to warn against emphasising the unity of the Church at the expense of the Pauline sense of community (Watson 1994: 244).

⁹ Interestingly Robinson also draws attention to the incomplete nature of the body image when he talks of: 'This *process* by which the Church is *gradually* embodying the Divine fullness of Christ is further set by Paul within *the total scheme of God's redemption*' (Robinson 1952: 71 – my italics). In other words, this movement is both ongoing and incomplete.

¹⁰ His perspective is one which: 'seeks to understand the Christian life according to certain tropes – as the reading, consuming and embodying of the Word in the word of Scripture in order to be read, consumed and *embodied* in the life of Christ.' (Loughlin 1996: 88 – my italics)

The idea of this image functioning as a dialectic between unity and diversity has been explored in different ways by Arland Hultgren and Gerd Theissen. Hultgren argues that by using such a model Paul was deliberately giving out a ‘double message’ (Hultgren 1994: 47). In 1 Corinthians he is exhorting the body to care for the individual whereas in Romans (Rom 12: 4-8) he uses the same metaphor to urge the individual to care for the body. A different perspective is provided by Theissen who sees the Church as a compromise between the need for institutions and the demands of freedom. He believes that the symbol of the body is fundamental for describing human relationality (Theissen 1984: 143) and the Church itself is a paradoxical organization:

It is a plannable institution which aims at offering opportunities for an unplannable event that escapes all institutionalizing: the event of the Holy Spirit who blows where he wills. (Theissen 1984: 149)

In reviewing the work of a variety of theologians who have discussed the Church in terms of the body metaphor, I have tried to show that the body may be used to affirm unity, diversity, contingency or a dialectical combination yielding all three aspects. It will also be clear from this, and the previous sections, that a consensus over an embodied understanding of the Church will have to address the conflictual elements of the *historical body*, the ambiguous nature of the *social body* and the dialectical character of the *theological body*.¹¹

An Embodied Church?

On the basis of this study, there appears to be a considerable diversity of view within the worlds of biblical studies, social sciences and management over the significance of the body as a metaphor for the Church (and other organizations). It could be argued this is only to be expected if we are moving within a ‘post-modern public square’ (Markham 1994) or a ‘risk society’ (Beck 1992) which not only *works with*, but *generates* a plurality of views.¹² In which case, identifying the effect that the metaphor has on our diverse social

¹¹ For useful discussions of the place of conflict within organizations see Katz & Kahn 1978 [1966]: 612-51, Sims, Fineman & Gabriel 1993: 38-49; on the role of ambiguity see Brunsson & Olsen 1993: 23-25, 123-24 and on dialectic see Morgan 1997 [1986]: 283-97.

¹² ‘The theoretical content and the value reference of risks imply additional components: the observable *conflictual pluralization and multiplicity of definitions of civilization’s risks*. There occurs, so to speak, an overproduction of risks, which sometimes relativize, sometimes supplement and sometimes outdo one another.’ (Beck 1992: 30 – author’s italics)

and organizational structures maybe the most we can hope to achieve. This is an important point. George Lakoff argues that through a process of ‘functional embodiment’ (the unconscious use of a category in a social setting) certain concepts are used automatically in a non-reflexive way (Lakoff 1987: 12-13) and there maybe times when the metaphorical plurality of the body metaphor appears not to be acknowledged as part of its functional embodiment. An example of this is the univocal use of the body metaphor in the report from the Archbishops’ Commission of the Church of England (published as *Working As One Body*) where it is taken solely as an image for organizational unity. Lakoff extends his notion of functional embodiment into the broader concept of ‘cognitive model’ (embodied models which structure thought and understanding) while Mark Johnson develops a more embodied metaphor of ‘gestalt structure’ which he defines as: ‘an organized, unified whole within our experience and understanding that manifests a repeatable pattern or structure’ (Johnson 1987: 44). Is there an embodied cognitive model or gestalt structure which shapes our understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ? Peter Hodgson argues that there is and it is characterised by four attributes: **(i) Embodiment** – the crucifixion of Jesus’ body is fundamental to Hodgson’s understanding of a Christ-Gestalt. It is the ‘not-Godness’ of Jesus’ death which is significant because, for Hodgson, God is definitively present in the world not in some perfect human form such as Greek statue but in Jesus’ finitude, mortality, susceptibility to suffering, sexual and ethnic specificity; **(ii) Incarnational Praxis** – Jesus incarnates a transformative praxis which builds human solidarity, enhances freedom, breaks down systematic oppression, heals the injured and broken, and cares for the natural world; **(iii) Wisdom of God** – the Christ-Gestalt is engendered by the Wisdom of God, which is the mode of God’s spiritual presence in the world. God shapes spiritually and ethically by indwelling, moving, empowering, instructing, inspiring human individuals and communities; **(iv) Relationship with other Gestalts** – these include the ‘root experiences’ of Judaism (exodus, prophecy, exile, messianic kingdom) and ecclesial existence (a mode of existence transfigured in the direction of nonprovincial, non-hierarchical, nonpatriarchal, nonethnic communion of persons, open to all without prior conditions (Hodgson 1994).

However, my contention would be that in this description Hodgson has not followed the pattern of his own gestalt. He speaks of God being present in the world not as some Greek statue but in Jesus’ inconvenient specificity, yet his image of the Church is of a

perfection which seems more akin to the Greek statue. On the basis of the preceding discussion I would argue that a gestalt for the Church should embody: the diversity of interpretation regarding the metaphor of Jesus' body in the early Church (*Historical Bodies*); the paradoxical understanding of the body in a double role – the Same and the Other (*Social Bodies*); and the contingent nature of the body which emerges from a dialectical understanding of the metaphor (*Theological Bodies*). In which case, what might bring such a dialectical gestalt to birth? Some writers have identified a dialectic between the body as a metaphor for organizational unity and diversity however, in a tantalising image which he does not develop, John O'Neill argues that the human body, and therefore human politics and history, arise from a dialectic of the 'will-to-consensus' and the 'will-to-conflict' (O'Neill 1989: 5). It seems to me that this dynamic but messy understanding¹³ of the ecclesial gestalt better reflects not only many people's direct experience of churches but also fits with the nature of the 'historical', 'social' and 'theological bodies' as I have outlined them. There is, in O'Neill's words, 'an overriding coexistence' (ibid.) of these two forces within human social being and, I would add, social becoming. Thus, Hampden-Turner's legendary creature ('The Consensus') has more of an embodied existence than he allows. To extend the metaphor perhaps his legendary consensus, or will-to-consensus, does indeed exist but the reason it tends 'to vanish as mysteriously as it first appeared' (Hampden-Turner 1990: 121) is because of that other predatory creature the 'will-to-conflict' whose embodied form appears to be far quicker and more powerful – at least in the Church. The task of getting these two creatures to lie down together maybe even harder than encouraging close relations between the lion and the lamb but it is no less visionary.

¹³ On 'mess' as an organizational metaphor see Eden, Jones & Sims 1983.

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