

TYPOLOGY AS A MEANS OF INTERPRETATION:
PAST AND PRESENT

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INTRODUCTION

In his Preface to *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, Claus Westermann writes:

The current debate within the Old Testament research [*sic*] appears to concentrate particularly on two questions: What is the relationship between the story of the acts of God as testified to by the people of God, on the one hand, and the history of Israel as the historical research of our time sees it on the other? And the second question: Can the interpretation of the Old Testament, in presupposing a unity of Old and New Testaments as the Bible of Christianity, presuppose some one concept which will guide and determine interpretation as a whole—some one concept, for instance, such as typological exposition? Is the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament essentially simple or is it complex?¹

This question of the validity and use of typology is one of the central issues being discussed today in the field of methodology of Biblical interpretation, but so far there seems to be little agreement as to validity, terminology, rules, and method. But the typological approach is not without its supporters, some of whom are quite avid. For instance, M. D. Goulder says that when properly used, typology "is the golden key that unlocks many a problem door, and it is not difficult to show, at least in general, that it can be applied, and at the same time to say when it cannot."²

But most proponents of the typological method are not that confident. Indeed, there is a lack of confidence as well as disagreement as to what a proper definition of typology and the typological task should be. Goulder, who confidently says that it is the golden key that unlocks many a problem door, gives a tautologous definition of typology when he says that it is "the science of determining types which lie behind the records of the New Testament."³ But what is a type? B. W. Anderson comes much closer to giving an acceptable definition of the modern

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1. Claus Westermann (ed.), *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 11.
2. M. D. Goulder, *Type and History in Acts* (London: S. P. C. K., 1964), p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

typological method when he says that typology is a means to express the Biblical understanding of history. "Usually typology is regarded as a way to understand the dramatic unity of Scripture, on the supposition that events of the Old Testament, seen from the angle of Christian faith, foreshadow and point beyond to the decisive event of God's revelation in Jesus Christ."⁴ It can be seen that even this statement leaves many issues unresolved; however, it may be noted that typology is an effort to understand the unity of the Bible from the standpoint of history rather than allegory.

TYPOLGY UP TO THE REFORMATION

Modern interpreters are not the inventors of typology; indeed, the fact that it is part of the warp and woof of scripture is what gives this whole method its significance. Since it is not the purpose of this paper to investigate the types in scripture as such, the existence of such will be assumed. In the New Testament itself the saving events of the Gospel were regarded as the antitypes of the events, institutions, and certain persons of the Old Testament, the correspondence often being mentioned in rather subtle and indirect ways.

Faced with the task of apologetics, post-apostolic Christians were quick to follow the lead of the New Testament writers. One of their most pressing tasks was to demonstrate the underlying agreement and continuity between the Old Testament, properly understood, and Christianity and its claims. The unity of the Bible was the fundamental premise. The whole Bible spoke directly of Christ, in prophecy and in type. While the historical context and grammatical meaning of the Old Testament texts was to be sought out and adhered to, for the events would have had no validity if they had not actually happened, it was the foreshadowing of Christ that was of the greatest importance. This unity transcended all diversity present in scripture. Though there was diversity of opinion between the Alexandrian and Antiochene exegetes as to the importance of literal exegesis, they were united on the importance of the witness of all scripture to Christ, and typological exegesis of scripture was one means of seeing that unity and witness. Christian preachers from apostolic times had to show that the truth of their message could be attested by the sacred books recognized by their audiences as possessing absolute authority. Thus, they were compelled to show that the Old Testament spoke about Christ. They taught the fulfilment of Old Testament types and prophecies. This was the method of Justin in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. If the Old Testament was a book about Christ, typology was a means of discovering and interpreting that fact.⁵

4. B. W. Anderson, "Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, edited by B. W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1962), p. 177.
5. W. H. Lampe, "The Reasonableness of Typology," in *Essays on Typology* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1957), pp. 22-23.

But there was a danger inherent within this approach, and it is easily discoverable to anyone who will read early Christian writings. That danger is that whenever typology is used to show the Christocentric unity of the Bible, it is all too easy to impose an artificial unity (even assuming that there is a valid use of the basic method). Types come to be created rather than discovered, and the drift into allegorism comes all too easily. In fact, it is often difficult to distinguish typology from allegory. The history of interpretation prior to the Reformation is eloquent witness to this fact. Properly speaking, typology is a mode of historical understanding. The historical value and understanding of the text to be interpreted forms the essential presupposition for the use of it. But in the search for types it was all too easy to look for secondary hidden meanings underlying the primary and obvious meaning. When that happened, typology began to shade into allegory. Of course there are varying degrees of this shading, and some allegorical interpretation is nearer to typological interpretation than other. This circumstance has given rise to considerable controversy concerning the exegetical method of Origen. Many historians have felt that he was an allegorist pure and simple; but in recent years Jean Danielou has sought to clear Origen of that charge by saying that basically he has a typological exegesis, but that his theory is better than his practice.⁶ Be that as it may, in Origen the emphasis has shifted from a historically based typology to allegorical interpretations in which the content forced upon the text is not inherent within the text, but rather is fixed and known to the interpreter before he begins. Thus the art of allegorical interpretation really consists in the establishment of relations between this preconceived content and the text. When viewed in this manner, one may see how it so easily came about that post-apostolic Christianity in its typological search for Christ in the historical fabric of the Old Testament gradually slipped into an allegorism in which the grammatico-historical sense was a matter of secondary value, indifference, and even offense in some cases, being pushed aside to make room for the spiritual sense which lay behind.⁷

This shift from typology to allegorism was gradual and did not always go to the same extremes. Those exegetes influenced by the Antiochene school placed more emphasis on the historical and literal, though they were not immune to the allegorizing tendency themselves. Jerome, who was profoundly influenced by the Antiochene viewpoint, had sound exegetical principles, but in practice he was an allegorist, even to the point of allegorizing the New Testament.⁸ With the work of Augustine, allegorism became the most dominant interpretative method in the West. He had been driven to it in his reaction to the letterism of the Mani-

6. Jean Danielou, *Origen* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), pp. 131-73, 184; and Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), pp. 31-34.
7. Walter Eichrodt, "Is Typological Exegesis an Appropriate Method?", in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics, op. cit.*, p. 227.
8. Ramm, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

cheans. From this point on to the Reformation, the preponderance of exegetical work was allegorical.

TYOLOGY AFTER THE REFORMATION

Calvin and Luther brought about a new epoch in the typological interpretation of scripture with their return to the literal sense and methodical exegesis of scripture. With this renewed concern for the grammatico-historical sense came a new appreciation of typology. A typology grounded in an appreciation of the historical verities precipitated a distinction once more between the typological and allegorical, though neither Calvin nor Luther worked out a system of typology of his own. But through them typology had gained a new lease on life.⁹ But once again it soon began to run wild in the fanciful production of far-fetched types. The Cocceian school of the mid-seventeenth century fell into the irregularities of the ancient allegorists, though they claimed to accept no sense from scripture but the literal and historical one. Cocceius himself believed that every event in the Old Testament history which had a formal resemblance to something in the New Testament was typical. Many followed him in these extravagances.¹⁰

But this trend toward allegorical interpretation was not without its opponents. Though the man whose name designates this group was not the originator of this view, a group known as the school of Bishop Marsh propagated the rule of thumb that a type is a type only when the New Testament specifically designates it to be such. Since this is a clear and precise formula, it has exercised a great influence on conservative Protestant interpretation since the time of Marsh.

However, a more moderate school of thought pointed out that the New Testament practically invites the interpreter to find additional types in Scripture. Thus, this mediating school tried to resist the wild extravagances of the Cocceian school, but it still insisted that the possibilities of a typological interpretative method were certainly greater than Bishop Marsh had suggested. Hence, the mediating school suggested that there were two varieties of types: 1) innate types, or those specifically declared to be types in the New Testament; and 2) inferred types, or those not specifically designated in the New Testament but justified for their existence by the nature of the New Testament materials on typology.¹¹ The most able systematizer and defender of this approach has been Patrick Fairbairn, and he is supported by Terry in his *Biblical Hermeneutics*.

In present-day conservative Protestantism (fundamentalism, evan-

9. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), II, 366; Gerhard von Rad, "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, *op. cit.*, p. 22; and Ramm, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-59.
10. Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1900), I, 9-14.
11. Ramm, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

gicalism, orthodoxy or whatever other term may be regarded as descriptive) the above three approaches to typology continue to co-exist. There are those who play the typological theme to the point that it practically amounts to allegorical interpretation. In reaction to these excesses, Bishop Marsh has many modern followers; but probably the majority of modern conservative Protestants seek to maintain a mediating position similar to that of Fairbairn and Terry.

Now at this point it becomes necessary to clarify one feature of typology as thus far considered and then to back up in point of time. The typologists so far considered in this paper, regardless of their other differences, all agreed on one point, and the great mass of Christians had agreed with them through the centuries. That one point of agreement is that the essence of a type is that it is in some sense predictive, every bit as predictive as a verbal utterance of predictive prophecy. Typology was regarded as a species of predictive prophecy. The correspondence between type and antitype, whatever the nature of that correspondence, was not a mere analogy nor an artificially imposed scheme on the part of the writers of scripture; the Old Testament types were foreshadowings in a predictive sense of Christ and his saving person and work. Though the Old Testament writers may have been unaware of these things, still God in His inspiration of them intended this result. This universally accepted point of typology must be recognized before the significance of the next development can be seen.

It will be recalled that developments in typological interpretation have been traced from the time of the Reformation to the present only in relation to the so-called conservative branch of Protestantism. Obviously the situation is not that simple. For many Protestants the rise of rationalism and the modern critical study of scripture destroyed the belief in verbal inspiration, predictive prophecy, the unity of the Bible, and hence the validity of typology and typological interpretation. No longer was the conviction held that the whole Bible spoke directly of Christ. No longer would every reader accept as a matter of course its author's belief that "these things came to pass that the scripture might be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced." Instead of seeing the Bible as a vast harmonious complex of prophecy and fulfillment, type and antitype, fused together by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Biblical criticism sought to recover the true and original meaning of the literal sense and to set the various documents comprising the Bible in their proper context in history. The effect of this attempt by destructive higher criticism was to lay emphasis on the diversity of the Biblical writings and the outlook and theology of their authors. Prophecy ceased to be thought of as actual foretelling of the details of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, for those who followed the presuppositions, theories, and conclusions of destructive higher criticism, the typological method of interpretation became a matter of historical curiosity. Though

the principal question that was being asked concerned the factuality of the Biblical writings, "in the end, . . . the most definite and conclusive result of all this critical investigation was the breaking down of the old conception of the unity of Scripture and the consequent discrediting of the typological and prophetic exegesis familiar to so many generations of Christians."¹²

However, it is of interest to note that though the literary criticism of the Bible had turned typology (and also allegory) out the front door, allegory at least managed to get back in through the rear door, particularly during the nineteenth century. There was little or no concern for the phenomena of saving history, but only for the light which symbolic language in the Bible threw on man in general. This led to the "spiritual interpretation" of the Old Testament which in the nineteenth century almost exclusively held the field.¹³

TYPOLOGY IN THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Though typology of the previous kind is not being revived by those who accept the conclusions of modern literary criticism as it has been applied to the Bible, modern scholarship is nevertheless becoming aware of typological thinking in both the Old and New Testaments; but it regards the scriptural typological thinking as being quite independent of the ensuing typological exegetical tradition in Christendom. Since typology was the characteristic road by which earliest Christianity came to terms with its Old Testament heritage, it is being asked if modern theological evaluations of the Old Testament and definitions of the relationship between the two Testaments can ignore these facts which should be taken into account in the search for an overall understanding. Furthermore, the religious experience of Israel is no longer being understood as the basis of a general religion. Israel is now seen as making her God's saving acts and institutions actual. The Old Testament speaks of acts of God in history. Can this have anything to do with the coming of Jesus Christ? And how should this be defined in theological terms? On what plane and in what sense are the two Testaments comparable. Is there something typical which binds them together, some sort of analogy?¹⁴ To this question many scholars are giving a cautious "yes," including such men as Lampe, von Rad, Eichrodt, and Wolff. Hence, Lampe writes:

It is again recognized that the New Testament writers, as well as Christian commentators from the earliest times, treated the Old Testament as a book about Christ in which every part con-

12. Lampe, *op. cit.*, p. 17. Cf. also pp. 14-16; von Rad, "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," *op. cit.*, p. 22; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, op. cit.*, II, 366-67; and Ramm, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

13. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, op. cit.*, II, 366-67.

14. *Ibid.*, II, 367ff.

tributed harmoniously to the pattern of typology and prophecy.

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If we try to recognize the typology which these writers employ and seek to grasp the meaning which the scriptural images had for them, we shall learn much about their thought and so about their conception of the significance of the Gospel events. Typological study is necessary if we are to appreciate the meaning of the New Testament.¹⁵

Similarly Hans Walter Wolff says:

In the New Testament is found the context of the Old, which, as its historical goal, reveals the total meaning of the Old Testament; also the correspondence in the details helps one to understand the witnessing intent of the Old Testament contexts. If it is shown to be true that no other historical document is comparable to the Old Testament in the way the New is, and that there also exists between the two Testaments a singular mutual relationship, then the typological approach is indispensable for an exegetical methodology that seeks to understand the historical context of the Old Testament texts and is concerned to eliminate arbitrary interpretations.¹⁶

Von Rad is both more eloquent and more confident than his cohorts when he writes:

We see everywhere in this history brought to pass by God's Word, in acts of judgment and acts of redemption alike, the prefiguration of the Christ-event of the New Testament. That is the only analogy—to return to the problem of analogy posed at the beginning—that offers itself for a theological interpretation of these texts. This renewed recognition of types in the Old Testament is no peddling of secret lore, no digging up of miracles, but is simply correspondent to the belief that the same God who revealed himself in Christ has also left his footprints in the history of the Old Testament covenant people—that we have one divine discourse, here to the fathers through the prophets, there to us through Christ.¹⁷

Such is the program that the new typologists are suggesting. In moving this direction they have laid down preliminary guidelines to govern this endeavor, but there is as yet no universal agreement on these matters.¹⁸ Indeed, there are vocal opponents to this approach.¹⁹

15. Lampe, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 19.

16. Hans Walter Wolff, "The Hermeneutics of the Old Testament," in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

17. Von Rad, *op. cit.*, II, 36.

18. It is beyond the scope of this paper to list these guidelines, but as an example see von Rad, *ibid.*, II, 36-39.

Certain questions readily arise in this writer's mind concerning the validity and direction of this contemporary revival of typology. 1) Proponents of the new typology use such terms as "analogy," "correspondence," "prefiguration," "pre-representation," "foreshadowing," and "corresponding reality." But what meaning can such terms have in a system of interpretation that repudiates predictive prophecy and verbal inspiration? Or to put the question differently, can such a system posit a valid connection between the Old and New Testaments?²⁰ 2) In what sense does this new movement regard the typology of Scripture as valid? 3) Does this new approach differ essentially from allegorism? 4) How can this new interest in typology avoid being anything but a destructive tool, in spite of constructive intentions? For instance, if the Bible writers "molded" history in order to create typological correspondences, it would appear to be valid to conclude, as Goulder does, that the more an incident falls into an antitypical pattern, the more its historicity falls under suspicion.²¹ Isn't it ironic that the new typological emphasis which originally was an attempt to show the unity between the Testaments may in fact end up concluding that this unity is artificial? But is any other conclusion possible for a position which rejects the orthodox doctrine of inspiration?²²

19. Cf. James Barr's objections in chapter IV of *Old and New in Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1966); similarly, chapter IV in James D. Smart's *The Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961).
20. Cf. James Barr's objection, *loc. cit.*; similarly, those of James Smart, *loc. cit.*
21. Goulder, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-82. Cf. Arthur Voobus, *The Prelude to the Lukan Passion Narrative* (Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1968), p. 63. Voobus suggests that Luke recast the Markan material in Luke 22:1, 7 in the interstool of his own typological conception, Voobus' assumption being that "history was not the concern of the evangelist."
22. It should be noted that consideration of the contribution of Jean Danielou to the current discussion of typology has been by-passed for the most part. This omission from the text of this paper is justified by the fact that Danielou works in a different milieu than either conservative Protestant or destructive higher critical views of typological interpretation. Many of Danielou's writings have dealt with the typology prominent in the patristic writings; he usually fails to be critical of their excesses, his effort being to rescue them from the charge of allegorism. Indeed, it would usually seem that Danielou agrees with the fathers. His arguments are not always convincing and often partake of the nature of special pleading. In his book *The Bible and Liturgy* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960) Danielou thoroughly works out the thesis that there is a sacramental typology in the Old Testament as well as a Christological typology (pp. 4-5). "Consequently, the eschatological typology of the Old Testament is accomplished not only in the person of Christ, but also in the Church" (p. 5). This means that "the sacraments carry on in our midst the *mirabilia*, the great works of God in the Old Testament and the New" (p. 5). It is the study of Biblical symbolism behind the sacraments (i.e., the study of the sacramental types) which constitutes the primitive foundation which gives the true significance of the sacraments in their original institution. Hummel ("The Old Testament Basis of Typological Interpretation," *Biblical Research*, 1964, IX, 42 note) considers Danielou to be outside the current discussion of typological interpretation as much as Patrick Fairbairn is. The comments of Roland E. Murphy in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (XXVI, 357) lead to the same conclusion.