

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_evangelical\\_quarterly.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php)

# Typology

by John W. Drane

*This paper was originally read at a Tyndale Fellowship study group. We are glad to give it wider circulation here. Dr. Drane is Lecturer in Religious Studies in the University of Stirling.*

ONE of the most distinctive characteristics of Biblical religion is that its sacred book contains not a collection of doctrines, theologies or religious philosophies, but is the account of the history of a nation and its experiences with its God in and through the everyday events of historical experience.<sup>1</sup> This means that, unlike the great religions of the East, Judaism and Christianity are not easily assimilated to other times and cultures than the time and culture in which they originated. Though it is possible to view the phenomenon of Biblical religion from the point of view of modern existentialism, and see the spiritual pilgrimage of Abraham and the other great men and women of faith as the spiritual pilgrimage of everyman, this is not to understand the Bible in its own terms, and ultimately it is a side-stepping of the real issue raised by the character of Biblical revelation, rather than either an answer to it or a reinterpretation of it.

The crux of the problem which concerns us in this paper is stated succinctly by Mowinckel: "The religion of the Old Testament is a historical entity with all the conditioning and limitation that pertain thereto. How can it also be an eternal entity, the beginning of the Kingdom of God?"<sup>2</sup> Until the rise of scientific Biblical criticism, this was a question that had been tacitly ignored by the Christian church. Though in the second century the heretic Marcion had raised the question of the relevance of the O.T. for Christian belief, his arguments had been effectively silenced by the orthodox catholic church fathers, and with scarcely a single exception, the whole tradition of the church from the second to the nineteenth centuries had emphasized the Christian character of the O.T. Thus the O.T. became a quarry from which the gems of Christian theology could be excavated, rather than a source book for the history of an ancient people. Since the O.T. was assumed to be a book about Christ, there was no problem in seeing him portrayed everywhere in it. The historical events of the O.T. came to be regarded not so much for their intrinsic

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology II* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), pp. 336-356.

<sup>2</sup> S. Mowinckel, *The Old Testament as Word of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960), p. 20.

value, as for their "witness to Christ". Thus the real importance of Joseph, Joshua and David, to name only three O.T. worthies, was that they were "types" of Christ, and it was generally assumed to be self-evident that the meaning of things like the exodus, the passover lamb and the tabernacle could only be found in their allegedly typological significance, pointing to the redemption won by Christ.

This pattern of interpretation has continued right down to our own day in some circles. But on the whole, the development of a critical and historical approach to the O.T. brought with it a serious disturbance in the *status quo* of O.T. interpretation. With the onset of modern scholarship, the historical approach became all-important, as scholars sought to set the various O.T. documents in their proper historical context. The effect of this was to emphasize the diversity of the Biblical writings and the outlook and theology of their authors; and while events like the exodus came to be regarded as of great historical and archaeological importance, their connexion with the Christian experience of salvation was regarded as far-fetched and artificial.

When once it was accepted that the interpretation of the O.T. in a Christian sense, at least as it had been traditionally practised, was a futile and subjective exercise, many Christians were at a loss to know what to do with it. Even today the O.T. has lost its relevance not only for the average Christian, but for the average Christian preacher as well. According to one author, the modern critical understanding of the O.T. "has actually inhibited rather than encouraged [preachers'] use of these Scriptures in the way in which a Christian preacher should handle them",<sup>3</sup> and so he suggests that ". . . men being trained as preachers in the theological colleges need to be set free from absorption in the study of the prevailing scientific and historical criticism of the Old Testament . . . and encouraged to study the Old Testament with its Christian application and use fully in view. For it is within the Canon of the Old and New Testament Scriptures that God's present word for men is still to be found and heard."<sup>4</sup>

We may well doubt that this is the real choice before us, for we are still faced with the question of how a revelation that is directly conditioned by a given series of historical and cultural associations can speak to the man of the twentieth century. Is it actually possible to reduce the Old Testament to a series of religious propositions? Or, indeed, is it desirable to do so, since such a procedure will inevitably lead to the removal of Christian belief from the realm of the historical to the realm of the mythical?

<sup>3</sup> A. M. Stibbs, *Expounding God's Word* (London: IVF, 1960), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

In order to answer this question, and attempt to decide whether there is a place for typology in the modern interpretation of the O.T., we must go back to the Biblical literature itself, to see how the revelation given through specific incidents in previous generations was understood and updated by other Biblical authors themselves. We shall accordingly look first at the O.T.'s self-understanding, then at the use of the O.T. in the N.T. and then briefly at the use of the O.T. in the church, before reaching our conclusions.

## I

The main elements of the salvation history of the O.T. are contained in the great confession of Israel's faith that may well have formed the basis of the covenant renewal ceremonies at the Jerusalem temple (Dt. 26: 5ff.). In this confession of faith, we find the very heart of O.T. religion. Israel's status as the people of God depended on what God had done for her, in her whole history in general, but more especially in the events of the call of Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, the Covenant, and the entry into the land, which itself was considered to be God's gift. By the repetition of this creed, and others like it, in the context of the cultic ritual, the worshipper felt himself to be a part of that community in which the acts of God had been experienced. Though he may have been far removed in time from the age of Moses, and equally remote geographically from the scene of exodus and covenant, nevertheless he was a part of those people with whom God had dealt face to face. In the continuing life of the people of God, the formative events of Israel's history were no mere historical facts, but an ongoing reality in her everyday cultic experience.

Because of this, Israel never saw the O.T. as a "history of faith": "rather she saw herself snatched up into a divine history in which she was continually led by God's Word from promise to fulfilment."<sup>5</sup> Thus Mowinckel can speak of the O.T. as having within itself a "double organic relationship: a history that proceeds through conscious break and conscious connection."<sup>6</sup> It was inevitable that there should be a certain element of discontinuity between the later and earlier O.T., as God's revelation became more clearly understood in its true context.<sup>7</sup> But more important than the element of discontinuity is the element of "conscious connection". An important peculiarity of the O.T. covenant promises is that they remained to the

<sup>5</sup> G. von Rad, in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. C. Westermann, Eng. trans. (Richmond, Va.: Knox, 1963), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> *E.g.* both Hosea and Jeremiah could issue a rebuke against Jacob's craftiness—something that was viewed in a praiseworthy light in the earlier histories, but by the prophets was seen to be the cause of so much duplicity in the history of the covenant people.

end as things that were still hoped for. Though the covenant was a historical event lying at a definite point in Israel's past, Jeremiah declared that in fact its true meaning had scarcely begun to be fulfilled, and was yet to come with the establishment of a "new covenant" (Jer. 31: 31 ff.). Like the old one, this new covenant would be accompanied by circumcision, though this time it would be spiritual. The same was true of other crucial phases of the nation's history: there would be in the future a new exodus (Jer. 16: 14f.; 23: 7f.; Hos. 2: 17-20; Isa. 52: 11f.), a new David (Jer. 23: 5; Ezek. 37: 24f.), a new city of God (Ezek. chs. 40ff.), and even a renewal of the material sacrifices, this time as a spiritual reality (Ps. 51: 17). No longer were the faithful in Israel to think merely of things that had happened far away and long ago in their national history: the exodus, the covenant, and all that they implied, were to be re-enacted in *their* time in the future on a more imposing scale than in the past.<sup>8</sup>

The O.T. concept of history, then, was never of redemptive history as a mere rehearsal of events. It is more realistic to say, with von Rad, that to the O.T. writers "the drab facts of history had become prophetic, and had come to be viewed as prototypes to which a new and more complete redemptive act of God would correspond. . . . Things are never used up, but their very fulfilment gives rise, all unexpected, to the promise of yet greater things . . . Here nothing carries its ultimate meaning in itself, but is ever the earnest of yet greater works."<sup>9</sup> It is because of this that the O.T. can be considered as "a book of ever increasing anticipation".<sup>10</sup>

All this is in marked contrast to the re-application of the O.T. which became current in later generations of religious fanatics. Like their forerunners the O.T. prophets, the men of Qumran, for instance, reinterpreted earlier prophecies. But when they did so, they did not mean that the message of God to an earlier generation was relevant to a new situation. They argued that the situation of their own time was the actual one that had been in view in the O.T. all along; and it is not without significance that they were able to do so only by an extended use of a far-fetched method of mystical interpretation.<sup>11</sup>

This is strikingly similar to the understanding of the O.T. found in many of the early church fathers, especially those connected with a Jewish form of Christianity.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. F. Foulkes, *The Acts of God* (London: Tyndale, 1959), where it is suggested that these two features are the basic characteristics of typology: repetition of the acts of God, and the greater glory of the future acts of God.

<sup>9</sup> G. von Rad, in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* II, p. 319.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 1Qp Hab. xi. 17-xii. 5, Zad. vi.2-11.

## II

But before we come to them, let us now go on to look briefly at some of the ways the O.T. is used and re-applied in the N.T. itself.

There are some four basic ways in which the N.T. uses the O.T.:

(a) *Predictions* which the N.T. claims to have been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. The main element here is the conviction that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and in the light of this he could be viewed as the fulfilment of O.T. predictions.

(b) *Analogy*—a device which is perhaps the most characteristic use of the O.T. by the N.T. writers. By analogy we understand the use of O.T. language and concepts to describe N.T. realities, as, for instance, when Paul refers to the Galatian Christians as “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6: 16; cf. 1 Pet. 2: 4ff., etc.). Much of the material falling into this category consists of casual, *ad hoc* references to the O.T. with no necessary theological connotations.

(c) *Allegory* is occasionally used, though as we shall shortly see, there is a problem here over the precise definition of the term. For the present, it is sufficient to note that all scholars are agreed that this does not play an important part in the N.T.’s use of the O.T. and, if it is present at all, it is to be found only in Gal. 3: 16; 4: 21-31; 1 Cor. 5: 6-8; 9: 9; 10: 4.

(d) *Typology*. Again, there is some doubt as to the precise definition of “typology” in the N.T., but Foulkes probably represents the majority position accurately when he says that “Typological interpretation, strictly speaking, . . . is the interpretation of history.”<sup>12</sup> Von Rad also contends that the relationship between the early church and the O.T. was the same as that between the O.T. prophets and the earlier O.T. history, *i.e.* a relationship of reinterpretation in terms of the promise-fulfilment motif.<sup>13</sup> Taken thus, typology can be distinguished from prediction in that whereas a prediction necessarily entails within itself a fulfilment at some future date, a type does not: it is self-contained in itself, and it is only when it is viewed in the larger context of God’s subsequent dealings with men that it can be seen to have any significance outside of itself.

Clearly, everyone will not accept in every detail the distinctions made here, but at least they may serve as a working definition.<sup>14</sup> On any account, typology is clearly not the most common way that

<sup>12</sup> F. Foulkes, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> *Old Testament Theology* II, pp. 321f.

<sup>14</sup> For different definitions of the N.T.’s use of the O.T., cf. A. G. Hebert, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (London: Faber, 1947), pp. 233 f.; and more recently, R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1971), pp. 40ff.

the N.T. uses the O.T. though according to many contemporary scholars, it may be theologically the most significant.

It would obviously be impractical to trace through every verse of the N.T. where it has been claimed that an O.T. type is expounded. Nor would it be particularly helpful to do so, since many of the so-called "types" (e.g. of Adam and Christ) can perhaps be better understood under one of the other headings. What I wish to do here, therefore, is to make a few observations of the typological use of the O.T. on the basis of just one sample passage from the N.T.

Apart from Rom. 5: 14, there is only one passage where Paul refers to O.T. events as a τύπος of events that had come to full fruition in the N.T. church. This is in 1 Cor. 10: 1ff. Here Paul was addressing a group within the Corinthian church who under the influence of a Gnostic dualism, were contending that what they did in the body was of no consequence, since their eternal spiritual future had been secured by their participation in the Christian sacraments, which they interpreted as conferring on them some mystical spirituality coupled with a magical protection. In reply to these people, Paul compares their situation with that of the Israelites in the desert. The Corinthian Gnostics were by no means the first people to have eaten food from a supernatural source. Though the Corinthians were wrong in supposing that the Eucharist had some magical properties, even supposing it did that would not confer on them the freedom to act as they pleased. The Israelites many centuries before had actually eaten manna given to them by direct divine intervention, and they had drunk water that gushed from the rock at God's command—yet what had been their fate when they disobeyed? Far from conferring some kind of immunity on them, the "divine food" they had eaten placed on them a burden of greater responsibility, and their judgement was accordingly great: they were not allowed to enter into their inheritance. The Corinthians, says Paul, should sit up and take notice, for what had happened to the Israelites so long before would as surely happen to them, if they persisted in their foolish ways.

What can we say of the way Paul uses the O.T. in this context as a τύπος? First of all, we must note that this passage is in no sense an interpretation of the O.T.<sup>15</sup> It did not have its origin in any kind of exegetical considerations, but in the conditions of the church at Corinth. What struck Paul was the similarity between the situation of the Corinthian heretics, who argued that they had a privileged place because of the supposedly magical virtue of the sacraments, and the Israelites, who had in fact eaten "the food of heaven", and yet were still judged. He was not intending here to give an exposition either

<sup>15</sup> L. Goppelt, *TDNT* VIII, pp. 251f.

of the exodus narrative, or of the Christian sacraments. Indeed, the parallel between the two situations was not all that close in details, for the Israelites were not really "baptized . . . in the sea": they never got wet at all. What Paul was obviously referring to here was simply the broad similarities of the two situations, and he was certainly not intending to expound the O.T.: he was hoping to correct a practical aberration in the church at Corinth.<sup>16</sup>

We must therefore suppose that when Paul said ταῦτα δὲ τύποι ἡμῶν ἐγενήθησαν, he was referring not to individual aspects of his O.T. exegesis, but to the overall pattern presupposed in both exodus and Corinth: God's gift creating an unwarranted presumption, leading to judgement. What he was referring to was not some O.T. event that had direct and detailed correspondences in the N.T. or in Christian experience. What he was really speaking of was the unchanging character of God himself, and in this he stands in direct line with the "typology" of the O.T. prophets, whose message was: if this is how God acted with his people in the past, this is how we can expect him to deal with us. Thus, "typology" really becomes a statement of theology, affirming the unchanging character of the Biblical God. There is, then, an important strand in the N.T. which continued the prophetic understanding of the redemptive events of O.T. history, and saw in them a mark of God's unchanging character and his consistency in his dealings with mankind. Whether it is either legitimate or sensible to call this "typology" is a question to which we shall return shortly.

### III

It is certainly the case that when we come to the writings of the church fathers we find an altogether different approach to the problem of the O.T. as a part of Christian scripture. The problem of how a divine revelation that was tied to specific historical events could be universalized so that it spoke to all men in all times was one that had already been faced by the Jewish exegete, Philo of Alexandria. In his effort to reconcile orthodox Judaism with Greek philosophy, he resorted to a mystical interpretation of the O.T. By disregarding the historical questions that are posed by the distinctive form of the O.T., and by applying a thoroughgoing mysticism to its understanding, he was able to conclude that Moses and the other O.T. writers had actually declared the truths of Greek

<sup>16</sup> The statement that "the Rock was Christ" could be taken to point in the opposite direction, of course. Two possible ways of understanding this in relation to the question of typology are either, with von Rad, to regard it as "allegorical exposition within the framework of typological interpretation" (*Old Testament Theology* II, p. 366 n.1), or to adopt A. T. Hanson's theory of "the real presence of Christ in O.T. history" (*Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* [London: SPCK, 1965]).

philosophy several centuries before the Greeks thought of them. Philo's approach to the O.T. was of course more Greek than Jewish, and the way he interpreted it was the customary method used by some Greek writers in re-applying the crude and immoral stories of the gods and goddesses in the writings of Homer.<sup>17</sup>

The whole problem of how the O.T. should be interpreted in the early church was cast up in the second century by the heretic Marcion, who argued that the O.T., together with much of the N.T., ought to be relegated to the dustbin if the true apostolic Christian faith was to survive. The early fathers, though bitterly opposed to all that Marcion stood for, realized that he had a valid point, and that there was a difficulty in seeing how the history of an ancient people and its dealings with God could be relevant to any later age, especially since the coming of Jesus had introduced something new. The mystical understanding of the O.T. had a great appeal for them, as it enjoyed a great popularity among Jews not only in the Diaspora, but in Palestine itself, where the rabbis were using precisely the same methods of O.T. interpretation, only for a homiletical rather than a philosophical purpose.

We can perhaps see a few traces of this kind of approach to the O.T. and its Christian significance in parts of the later N.T.<sup>18</sup> But it was in the second century and after that the method really became important.

Certain parts of the O.T. appear to have been used more often than others for this purpose, and four separate groups of Christian *Midrashim*, or O.T. paraphrases, came into regular use to provide a mystical link between Old and New Testaments and the ongoing life of the church.<sup>19</sup>

(a) First of all was a group of Christian *Testimonia* that appear to have centred round the theme of scarlet objects in the O.T. Barnabas 8 interprets the red heifer of Num. 19 in a Christian sense, and Barn. 7 speaks of the goat of the Day of Atonement with the scarlet wool on its head as "a type of Jesus set forth for the Church, since

<sup>17</sup> Theagenes of Rhegium is said to have been the first to allegorize Homer in 525 B.C., and he was followed by the Pythagoreans, Cynics and Sophists, though Plato and Socrates had no time for this method (cf. *Phaedrus* 229, *Rep.* ii. 378). Perhaps the best example of this approach is Heraclitus, *Quaestiones Homericae*. Hebert argues that the church fathers differed from these Greek writers (and Philo) by having "a constant awareness that the revelation of God has been given through history" (*Authority of the Old Testament*, p. 266)—though some of their mystical interpretations would hardly give him any good grounds for such a view.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. in Matthew's use of Hos. 11: 1 of Jesus (Mt. 2: 15). [Here Jesus, as the Messiah, recapitulates the experience of the messianic people.]

<sup>19</sup> Cf. on this and what follows, J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, Engl. trans. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), pp. 87ff., 270-278.

whoever should desire to take away the scarlet wool, it behoved him to suffer many things according to the terrible nature of the tree, and through affliction to win the mastery over it." Or again, in 1 Clem. 12 the scarlet cord which Rahab hung in the window of her house in Jericho was taken to be a type of the death of Jesus and its benefits for the Christian church.

(b) In another group of early Christian *Testimonia*, wine in the O.T. was taken as the symbol of the blood of Christ (cf. Gen. 49: 11f.; Dt. 32: 14; Isa. 25: 6), while the bunch of grapes of Num. 13: 23, hanging from the wood with its juice dripping onto the ground, was an ancient symbol of Christ on the cross, "since he himself, hanging from the wood, was grape and bunch, he who, pierced in the side, made blood and water gush forth."<sup>20</sup>

(c) The interpretation of Genesis also had a peculiar fascination for some of the early fathers, presumably because of its attraction for the Gnostics, who were their main opponents. According to Theophilus of Antioch, the sun in Gen. 1 is a type of God and the moon of man, because "the sun, like God, is immutable, the moon diminishes and increases like man. Its growing is a figure of the resurrection." The three days preceding the creation of the luminaries are therefore a type of the Trinity (II. 15). Clement of Alexandria also turned his attention to the story of creation, and for him the waters of chaos were the symbol of baptism, while the waters above the firmament spoke of the Holy Spirit (*Eclog. Proph.* IV. 1, VIII. 1-2). The other great Alexandrian exegete, Origen, also used the same method of applying the O.T. to his own day. And he often applied it in a quite absurd way. In his *Commentary* on John 10: 28, for instance, Origen takes Matthew's quotation of Zech. 9: 9, with its introduction of not only an ass but its foal as well (Mt. 21: 5ff.) as a picture of Christian experience, where the ass is the O.T., the foal the N.T., and Jerusalem the soul into which the word of God enters.

(d) Another element in early Christian mystical interpretation was the typology of the cross. Thus, for the author of Barnabas, the idea of Moses praying with his hands folded became a prefiguration of the cross (Barn. 12: 5; cf. *Sib. Or.* VIII. 250-253, Justin, *Dial.* 90.5, Cyprian, *Test.* II.21). There was also an elaborate typological exegesis connecting the Jewish houses of the passover marked with the sign of the cross in the blood of the lamb with the antitype of the Christian soul, marked with the sign of the cross at baptism (Justin, *Dial.* 111.4). For Justin and Irenaeus, even the axe raised from the water by Elisha could be interpreted as a type of the cross of Jesus (Justin, *Dial.* 86.6; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* V.17.4).

<sup>20</sup> Hippolytus, *Blessings of Isaac* 18.

The rationale of this Christian approach to the O.T. was accurately described as follows by Hilary of Poitiers in the introduction to his *Treatise of Mysteries*:

Every work contained in the sacred volume announces by word, explains by facts, and corroborates by examples the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . From the beginning of the world Christ, by authentic and absolute prefigurations in the person of the Patriarchs, gives birth to the Church, washes it clean, sanctifies it, chooses it, places it apart and redeems it: by the sleep of Adam, by the deluge in the days of Noah, by the blessing of Melchizedek, by Abraham's justification, by the birth of Isaac, by the captivity of Jacob. . . . The purpose of this work is to show that in each personage, in every age, and in every act, the image of his coming, of his teaching, of his resurrection, and of our church is reflected as in a mirror.

It was this kind of exposition of the O.T. that first convinced Augustine of the truth of the Christian faith.

Though, with the Reformation, the more extreme forms of mystical interpretation were forgotten, the method still lingers on. Even today, despite the advances of modern scholarship, it is still a commonplace method of understanding the O.T. in certain circles. In a publication dated as recently as January 1974, I came across an explanation of the meaning of the O.T. tabernacle and its furnishings which follows directly in the footsteps of the early church fathers. Thus, a modern author can claim that the rams' skins dyed red in the tabernacle were types of Peter and Paul in their converted state, that the brass used in its construction is a symbol of the judgement of sin, that the wooden boards set in sockets of silver are types of the Christian grounded in his faith, while the various loops used to hold the structure together are nothing less than a direct prefiguration of the kind of Christian fellowship to be found in the ecclesiastical circles to which the writer belongs.<sup>21</sup> For this kind of interpreter, the O.T. as it stands is not the word of God for the Christian; it can only be made so by being treated as "a sea teeming with mysteries and prophetic riddles".<sup>22</sup> To such people it should not really matter whether the events of which the O.T. speaks ever happened at all, nor even whether God really spoke to his people Israel through the events of their own experience. The kind of "truths" that have been discovered in the O.T. by means of this brand of mystical interpretation could as easily be found in the works of Shakespeare, or in any of the more trivial pieces of literature that we read every day. What has happened is that the O.T. has been turned into something quite different from what it claims to be. Whereas it claims to be the account of the revelation of God's purposes through the history of his people, mystical interpretation of this kind turns it into a mytho-

21 E. Robinson, "Tabernacle and Temple", in *Assembly Testimony* (Kilmarnock: Ritchie), no. 129, Jan./Feb. 1974, pp. 17-20.

22 The expression of A. J. B. Higgins, *The Christian Significance of the Old Testament* (London: Independent Press, 1949), p. 119.

logical source book for (an often spurious) Christian theology. The theology is the most important thing, and the O.T. is quite secondary. Such a procedure obviously has grave hermeneutical consequences, for it produces a theology which is bound to be subjective, since it cannot be tested by the historical and theological norms of God's dealings with men in the past, and it leaves us with a disembowelled O.T. that is of no greater intrinsic value than, say, our daily newspaper.

## IV

One would have thought that in view of such aberrations, "typology" would be a subject of interest today only to a few rather eccentric Christians. But quite the opposite is the case, and in recent years there have been many weighty contributions to the study of the subject, especially from O.T. scholars themselves. Several reasons may be given for this. One is the plain fact that it is largely true that modern scholarship has often missed the real point of the religious message of the O.T., laying all the emphasis on literary and critical points to such an extent that the O.T. has become something of an embarrassment to the Christian church. When the question of the Christian character of the O.T. was faced in earlier generations, the answer to the dilemma was seen to be mystical interpretation of it, and so many Christians have felt inclined to turn once more to this method of understanding, if for no other reason than their complete disillusionment with the results of O.T. scholarship. Corresponding in time with this movement away from the evidently barren results of modern scholarship was the discovery by O.T. scholars themselves that one of the most significant elements in the O.T. is the pattern of progression from promise to fulfilment, a pattern of correspondence which is continued over into the N.T.<sup>23</sup> Thus an O.T. theologian like von Rad can suggest that, to understand the full message of the O.T., we must speak of "a witness of the old Testament to Christ", and he goes on to assert that "our knowledge of Christ is inadequate without the witness of the Old Testament . . . in these dealings of God in history, in his acts of judgement as well as his acts of redemption, we may everywhere discern what is already a Christ-event."<sup>24</sup>

Von Rad calls this "typology", and in doing so he is followed by many other scholars. It has come to be customary to distinguish this "typology" from "allegory" by suggesting that typology is firmly rooted in the historical situations of God's revelation, and is con-

<sup>23</sup> Cf. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* II, p. 321: "the way in which the Old Testament is absorbed in the New is the logical end of a process initiated by the Old Testament itself . . ."

<sup>24</sup> G. von Rad, in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, p. 39.

cerned with "the recognition of a correspondence between New and Old Testament events, based on a conviction of the underlying character of the principles of God's working, and a consequent understanding and designation of the New Testament events in terms of the Old Testament model."<sup>25</sup> This means that typology presupposes a correspondence of both history and theology, and if both are not present the "type" is reduced to allegory. In allegorical interpretation, the whole of scripture is interpreted in a quasi-Platonic way as the outward dress of an eternal system of spiritual truth that is hidden for all but those who have the key to its understanding. On these definitions, then, the Biblical understanding of the continuity of God's ways of working with men in the promise/fulfilment *schema* can be called "typology", whereas the church fathers' use of the Bible may be better characterized as "allegory".

We may, however, express a certain dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in the discussion of this subject. The phenomenon of so-called "typology" in the O.T. is not so much a matter of historical correspondences based on some preconceived rhythm in history, for the correspondences between promise and fulfilment described by the prophets are not presented to us as commentaries on history, but as statements about the character of God himself. There is no element of mystical reinterpretation of the past. Rather, as J. D. Smart puts it, "The prophet knows what God will do because he knows who God is. . . . A fixed scheme of prediction and fulfilment belongs together with a static conception of history in which from the beginning God has determined all events, a conception totally alien to the dynamic character of the prophetic faith in which history consists of a succession of situations in which the nation is called to choose between the way of life and the way of death."<sup>26</sup> The use of the O.T. in the N.T. continues along the same lines. Yet if we are to call this kind of reinterpretation "typology", we are really beginning by making a re-definition of the terms of reference, for "typology" in the vocabulary of most people refers to the quasi-allegorical interpretations of the church fathers and their successors.

If we want a comprehensive term to describe the ways in which the Bible reinterprets itself as the purposes of God move from promise to fulfilment, it seems to me that a more adequate conception lies

<sup>25</sup> R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, p. 40. For an earlier statement of the same basic distinction, cf. P. Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, (London: Oliphants, 1953 [repr.]), pp. 2f.

<sup>26</sup> J. D. Smart, *The Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), p. 104. Foulkes makes the same point when he speaks of a "conviction of an unchanging God" as the basis of "typology" in the O.T. itself (*op. cit.*, pp. 32f.).

ready to hand in Oscar Cullmann's definition of salvation history. Though Cullmann himself admits that "the divisions between typology and salvation history are in flux",<sup>27</sup> there does seem to be a useful distinction here. In salvation history, "the central saving event is presented and is taken as the standpoint from which the the past is seen in retrospect and the future is anticipated."<sup>28</sup> So, according to Cullmann, this means that every contemporary problem in the N.T. had to be seen in the light of the totality of salvation history, an attitude which "grounds the expectation of what is yet to come in faith in what has already become a reality in the past."<sup>29</sup> As examples of how this works, Cullmann cites the way Paul gives a salvation history of faith in Gal. 3: 6-4: 7, in answering questions about the faith of his own contemporaries in Galatia, or the way he does the same thing by his allusion to Adam and Christ in Rom. 5: 12ff. In distinction to typology, even on the definition of modern scholars, salvation history can see the whole of God's workings in a much broader perspective. To the extent that typology establishes a parallelism between two figures or phenomena, it is comparable to what Cullmann means by salvation history. But whereas typology lays considerable stress on repetition,<sup>30</sup> salvation history emphasizes the element of fulfilment and consummation.<sup>31</sup> It is this latter emphasis that also distinguishes it from allegory: "In allegory the salvation-historical meaning of Scripture is eliminated, making it merely a form for expressing some truth divorced

<sup>27</sup> O. Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, Engl. trans. (London: SCM, 1967), p. 286.

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>29</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Foulkes, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-22. Von Rad takes a different line, arguing that "one must see the basic ideas of typology less in the notion of 'repetition' than in that of 'correspondence'" (*Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, p. 20). This would meet some of the criticisms of Bultmann, who has argued that if the basis of "typology" is the concept of repetition, it represents a cosmological theory based not on the O.T. but on mythical ideas of the world process as a cyclical movement. If this is the case, such "typology" would actually misrepresent the O.T.'s own view of history (R. Bultmann, "Ursprung und Sinn der Typologie als hermeneutischer Methode", in *TLZ* 75, 1950, pp. 47ff). Cf. also W. Eichrodt, in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, pp. 233f.

<sup>31</sup> Though von Rad insists on calling his own approach to the O.T. "typology", because he thereby establishes a contact with the earlier typology/allegory exegetical tradition, what he actually says on the subject appears to approximate more to Cullmann's concept: "There can now be no question of declaring certain persons or objects or institutions, as, in their objective and as it were static essence, types. Everything depends on the *events* between Israel and her God, . . . and on what place all these events have in the great area of tension constituted by promise and fulfilment which is so characteristic of Israel's whole existence before God" (*Old Testament Theology* II, p. 371).

from salvation history. In allegorical interpretation the historical development between the Old Testament text and the New Testament situation has no significance whatever."<sup>32</sup>

It seems clear, therefore, that one of the most pressing requirements in this area of study is to establish suitable terminology to describe what we are talking about. By attempting to inject a new set of meanings into the old term "typology", O.T. scholars have often done themselves and their readers more harm than good. Whether we like it or not, "typology" is unalterably fixed in the tradition of the Christian church as a description for the mystical methods of interpreting the O.T. that came to their full flower in the works of the early fathers. The promise-fulfilment motif in the Bible itself can more accurately be described by the term "correspondences", or Cullmann's "salvation history", and it is both unnecessary and unfortunate that the term "typology" should have been reintroduced into the discussion, for there is no basis in either Old or New Testaments for reviving the methods of the church fathers.<sup>33</sup>

v

Finally, it seems appropriate here to draw some practical conclusions on the legitimate use of these methods of interpretation in communicating the Christian message to modern man. Three points deserve attention in this connexion:

1. Both Hebert<sup>34</sup> and Lampe<sup>35</sup> have suggested that though typology cannot be regarded as a reliable means of exegesis, it can play an important part in preaching. To be sure, Hebert also avers that a proper mystical use of the O.T. must be based on and controlled by what he calls "the general sense of Scripture".<sup>36</sup> But how, we may ask, can this exercise any kind of realistic control over the fanciful imagination of the preacher, who is probably quite convinced in any

<sup>32</sup> Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>33</sup> This is really the point that Hanson is making in his book *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, though he wants to make the concept of "the real presence of Jesus in the Old Testament" the key to the N.T.'s understanding of the O.T. Cf. France, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>34</sup> A. G. Hebert, *Authority of the Old Testament*, p. 234, argues that though mystical interpretation in general "is not valid as exegesis. . . . When the teaching given is in accord with the general sense of Scripture and with the Catholic Faith, it is good teaching in itself. . ." Cf. also his earlier work, *The Throne of David* (London: Faber, 1941), pp. 33ff.

<sup>35</sup> G. W. H. Lampe and K. Woolcombe, *The Reasonableness of Typology*, section 7.

<sup>36</sup> Hebert, *Authority of the Old Testament*, p. 266.

<sup>37</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 132. Hebert gives good grounds for Smart's accusation, for he contends that ". . . the mystical interpretation of the Old Testament is for Christians a matter of obligation"—presumably because there is for them no other possible way of dealing with it (*Throne of David*, p. 256).

case that *his* interpretation is the only right one, and is therefore soundly based on "the general sense of Scripture"? According to Smart, what Hebert and Lampe are really saying is that there is no unity between the Old and New Testaments: ". . . if the Christian gospel cannot be found in the Old Testament without allegory, this is tantamount to a confession that *it is not there* but has to be inserted from without."<sup>37</sup> The N.T. writers were all convinced that it was there, though in a partly concealed form, and our case would be sad indeed if no O.T. scripture could speak to us as God's word today until it had been allegorized, typologized, mysticized, or whatever we care to call it.

2. In the past, too much emphasis has been placed on the methods used in the N.T. to interpret the O.T., and it has often been supposed that the church's duty is simply to take over these methods and use them itself. But even supposing it can be proved that mystical interpretations are found in the N.T., this is not necessarily a valid reason for us to use them today. As students of the Bible we may well ask why the N.T. writers used the methods they did, and whether they have some principle to teach us which can be applied in our situation. But simply to adopt them as they stand is an unjustified procedure.<sup>38</sup> This is especially important if we see "typology" in the N.T. as a continuation, indeed *the* continuation and consummation of the O.T. promise/fulfilment motif. In any event, we would do well to limit our own observations to those connexions already made in the N.T., rather than trying to find "types" of Christ (or of anyone else) in every obscure part of the O.T.

3. Though the promise/fulfilment patter of N.T. theology was not the mainstay of early Christian apologetic, it certainly played some part in the proclamation of the Christian message to the men of the first century.<sup>39</sup> Both Jews and Gentiles were accustomed to hearing their own religious heritage being interpreted in the light of contemporary events, and so for the early Christians to be able to show that Jesus' life, death and resurrection stood at the central point of a promise-fulfilment pattern in the whole of salvation history was a positive commendation of the gospel in the eyes of their contemporaries. We must not, of course, overemphasize the importance of this in N.T. times, though it certainly became very important later. Yet there is enough evidence to suggest that the promise-fulfilment motif of the N.T. was formulated with a view to practical advantage, as well as being determined by more theological considerations.

<sup>38</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* II, p. 409: "There is in fact no normative interpretation of the Old Testament. Every age has the task of hearing what the old book has to say to it, in the light of its own insight and its own needs."

<sup>39</sup> Cf. B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (London: SCM, 1961), p. 282.

What, then, should be the attitude of the Christian towards the methods of O.T. interpretation that we have considered here? We must, I think, be perfectly honest and say that if the O.T. is ever to mean anything to twentieth century men and women it will not be by means of any kind of mystical exposition, whether allegorical or typological.<sup>40</sup> To expound the O.T. in this fashion today is to court certain disaster. If we accept that the O.T. can mediate the word of God to us today, we can expect it to do so without the intervention of this kind of artificial hermeneutic devices. In his encyclical *Divino Afflante*, Pius XII, commenting on the use of typological expositions, went to the heart of the matter:

... it must never be forgotten that such a use of the words of Sacred Scripture is, as it were, extrinsic and adventitious to Holy Writ . . . the faithful . . . want to know what it is that God Himself means to say to us in the Sacred Scriptures, rather than what some eloquent speaker or writer is propagating with a dexterous use of the words of the Bible. "The word of God . . ." . . . certainly needs no human artifice or manipulation in order to move and stir the soul.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps we can sum the whole matter up most succinctly by echoing the words of Professor Smart, that what we need today is "not a return to allegory and typology but a faithful exegesis and exposition of Scripture that will wrestle with the words of these ancient witnesses until the walls of the centuries become thin, and they tell us in *our* day what they knew so well in *their* day. They knew God, and the goal of our exegesis must be, not to foist upon their words spiritual meanings that we in our ignorance think to be the general sense of Scripture, but to let each of them speak to us in his own way until through his words he becomes our elder brother in the faith, sharing with us his knowledge of God and of that life that is possible only in the knowledge of God."<sup>42</sup>

*University of Stirling*

<sup>40</sup> Here I am meaning to use these terms in what I take to be their widely held significance, rather than the specialized meanings we have discussed above. The promise-fulfilment pattern of O.T. and N.T. is obviously a suitable subject for the Christian's attention, since it is an important part of the entire Biblical revelation, and as such we need to take proper account of it in our teaching and preaching.

<sup>41</sup> *Divino Afflante*, Engl. trans. (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1944), p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 133.