

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 *Theological Students Fellowship* (TSF) *Bulletin* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_tsfbulletin_01.php

ing His message to their minds? God certainly meets man in historical deeds, but we can be thankful that He does not leave him to his own devices in the understanding of these deeds, but provides him with an authoritative revelation of the meaning of them. Some of the manifestations of dialectical theology border upon the irrational, but biblical thought, although sometimes paradoxical, is never irrational.

(f) *Its increasing tendency towards an anthropocentric outlook*

There can be no doubt that existentialism is the leading philosophical influence upon present-day theology. Since Kierkegaard's day, existentialist philosophy has tended to become less and less Christian. Heidegger's brand of it has considerably affected Bultmann and

Tillich, and he speaks not of God but of 'Being'. In his thought man is challenged to forsake 'inauthentic existence', in which he tries to hide from reality. It is when he turns round and faces the truth about himself 'like a man', that he comes into 'authentic existence'. It is not easy to see how Heidegger's man in authentic existence differs from a self-made man.

These tendencies towards a man-centred view of things (often linked with a subjectivist outlook in ethics) are being given their head by those who occupy the left of centre in theology at the moment. Barth and those who belong well to the right of his movement may well find themselves left high and dry by the tide of so-called 'radicalism'. Only a God-given revival of true biblical faith and truly biblical theology can stem this tide.

The Interpretation of the Old Testament by the New Testament

By THE REV. KLAAS RUNIA, TH.D., Professor of Theology at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Australia. This article was originally published in Theolog. Review, journal of the Australian Theological Students' Fellowship.

IT IS SELF-EVIDENT that this is an important aspect of the interpretation of the Bible. It concerns both the Old and the New Testament. On the one hand, we have to examine the New Testament to see how the inspired authors approached and read their Bible. And, on the other hand, we have to study the Old Testament for ourselves and try to answer the question: How shall we today read this part of the Bible?

Even a superficial reading of the New Testament shows us that all the authors make much use of the Old Testament and we immediately notice that they read it in a special way, viz., as a *Christian* book. Take for example the *Gospel according to St Matthew*. In the very first chapter we find the genealogy of Jesus Christ and we see that Matthew traces it back to Abraham, the founding father of Israel (1: 1). After that, he

gives us a long list of names: three times fourteen (1: 17). In this list the whole Old Testament passes before our eyes. Many of the most important personalities are mentioned: the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; then Judah; later on Boaz (who married Ruth), David (together with Bathsheba), Solomon, Hezekiah, etc. But this genealogy is only the beginning. In the remaining part of the book, too, the Old Testament is repeatedly quoted.

In chapter 1: 23 the well-known words of Is. 7: 14 — 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel', are quoted and applied to Jesus. Of course, this quotation as such does not create much of a problem if we accept that the birth of the child Jesus was indeed a virgin birth. The next quotation in chapter 2: 6, however, (from Micah 5: 2 — Bethlehem as the birth-place of the Messiah), is more difficult, for Matthew quotes the Old Testament passage somewhat differently from the original. Chapter 2: 15 is more difficult again; Matthew quotes Hosea 11: 1 — 'Out of Egypt have I called my Son', and applies this to the return of the infant Jesus with his parents from Egypt after

the death of Herod, while in Hosea 11: 1 itself the reference is to the Exodous. The next quotation, Chapter 2: 18, is also rather hard. Matthew quotes Jer. 31: 15, where the prophet speaks of Rachel weeping for her children (a reference to the Israelites brought into exile), and applies this to the little children of Bethlehem who were murdered by Herod. Is not that a little far-fetched, we are inclined to ask. Then we come to chapter 2: 23, where Matthew speaks of the fact that after the return from Egypt, Joseph, with Mary and the little Jesus, settles in Nazareth and the evangelist concludes by saying: 'that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene"'. This is perhaps the most difficult quotation of all, because there is no known passage in the Old Testament, which says that the Messiah will be a Nazarene!¹

These few examples bring us at once right into the problem of the interpretation of the Old Testament by the New. According to some scholars the whole method of the New Testament writers is altogether unacceptable for us today with our modern standards of exegesis. Rudolf Bultmann, for example, calls it a matter of pure arbitrariness². The New Testament writers do not gain any new knowledge from the Old Testament texts, but read from or into them what they already know. In this way 'the Old Testament becomes clear as prophecy as a result of the fulfilment'. Of course, the New Testament writers meant well. They came to it because of their apologetic interest. In their anti-Jewish polemics and their mission to the gentiles this method served them by giving them 'proofs' that their faith in Jesus Christ was right. Was He not the fulfilment of predictions and prophecies made long ago? But, Bultmann says, for us this whole procedure is untenable: 'In reality this method of finding prophecy — whether with or without allegorizing — abandons the text of the Old Testament to the mercy of arbitrary choice, and the grotesque examples in the apostolic fathers are simply the consequence of the method of the New Testament authors.'³

Very few scholars today would go all the way with Bultmann who, in fact, sees hardly any value in the Old Testament. In his view the only way we can speak of a fulfilment of the Old Testament is that we see it as fulfilled in 'its inner contradiction, its miscarriage'.⁴ Although there is a drift towards a trans-

cent God and His activity in the Old Testament, there is also the fact that God and His activity are not conceived of in a radically transcendent and eschatological sense. Again and again Israel tries to realize the divine promises (the covenant of God, the rule of God, the idea of the people of God) in its own empirical history, each time leading to a failure. Now this miscarriage of history actually amounts to a promise, and as such the Old Testament still has value for us too.

All this means, of course, that for Bultmann the Old Testament is a pre-Christian book. It has for him the same function as the Mosaic law had for Paul in the doctrine of justification. Bultmann himself mentions this example explicitly and concludes: 'In the same way faith requires the backward glance into Old Testament history as a history of failure, and so of promise, in order to know that the situation of the justified man arises only on the basis of this miscarriage.'⁵ After all this it is not surprising that Bultmann cannot possibly agree with the New Testament writers, when they read the Old Testament as a through and through *Christian* book.

We for ourselves believe that the Old Testament and the New are the *one Word of God*. We fully believe that not only the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well, is a Christian book. This means that in principle we fully agree with the New Testament writers. Yet for us too there are many questions. Did they not read too much into the Old Testament? What were their principles of interpretation in reading the Old Testament? Were these principles valid, *i.e.*, did they not violate the peculiar character of the Old Testament? And are these principles still valid for us today?

When we turn to the New Testament and count all the quotations, we find an amazingly great number. H. Berkhof, using the marginal notes of the Nestlé edition of the Greek New Testament, counts 613 real quotations. Adding the clear allusions to the Old Testament, he comes to a number of 1,640.⁶

Some of them cause no difficulty at all. For example, there are the quotations which see the Old Testament as a moral authority for our Christian life. Thus Jesus quotes the fifth commandment in Matt. 15: 4, 'Honour your father and your mother', adding a word from Ex. 21: 17, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die' (cf. also

Lev. 20: 9). Similarly Paul quotes Prov. 25: 21, 22 in Rom. 12: 20, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head'. But these are only a small portion of the quotations. In the majority of the passages quoted something quite different is at stake.

One of the main features of the Old Testament is that it speaks of the great future, the *eschaton*, in which God will give *full redemption* to His people. To be sure, Israel knew already about redemption. They had experienced it again and again; first of all in the Exodus, the great redemption from Egypt, the founding fact in their national history; and also afterwards, in many peculiar events of deliverance and redemption. Time and again, throughout their whole history as a nation, there was God's redeeming hand over His people. Yet they also knew that all these acts of redemption were still to come. The prophets, in particular, always pointed to a coming redemption.

Now the starting point of all the New Testament writers is that this eschatological redemption, the promised time of grace and mercy, *has come* in the appearance, death and resurrection of Jesus, the rabbi of Nazareth. The 'eschaton' is no longer a matter of the future only, but it is a present reality. Again and again we read how they take certain Old Testament passages, which are clearly eschatological in their own context, and apply them to Jesus of Nazareth. C. H. Dodd, in his book *According to the Scriptures*, has made a special study of these passages and discovered that there are certain 'blocks' of eschatological passages in the Old Testament, which the New Testament consistently applies to Jesus. He singles out especially: Dan. 7 and 12; Joel 2 and 3; Zech. 9-14 and Malachi 3 and 4.7 We find these passages quoted throughout the whole New Testament. In other words, they show us that there was a very definite method of reading the Old Testament among the New Testament writers. But where did they get this from? Dodd's conclusion is: 'To account for the beginning of this most original and fruitful process of rethinking the Old Testament we found need to postulate a creative mind. The Gospels offer us one. Are we compelled to reject the offer?'⁸ The answer is a clear 'No'. The New Testament itself emphatically tells us that Jesus read the Old Testament in this way and also

taught His disciples to do the same (cf. Luke 24: 25ff. and 44ff.). It is clear that the New Testament writers have accepted this lead given by the Master, and creatively added to it when later on they wrote their books.⁹ Everywhere in the Old Testament they found indications of Jesus as the Messiah.

But again the question presents itself: Were they right in doing this? Or did they violate the Old Testament itself, by reading it as a 'Christian' book? The only way to answer this question is to study the quotations themselves. Of course, it is impossible to discuss them all in one short article. But this is hardly necessary, as all the main quotations fall into three categories: A. Direct messianic prophecies. B. Typical or typological passages. C. General statements of the Old Testament, which are applied to Jesus.¹⁰ On each of these three groups we shall make some comments.

A. DIRECT MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

There are many passages in the Old Testament which speak directly of the messianic age. Here the Old Testament author himself is looking forward to the future and sees in his mind the figure of the promised Messiah. The New Testament writers simply take these passages and apply them to Jesus Christ. In a sense, one can say that there is no special principle of interpretation. There is no need for such a principle, for the passages themselves are clearly messianic. In most cases even the Jews themselves accepted the messianic character of these passages. The one peculiar thing is that the New Testament writers believe that Jesus, the man of Nazareth, *is* the Messiah. Therefore, if one wishes to speak of a principle of interpretation, one can say that it is this *belief in Jesus as the Messiah sent by God*.

As examples, we point to the following passages. Moses' words, recorded in Deuteronomy 18: 15, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren — him you shall heed', are applied to Jesus in Acts 3: 22, 23 and 7: 37. The passages about the 'Ebed Yahweh' ('Servant of the Lord') are quoted throughout the whole New Testament.¹¹ Jeremiah 31 (the new covenant) is quoted as fulfilled in Hebrews 8: 8-12 and 10: 16, 17. Micah 5: 2 (Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah) is quoted in Matthew 2: 6.¹² Malachi

3: 1, which speaks of the messenger, who is to prepare the way before the Lord, is applied to John the Baptist in Matthew 11: 10; Mark 1: 2; Luke 1: 17, 76; 7: 27. Malachi 4: 5 (Elijah comes first) is applied by Jesus Himself to John the Baptist, according to Matthew 11: 10, 17f.; Mark 7: 13.¹³ Zechariah 9: 9, speaking of the humble king, is seen as fulfilled in Matthew 21: 5.

In all these passages there is no real problem of interpretation, nor is any violence done to the Old Testament for they are all clearly messianic. All depends here on the question, whether Jesus is the Messiah. If this is so — and this is a matter of faith — then the New Testament writers were fully right in applying them to Jesus.

B. TYPICAL OR TYPOLOGICAL PASSAGES

This group of passages is much more difficult, because it contains material of quite a different nature. The passages themselves are *not* directly messianic. They all had significance primarily for the time of the prophet himself, but at the same time there is, according to the New Testament, an aspect in which they point to the future, *i.e.*, to the messianic age. In other words, while the Old Testament author saw only one dimension in these passages, namely, his own contemporary dimension, the New Testament sees two dimensions: the contemporary-Old Testament aspect and the future-messianic aspect. Usually we speak here of Old Testament *types*. W. Eichrodt gives the following definition: Types are 'persons, institutions or events of the Old Testament that are looked upon as divinely appointed models or previews of corresponding great things in the New Testament history of salvation.'¹⁴

At this point everything becomes much more difficult. For how do we know whether a person or event or institution is a type? It is so easy to create types and then to read them into the Old Testament. How can we avoid arbitrariness here? What are the standards? Are there some fixed characteristics of types? We believe that the answer to the last question is in the affirmative, and would refer to L. Berkhof, who mentions the following points¹⁵. (1) There must be some notable real point of resemblance between a type and its anti-type. There may be many differences between the two persons or events, yet at *some* point the

type must be a *true picture* of the anti-type. (2) The type must be *designed* by divine appointment to bear a likeness to the antitype. It is not left to us to find out the relationship, but there must be scriptural evidence that it was so designed by God. This does *not* mean that it is always *expressly* so designated by the New Testament, but there must be some indication. (3) A type always prefigures something *future*. This is the great difference between the *type* and the *symbol*. The latter points to something present, for example, the ephod of the high priest with the twelve precious stones; this conveyed to contemporaries the spiritual truth that the high priest in his work carried the twelve tribes of Israel upon his heart.

There is also a difference between *type* and *allegory*. The latter is a spiritual interpretation of an event or person, whereby one seeks for some kind of spiritual lesson or truth. One is not really interested in the historical person or event itself, in fact, the historical aspect is largely or completely ignored. All the interest is focussed on the deeper, spiritual truth to be discovered. Rather famous is the allegorical interpretation of the 'eighteen and three-hundred males' belonging to Abraham's household and circumcised by him. 'In the eighteen I stands for ten, H for eight. Here thou hast IHSAOUS (Jesus). And because the cross in the T was to have grace, He saith also three hundred.'¹⁶ It is obvious that here there is no trace of real resemblance. This is pure arbitrariness.¹⁷

A *type* is always an *historical* person or event, which first has significance for its own time (the first dimension), but, beyond that, also points towards the future (the second dimension). And there is always *correspondence* between the two. We mention two typical examples. The first is Isaiah 7: 14, applied to Jesus in Matthew 1: 23. Reading through Isaiah 7 it is quite clear that this prophecy first of all was meant for the contemporary situation. The prophet tells King Ahaz, who is attacked by two armies, that redemption will come to Jerusalem. In the name of God he gives Ahaz the sign of the young woman who shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. When the boy is still small ('before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good'), redemption shall be a fact. In conservative circles this text has often served as a

shibboleth of orthodoxy and all emphasis was laid on the translation of 'alma' by 'virgin'. We are afraid, however, that when this is overstressed one comes to the idea of a first 'virgin birth' in the days of Isaiah, an idea which in our opinion is contrary to the tenor of the whole story. The emphasis in Isaiah 7 is not on the virgin, but on the *child*. We do not believe that the prophet himself had thought of a virgin birth, nor of the messiah. Characteristic of typology is that it is always indirect. Only afterwards, in the light of the fulfilment, the typological character of an event or person is recognized. And this is what happens in the case of Matthew. Looking back from the virgin birth of Jesus, who is indeed 'Immanuel', God-with-us, he all of a sudden sees the light reflected in Isaiah 7: 14, and taking the providential translation of 'alma' by 'virgin' ('*parthenos*') in the Septuagint, he now puts all emphasis on the special nature of Jesus' birth as a virgin birth. In the Messiah Jesus, the prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled in a way (second dimension) which goes far beyond the original meaning (first dimension).

The second example is taken from the Psalms, namely Psalm 2: 7, which the New Testament quotes as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in Acts 13: 33 and Hebrews 1: 5; 5: 5. Again, the first reference is to the contemporary situation. The King of Israel is the 'son' of Yahweh. At first glance this seems to be a parallel of the common belief among the nations around Israel that their king was divine. But the similarity is only superficial. In Psalm 2 there is no indication whatsoever of a divine nature of the king. His sonship is not 'natural', but it is the result of the divine decree. Indeed, it is said of him: 'You are my son, today I have begotten you', but this 'begotten' is qualified by the preceding 'decree' and therefore refers to his appointment by God. This is exactly the glory of the Israelitic Kingship: it is a kingship 'by the grace of Yahweh'. When, however, the New Testament writers, who have seen *the* King of Israel, the Messiah ('his anointed', Ps. 2: 2), look back towards the Old Testament, all of a sudden the words of the Psalm begin to light up with a new radiance; for of the Messiah Jesus the words 'You are my son, today I have begotten you' are indeed true in a much deeper sense. Rightly, the author to the Hebrews can

ask: 'For to what angel did God ever say this?' (1: 5). This is a unique sonship, because He is the Anointed who made purification for sins and then sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, excelling all the angels (1: 3, 4).

These are only two examples. When we study the whole New Testament, we find that the number of types is almost embarrassingly great. H. Berkhof mentions the following: the creation of the world, the creation of the man and the woman, Adam, the flood, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham and all the other patriarchs, the passover, Moses, the passing through the Red Sea, the establishment of the covenant, the brazen serpent, the manna, the service of the tabernacle, the day of atonement, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah.¹⁸ When we examine this long list more carefully, we see that they are nearly all grouped together in one of the crucial stages of the history of salvation: the creation, the flood, the time of the patriarchs, the Exodus, the early Kingship, the early prophets. It is further noteworthy that most of them come from the Torah, and the group connected with the Exodus is particularly numerous. We should not be surprised by this fact. As we have seen, typology always presupposes a genuine historical background and foundation. It is characteristic of the Torah that much emphasis is placed on history. In addition, in the Torah the main facts of Israel's history are recorded: creation, covenant with Abraham, redemption out of Egypt, covenant at Sinai, constitution as a nation. Yet we do find typology also in the prophets (not only in their own personal fate — Elijah, Elisha, Jonah — but also in their prophetic activity, *e.g.*, Is. 7: 14); and in a lesser degree, also in the Psalms (*e.g.*, Ps. 2: 7; 110: 1-7, esp. vv. 1 and 5).

Our main question at this point is: Can we discover a definite *principle of interpretation*? I believe that the answer is positive. The principle is that of *prefiguration*. Israel and its history are seen as a prefiguration of the future history of salvation. But is this a *valid* principle? Again I believe that the answer is positive, for it is a principle based on nothing else but *God's own consistency* in his dealings with his people. The New Testament writers know that the whole history of Israel is part of the great divine plan of salvation. The centre of this plan is the promised Messiah and Israel's history is, as it

were, the pre-history of the Messianic fulfilment. We can also put it in another way. Israel lives under the eschatological promise of the Messiah and the Messianic salvation, and standing under this promise, cannot but prefigure this salvation in some aspects of its own history. For God's promise, although essentially eschatological, always at the same time contains the reality which is promised. The light of the fulfilment, therefore, falls already over the pre-history and there must needs be a reflection of the future in this pre-history. This is what we have called pre-figuration, and it is fully justified because it is based on God's own nature and promise.

C. GENERAL STATEMENTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, WHICH ARE APPLIED TO JESUS CHRIST

This is the most difficult category of all. Here we have to deal with passages which the New Testament quotes as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but — as far as we can see — in the Old Testament itself they have nothing to do with the Messiah. Usually the situation is as follows. In the Old Testament a certain fact is mentioned. In itself, it is just a factual statement. But the New Testament takes it up, applies it to Jesus Christ or to the Christ-event, and then bluntly declares: 'Now this Scripture has been fulfilled.' Especially here the modern reader often has a feeling of perplexity. Sauer frankly admits: 'In all probability no contemporary of the original statement would have grasped the application given to the text in the New Testament.'¹⁹ Does this then mean that, at least in these cases, we meet with arbitrariness? The best way of finding the answer is to study one of the passages.

We take as an example Hosea 11: 1, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.' As we have seen, Matthew applies this in chapter 2: 15 to the infant Jesus returning from Egypt with his parents after the death of Herod. We have also seen that in the prophecy itself the words refer to the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. The charge of arbitrariness in Matthew's handling of this verse seems hard to resist.²⁰ But then we are immediately faced with the fact that Matthew is not the only one who does this. For example, the evangelist John and the author to the Hebrews do the same. And we begin to wonder whether there is not again a certain general *principle of interpretation* behind it. I believe

that this is so, namely, that *Jesus Christ is the representative of Israel*. If this is so, all that is true of Israel as the people of God is ultimately and in a much deeper sense true of the Messiah Jesus. We find this already in the opening verses of the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus is the son of Abraham, *i.e.*, He is the representative of Israel, the people of Abraham, and all that is said of Israel applies in the final analysis to Him. This is why Matthew can apply Hosea 11: 1 to Him, and Jeremiah 31: 15-17 (in Matt. 2: 18) to the children of Bethlehem. We cannot dismiss this as the zeal of a New Testament disciple which 'got out of hand' (Edgar), but rather it is a deep spiritual insight into the intrinsic relationship between Israel and its Messiah. Is it not true that the hostile powers which threatened Israel in Jeremiah's days, were ultimately aiming at the coming Christ? And is not this what is happening again in Bethlehem? Is not therefore Rachel's weeping really 'fulfilled' in the events of Christmas? Similarly, Psalm 80: 8 ('Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt') and Isaiah 5: 1-7 ('For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel') are fulfilled in Jesus, Who is the true vine (Jn. 15: 1). Some also see Hosea 6: 2 ('After two days he will revive us, on the third day he will raise us up') as belonging to this category. According to H. Berkhof, Jesus Himself would have based the certainty of his resurrection 'on the third day' on this passage.²¹

Luke goes even a step further and traces Jesus' genealogy back to Adam: 'the son of Adam, the son of God' (3: 38). In other words, Jesus is not only the representative of Israel, but of all mankind. No doubt this is also the background of Hebrews 2: 6-8, where Psalm 8 is applied to Jesus. In the original, this psalm is a creation-hymn; it speaks of the human race, of 'everyman' (*cf.* especially vv. 5-8). But the author of the Hebrews, making full use of the Greek translation of the Septuagint ('a little while lower than the angels' [ἐλοήμ] in verse 5), applies it to Christ in his humiliation, for Jesus Christ is man *par excellence*.²²

By whose authority did the New Testament writers do this? The only answer possible is by the authority of Jesus Himself. In fact, Jesus Himself apparently did it more than once. Several times we read that He took general statements of the Old Testament Psalms, which originally had been said by some anonymous believer, and applied them to Him-

self. The most famous is the opening of Psalm 22, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?', which Jesus takes upon His lips on the cross. Also the complaint, 'I thirst' (Jn 19: 28) is seen as a deliberate fulfilment of Scripture, *viz.* Psalm 69: 21. Another example is found in the words, 'they hate me without a cause' (Ps. 69: 4 and Ps. 35: 19), which Jesus declares are fulfilled in the hatred of the Jews against Him (Jn. 15: 25); while Ps. 41: 9 ('who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me') is seen to be fulfilled in the action of the traitor Judas (Jn. 13: 18).

Summing up, we can say that so far we have found *three main principles of interpretation*. (a) In the case of the direct messianic prophecies it is the belief that *Jesus Christ is the Messiah* promised by God. Therefore all messianic prophecies can be applied to Him. (b) In the case of the typological passages the principle of *prefiguration* applies: the Old Testament history of Israel points forward to the coming Christ. (c) In the case of the general statements, we have the principle of *representation*: as Israel's Messiah, Jesus is the representative of Israel.

When we have a closer look at these three principles, it appears that essentially they are identical; (b) and (c) are only particular applications of (a). At the same time (b) is the reverse of (c) and *vice versa*. In the case of (b) we take our starting point in the New Testament history of salvation, look back towards Israel's history and see it as a prefiguration of the Messiah Jesus. In the case of (c) we take our starting point in the Old Testament people of God, look forward and see the Messiah Jesus as the representative of this people. But in both cases the real starting point is the belief expressed in (a): namely that Jesus, the man of Nazareth, is the God-given Messiah.

This whole approach to the Old Testament, of course, is typically Christian. The Jewish rabbis in the days of the New Testament (and also today!) read the Old Testament quite differently. The reason was, and is, that for them the messianic eschaton is still fully future. There is no fulfilment yet: the Messiah is still to come. For the Christian, the eschaton has, in principle, become a reality in the coming of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Hence such New Testament statements as 'in the last days' (Acts 2: 17) — Peter adds these words to the original prophecy of Joel; 'the end of

the ages has come upon us' (1 Cor. 10: 11); Christ 'was made manifest at the end of the times' (1 Pet. 1: 20); 'it is the last hour' (1 Jn. 2: 18). All these statements point to the one, common conviction that in Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God has appeared. The eschaton is a present reality (however much it may be true that there is still a future expectation also), and in its light the Old Testament becomes a 'new' book of the coming Christ.

We must, however, return once more to the questions we asked at the beginning of this article. Is the interpretation in *accordance* with the Old Testament itself? Or does it involve a *violation* of the peculiar character of the Old Testament?

There is fairly general agreement in our day among Old Testament scholars that typological interpretation (for this is the main group and at this point the objections are usually voiced) is in no way a violation of the Old Testament. In the first place, there is the fact that the rabbis practised it already, although in a much lesser degree than the New Testament writers.²³ In the second place — and this is of much greater importance — typology, in contrast to allegory, fully represents the historical value of the Old Testament events. It does not minimize or ignore the importance of history, but takes it fully seriously.²⁴ Its peculiar characteristic is that it sees a 'prophetic plus' in this history. In doing this, it does not add anything to the history, but it points out that there was more in a particular event than the contemporaries had seen. L. Goppelt states it pithily thus: 'The results of the typological interpretation are statements about the New Testament salvation, not about the Old Testament itself.'²⁵ In other words, this principle allows the original authors to say exactly what they said, but then goes further and puts their words in a wider context. It reveals a perspective which was not yet visible at the time, but which has become apparent from the fulfilment.

We may even go further and say that this method of interpretation is in perfect harmony with the Old Testament. The Old Testament itself already knows the typological principle. In recent years Old Testament scholars in Germany have studied this matter carefully and extensively. Many of them, if not all, hold the critical position, but nearly all of them agree that one of the most characteristic features of the Old Test-

ament is the *movement from promise to fulfilment*. W. Zimmerli writes: 'When we survey the entire Old Testament, we find ourselves involved in a great history of movement from promise toward fulfilment. It flows like a large brook — here rushing swiftly, there apparently coming to rest in a quiet backwater, and yet moving forward as a whole toward a distant goal which lies beyond itself.'²⁶ He then points to the great promise given to Abraham which is actually a fourfold promise: a land, a great posterity, a fullness of blessing in coming history, and the promise that God wills to be his God and God of his descendants. The first great fulfilment of this wonderful promise is found in the Exodus. Israel does enter the land; Abraham has grown into a nation; God is their God: Yahweh, the God of the covenant. Yet the fulfilment is only partial and therefore the Exodus itself becomes the basis for the expectation of a new and greater fulfilment. Throughout the whole Old Testament and New Testament the Exodus plays an important role. The Old Testament prophets 'came to shape their anticipation of the great eschatological salvation through the Messiah according to the pattern of the historical Exodus under Moses'.²⁷

In the New Testament this pattern is taken up again, but now it is applied to the redemption brought about by Jesus Christ. His redemption is the real Exodus. Especially in the thought of Paul this Exodus-typology plays a dominant role. 'The events of the Exodus, the "redemption" under the "Old Covenant", provide a pattern of types, foreshadowing the redemption in Christ. As the Old Covenant was initiated in the Passover, so "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us", establishing a New Covenant in His blood (1 Cor. 5: 7, 11: 25ff.). As those redeemed by Moses were baptized "into Moses" in the cloud and sea, so those redeemed in Christ's death and resurrection are baptized "into Christ" (1 Cor. 10: 3; cf. Rom. 6: 3; 1 Cor. 1: 30; Gal. 3: 27; Eph. 1: 14; 4: 30). The Old Covenant, like the New, had a food and drink in which Christ was (typically) present (1 Cor. 10: 4; cf. Jn. 6: 31f.). As the Old Covenant had a Law written in stone, so the New Covenant had a Torah, a "Letter of Christ" written on men's hearts (2 Cor. 3: 3). Under the Old Covenant there was a tabernacle — and later a temple — in which the "Presence" or *Shekinah* of God dwelt and where sacrifices for sin

were offered; in the New Covenant, Christ and His Church are the temple and Christ's Cross the altar of sacrifice.'²⁸ Nor do we find this Exodus-typology only in Paul, but throughout the whole New Testament. Rev. 15: 3, for example, links Moses and Jesus by picturing the saints as standing beside the sea of glass and singing 'the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb'.

All this means that both Old Testament and New Testament show us the following pattern:

A — B — C — D — E

A is the promise given to Abraham. B is the first fulfilment in the Exodus, a fulfilment which becomes a promise for further and greater fulfilment. C is the new fulfilment in the return from the Exile, but again there is more to come, D is the great fulfilment in the coming of Jesus Christ. Now the people of God have really been redeemed. But even now the final redemption is still outstanding, and so the people of the New Covenant are eagerly looking forward to E, the second coming of their Lord, an event which will be the last and final fulfilment. Then the promised land will become an inalienable possession (cf. Heb. 4: 1, 11).

There is, therefore, only one correct way of reading the Old Testament: *in the light of Jesus Christ*. Yet we must remain cautious. We should beware lest we read too much into the material. We have no right to find types everywhere. James D. Wood mentions three important rules for all typological exegesis: (1) The typology must have persisted in the Church as a tradition. (2) It must be based on the literal sense of the Old Testament. (3) It must be founded on passages as a whole, and not merely on isolated words.²⁹ To these could be added: (4) Type and antitype must reflect both the consistency of God's character and the rhythmic pattern of His salvation. Everyone who adheres to these four rules will not make serious mistakes and yet will be able to see the full riches of God's one great work of redemption, prefigured in the Old Testament history of salvation and fulfilled in Jesus, who is the Christ.

Notes

¹ According to many commentators this might be a reference to Isaiah 11: 1, where the Messiah is spoken of as a 'netzër' (shoot) out of the stem of Judah. Jerome already tells us that he

had learned this from Jewish Christians. Others have read that as saying Jesus was to be called a *Nazarite*, one specially dedicated to the Lord by a vow. But this is a wrong etymology and, in addition, we nowhere read that Jesus was indeed called a *Nazarite*. Lenski offers another explanation: Jesus was afterwards called a 'Nazarene' by his enemies, indicating their contempt for him and this (viz. the contempt) was indeed 'what was spoken by the prophets'. (Note the plural: apparently Matthew did not refer to one particular passage of the Old Testament, but rather to the prophetic literature as a whole.) Cf. also John 1: 46 and Acts 24: 5.

² R. Bultmann, *Prophecy and Fulfilment*, in: *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. by Claus Westerman, 1963, pp. 54ff. On pp. 51ff. he mentions many other examples.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72f.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75. Cf. also James D. Smart, *The Interpretation of Scripture*, 1961, pp. 69ff., who discusses a much earlier article of Bultmann, viz. 'Die Bedeutung des Alten Testaments für den Christlichen Glauben', in *Glauben und Verstehen*, 1, 1954.

⁶ H. Berkhof, 'Hoe leest het Nieuwe Testament het Oude?', in *Homiletica en Biblica*, Vol. 22, No. 11 (Dec. 1963), p. 242. Cf. also Vol. 23, Nos. 1 and 2.

⁷ C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 1952.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁹ H. Berkhof, *Art. cit.*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Febr. 1964), p. 25.

¹⁰ This distinction goes back to the 19th century German scholar A. Tholuck, and is quoted here from Alfred Von Rohr Sauer, 'Problems of Messianic Interpretation', in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. XXX, No. 9 (Oct. 1964), pp. 566-574. James D. Wood, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, 1958, p. 2, also distinguishes three groups: (a) Simple; (b) Profound; (c) Perplexing. It is evident that the two divisions are parallel and that they can easily be combined: A + a; B + b; C + c.

¹¹ The remarkable fact is that the whole of Isaiah 52: 13 - 53: 12, with the exception of 52: 14, is referred to in one

way or another in the New Testament, and it is always interpreted as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Dodd makes the following comment: 'Its importance as a source of *testimonium* is manifest, and there is a high probability, in view of its ubiquity, that its use as such goes back to the earliest period to which we have access' (*Op. cit.*, p. 94).

¹² As we have pointed out above, Matthew slightly alters the original text. On the surface it looks like a contradiction, but in reality this is a typical example of the way the New Testament reads the Old Testament: the latter is read in the light of the fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Cf. Sauer, *art. cit.*, p. 568.

¹³ There is a peculiar difficulty in the fact that, according to John 1: 21, John the Baptist himself denies this identity. Most commentators explain it by suggesting that John's denial was directed to the Jewish literal expectation of the bodily return of Elijah, while John himself was Elijah in a spiritual sense. So, e.g., B. B. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St John* (AV, with introduction and notes), 1958, p. 18; F. W. Grosheide, *Johannes* (Bottenburg ed.), 1950, p. 125. Sauer puts forward another suggestion: 'There is a cogent reason for this difference. John was merely the anonymous voice of Isaiah 40: 3; he was speaking as that self-negating one who needed to decrease, while his Lord increased (Jn. 3: 30). Far be it from him, he would say, to identify himself with that Elijah who was to come! If identification would be made, it had to come from the Master Himself' (*art. cit.*, p. 568).

¹⁴ Walter Eichrodt, 'Ist die typologische Exegese sachgemässe Exegese?', in *Theologische Literatur-Zeitung*, LXXXI (Nov. 1956), p. 642.

¹⁵ L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 1957, p. 145.

¹⁶ Quoted by James D. Wood, *op. cit.*, pp. 37 and 38.

¹⁷ There is a marked difference between this and, e.g., the Pauline allegory on Hagar-Sarah in Galatians 4. Although at first glance it may look rather similar, and also may seem to show affinity with Philo's method, there is essentially no affinity between Pauline and Alexandrian allegory. 'The illustration of the "law versus promise" theme from the Hagar story and the recognition of its historicity are in marked contrast to the

symbolics of Philo, which often ignore anything apart from the purely allegorical' (E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 1957, p. 53). In addition, we should not forget that Paul does not use this allegory to *prove his point*. The doctrine has already been established. The allegory serves rather as an illustration, in typically Jewish fashion.

¹⁸ H. Berkhof, *art. cit.*, Vol. 23, No. 2, p. 27. Berkhof himself points out that the examples mentioned all belong to Christological typology. This is not surprising because this typology clearly dominates in the New Testament. But there are also types of the work of the Holy Spirit, of the church and the sacraments, and of the eschaton.

¹⁹ Sauer, *art. cit.*, p. 571.

²⁰ Cf., S. L. Edgar, 'New Testament and Rabbinic Messianic Interpretation', in *New Testament Studies*, V (Oct. 1958), p. 51f.

²¹ H. Berkhof, *art. cit.*, p. 26.

²² Sauer, *art. cit.*, p. 572, rightly says: 'Thus it pleased the Spirit of God to recast the creation statement of Psalm 8: 5 and to clothe it with redemptive significance in Hebrews 2: 7.'

²³ Cf., E. Earle Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 126, note 8.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 127f. Cf. also A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting The Bible*, 1963, p. 238f.

²⁵ L. Goppelt, *Typos. Die typologische Deutung des Alter Testaments im Neuen*, 1939, p. 242.

²⁶ Walter Zimmerli, 'Promise and Fulfilment', in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 111 and 112.

²⁷ E. Earle Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 131. Ellis points out that there are about one hundred references to the Exodus in subsequent books of the Old Testament (p. 132). Cf. also James D. Smart, who points to Hosea, Jeremiah and 'Second-Isaiah' in particular (*op. cit.*, p. 102f.). Actually there is a double perspective to the Exodus-scheme in the second half of Isaiah. The first reference is to the release from Babylon (*e.g.* 48: 20). The second and major reference is to the 'Messianic Exodus'. It is, further, striking that the Jews themselves had already seen this typology; cf. Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

²⁸ E. Earle Ellis, *op. cit.*, pp. 130 and 131.

²⁹ J. D. Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

The Practice of Truth

By THE REV. FRANCIS A. SCHAEFFER, BA, DD; an address given at the World Congress on Evangelism, Berlin, 1966.

THE CENTRAL PROBLEM of evangelism in the second half of the 20th century is the problem of the *practice* of principles, especially taking into account a spiritual and intellectual comprehension of that which is the dominant mentality of our century. If consistent Christian principles are not practised, 'success' in evangelism can, in the flow of history, only result in a weakened Christianity in the next generation. Any consideration of methods and programmes is secondary to a consideration of this

central problem.

The mark of our century is the victory of the Hegelian concept of synthesis, instead of a recognition of truth in the sense of antithesis and absolutes. Prior to Hegel, non-Christians generally acted upon the classical concept of truth. While they had no sufficient foundation for their optimism in regard to absolutes, yet in general they acted upon the concept that if a thing was true, the opposite was false. In morals likewise, if a thought or action was viewed as right, the opposite was considered wrong. Thus if the church in that day, including the evangelist, said that Christianity was true, or that a thing was right, this had meaning and was understood. If one said, 'Be a good girl,' for example, the statement was meaningful to those who heard it.