

***THE NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION  
OF THE OLD TESTAMENT:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY\****

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This study is limited to the Gospel of Matthew, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Book of the Revelation, and the teaching of our Lord, sections of the New Testament material which seem to be of special interest because of their distinctive features or peculiar problems. The Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline corpus merit a separate survey, while the Gospel of John and the first Epistle of Peter have been left aside in order to restrict the material to be compared, although they might have been helpfully included.

I. THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

We are to consider later the teaching of Jesus, and as some of this is recorded in Matthew we are faced with a methodological problem at this point. Our interest just now is in the mind of the author of the first Gospel rather than in that of Jesus, although we recognize that his selection of material from the teaching of Jesus reflects his mind also. Accordingly, we will take into account his record of this teaching, but will concentrate attention especially upon hermeneutical principles which can be seen from a study of his narrative framework and comments. This will be our primary material, while that taken from the Matthaean record of Dominical teaching will be given for additional illustration and will be placed in brackets in the notes.

*(a) The conception of the nature of the Old Testament*

A high conception of Scripture manifests itself somewhat differently from author to author. Matthew does not employ

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the perfect γέγραπται very often with reference to the Old Testament, except when he is quoting the words of our Lord, when it does appear fairly frequently. More often he looks back to the word spoken, although of course he knew this only in its written form.<sup>1</sup> It is probable that the reason for this is to be found in the fact that he viewed the Old Testament chiefly as a collection of prophetic oracles. In most of the citations with formula in this Gospel the idea of prophesying occurs.<sup>2</sup> In view of this, it is not surprising to find this often associated with the thought of fulfilment.<sup>3</sup> Does this mean that the idea of prediction governs everything for him? Not necessarily. Our author would have been extremely naïve if he had thought that there was a straightforward relationship of prediction and fulfilment of prediction between all the Old Testament passages and the Gospel events with which he linked them. Moreover, he has perhaps unconsciously given us a clue by quoting as the word of a 'prophet' a passage from a Psalm which neither as a whole nor in the part which he quotes could be conceived as predictive in nature (Mt. 13:35, *cf.* Ps. 78:2). This would suggest that he is using the idea of prophecy (and therefore presumably also of fulfilment) in a much broader sense. There can be little doubt that for him a prophet was one who spoke for God, although we may also add that in each instance what he gives us there is a 'fulfilment' of some kind in the history of Jesus, although sometimes in more subtle ways than the idea of prediction would suggest.

*(b) The principles of selection*

Matthew clearly believed that the chief Christian value of the Old Testament lay in its witness to Christ, and his selection of material from it to incorporate in his Gospel is, of course, related to this conviction. Even if we bear in mind the question of sources for his material, including either a Testimony Book<sup>4</sup> or a Christian tradition of extended passages with Christological bearing,<sup>5</sup> in the final analysis we cannot deny to the author

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* 1:22; 3:3; 4:14.

<sup>2</sup> The chief exceptions are in our Lord's teaching, *e.g.* 4:4, 7, 10; 11:10, but *cf.* 13:14; 15:7; 26:31.

<sup>3</sup> *E.g.* 1:22; 4:14; 12:17 (*cf.* 13:14 and the general statement of 5:17).

<sup>4</sup> The view of Rendel Harris, *Testimonies*, Cambridge University Press (1916, 1920).

<sup>5</sup> The view of C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, Nisbet, London (1952).

ultimate control over what he included and what he excluded. This consideration also applies to Lindars' hypothesis of the apologetic origin of the Christian use of the quotations.<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt that he shows a very marked concentration of interest upon the canonical prophets and especially upon Isaiah. Most of the Psalm quotations and all those from the Pentateuch are in his account of our Lord's teaching rather than as his own comments set within his narrative of the events. Perhaps his favourite formulae of quotation have themselves had an influence upon him here. Thinking of the Old Testament in terms of 'prophecy', what should be more natural than that he should tend to use material chiefly from those to whom, the term 'prophet' was more narrowly applied?

*(c) The hermeneutical standpoint*

Matthew shows a special interest in the literal fulfilment of prophecy, although this is found almost entirely in his own comments rather than in Dominical teaching. He records the fulfilment of the Emmanuel prophecy in the virgin birth of Jesus (1:22f.), the declaration of Herod's religious advisers that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem on the basis of Micah's prediction (2:5f.), our Lord's residence in Galilee (4:14ff.) in accordance with the words of Isaiah. These are fairly straightforward, for even if the Emmanuel prophecy is conceived by us in terms of a primary application in the prophet's time and a secondary and more complete fulfilment in Christ, this latter is no departure from the principle of literal fulfilment, for the whole point is that the literal meaning was not exhausted in the primary application. However, some of the other quotations present us with problems. Matthew 8:17 is a quotation from Isaiah 53:4, where the language of the bearing of sickness would appear to be figurative,<sup>7</sup> but Matthew has interpreted it rather more literally, applying it to the healing ministry of Jesus. Perhaps we may see this as evidence that Matthew thought of Jesus as One whose work involved Him in bringing blessing to others at cost to Himself, and that he saw that the words of Isaiah 53 which are normally treated in the New Testament in reference to the

<sup>6</sup> B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, London (1961).

<sup>7</sup> Although this is not perhaps beyond question, but *vide* Lindars, *Apologetic* 86.

cross<sup>8</sup> could be appropriately applied to saving ministries of a different kind prior to the cross, especially when the language of Isaiah 53 was verbally fitting. Matthew 21:4, 5 quotes Zechariah 9:9, and much has been said about Matthew's alleged misunderstanding of the parallelism of Hebrew poetry and his (it is said) rather naïve inclusion of an extra animal.<sup>9</sup> Is it not better to give Matthew the credit as an accurate recorder of the facts, so that the problem is approached from the other end? In this case, Matthew knew as a matter of history that two beasts were employed at the entry to Jerusalem, and he sees again a kind of verbal fittingness in the language which the prophet had used. Perhaps an approach to the complicated difficulties of Matthew 27:9f. might be made in this way. Certainly it is fruitful when applied to the words of 2:23, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'. The Hebrew was very conscious not only of the appearance of words but of their sound, and play on words is very common in the Old Testament. We may thus extend Matthew's principle of verbal fittingness to the sound of the word נָצְרָה and the name of the town where Jesus was reared. How appropriate, Matthew felt, that the name should thus symbolize, by its very sound, the office of Him who was the Messianic Branch! It is probably only our most un-Hebraic idea that the pun is the lowest form of wit that gives us any real difficulty with this passage.

There is also typology in Matthew, although not on the scale with which we shall be confronted with in *Hebrews*. Two examples will suffice. 'Out of Egypt have I called my son' (2:15; Ho. 11:1) is typological,<sup>10</sup> for it can only be applied to Jesus on the ground that in Him Israel is summed up, that He was, in the final analysis, the faithful Remnant, the complete expression of all that God intended His people to be. It took a whole nation to set forth in the Old Testament even an imperfect representation of that which found perfect expression in the unique Son of God.<sup>11</sup> Matthew 3:3 (quoting Is. 40:3) sees a parallel between the voice of the prophet announcing the ending

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Lk. 22:37; Heb. 9:28.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. D. Wood, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, Duckworth, London (1958) 25f.

<sup>10</sup> A point which some writers appear to have missed completely, e.g. H. J. Carpenter, writing in C. W. Dugmore, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, SPCK, London (1944) 10f.; J. Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation*, London (1966) 125.

<sup>11</sup> Vide Dodd, *Scriptures* 103.

of the exile through a Divine act of grace and the voice of the forerunner of Him who, through grace, should redeem His people from a greater Babylonian captivity, that of sin itself.

There are examples also of what might be called 'continuity of principle'. In Matthew 13:35, Psalm 78:2 is quoted.

A. B. Mickelsen,<sup>12</sup> noting that the various meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words involved all have the idea of 'instruction' in common, goes on to say, 'It is this matter of instruction which is the point of correspondence. For the psalmist, the instruction consisted in recounting some of the high points in the history of Israel. For Matthew, the instruction consisted in a technical . . . form . . . by which Jesus conveyed truth. This is a more specialized meaning than the psalmist had in mind.' The point is that both the psalmist and Jesus were Divinely burdened to utter instruction and so there is a point of correspondence which makes the two passages examples of the same principle. Mickelsen treats Matthew's quotation of Jeremiah 31:15 (2:17f.) as typology, but it is difficult to see that this is so, for the antitype would not appear to be at a deeper level than the type. It is better to see it as another example of continuity of principle. In Mickelsen's own words,<sup>13</sup> 'The point of correspondence is the grief displayed in the face of tragedy.' So a principle of human life finds a further example in the Slaughter of the Innocents by Herod.<sup>14</sup>

(d) *Theological presuppositions*

A man's theological presuppositions inevitably affect his interpretation of Scripture. The most far-reaching of all these for Matthew, of course, is the idea that in Christ there is a fulfilment of, a filling up of the meaning of, the Old Testament. This basic idea lies behind the various methods of interpretation which he applies to Old Testament passages. Christ is the great End for whom the Scriptures exist. They do not simply record events, they testify to Him, and that in all sorts of different ways, any one of which may be thought of as a 'fulfilment'. Other presuppositions, of course, are there. Space permits the mention of one only. Without a belief in the doctrine of the Incarnation

<sup>12</sup> *Interpreting the Bible*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (1963) 253.

<sup>13</sup> *Interpreting* 252.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 13:14; 15:7-9; 21:16, 42.

it is difficult to see the appropriateness of the references to the Old Testament in 1:22f., 3:3.

## II. THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### (a) *The conception of the nature of the Old Testament*

The Old Testament is viewed in this Epistle as Divine utterance. It is not a dead letter but the living voice of the living God, the incisive, authoritative utterance of 'him with whom we have to do' (4:11-13).

A study of the citation-formulae<sup>15</sup> employed by the author clearly reveals his basic conception of the Old Testament. He makes very extensive use of verbs of speech. Indeed, one who knew nothing of the Old Testament might be excused for failing to realize—in most cases—that the quotations are taken from literature at all. One almost gains the impression that the writer has overheard God speaking and communicated what he has heard to men. Moreover, although the past tense is sometimes employed (e.g. 1:5, 13; 4:3f.; 10:9; 13:5), the present is much more common, thus heightening the impression of a living, contemporary voice from heaven, almost a *Bath-Qol*.

Almost as striking as the frequency of verbs of speech is the almost complete absence of γέγραπται, so popular elsewhere in the New Testament, and the complete absence of the verb πληρουv. Of course, the author was perfectly well aware of the fact that he was employing ancient literature, but he had a vivid consciousness of God as speaking to him, the reader, when he read the Old Testament Scriptures. Psychologically, his choice of citation-formulae was probably influenced by this fact. That Scripture is ancient literature containing promises awaiting fulfilment is a legitimate standpoint for him, but for him it is still more. It is the immediate, contemporary utterance of God.

In line with this is his suppression of reference to human authors by name. Apart from the two indefinite forms of quotation occurring in 2:6 and 4:4,<sup>16</sup> we have only 4:7, where David's

<sup>15</sup> Cf. M. Barth, 'The Old Testament in Hebrews', in W. Klassen and G. F. Synder, *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, Harper, New York (1962) 58-61; B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Macmillan, London (1920<sup>3</sup>) 476-478.

<sup>16</sup> It is true that such forms occur also in Philo (for references see B. F. Westcott, *Hebrews, ad loc.*), but the author, if acquainted with them in the Alexandrian, was probably attracted to their use by his desire to play down the human authorship and to exalt the Divine.

name is probably given to emphasize the point that is being made about the passing of time, and 7:14, where no passage of Scripture is quoted at all. 12:21 is probably not a reference to a particular verse of Scripture.

It should not be inferred from all this that the author of this Epistle was a Barthian before Karl Barth! It would certainly appear that he regarded Old Testament Scripture *per se* as the Word of God or of the Spirit of God. It would take us too far from our theme to follow this up, but it is difficult to resist the impression that for him the Word of God consists of propositional communications which are the living utterances of God the Spirit.

In the Old Testament we listen to what Markus Barth has called 'innertrinitarian conversation'. It also permits us to hear that the Son brings the name of God to the public . . . In all the respective references to the Old Testament it is shown that God is his own witness and that man knows of him only because the Trinity discloses himself.<sup>17</sup>

(b) *The principles of selection*

Let us first consider the facts. Westcott summarizes these for us,<sup>18</sup> reckoning that of twenty-nine direct quotations, twelve are from the Pentateuch, eleven from the Psalms and four from the Prophets, while of fifty-three allusions, thirty-nine are from the Pentateuch, two from the Psalms and eleven from the Prophets. It is true that the presence or absence of an allusion is sometimes a matter of opinion,<sup>19</sup> but Westcott's figures certainly help us to view the proportion of reference or allusion to different parts of the Old Testament.

It is needless to state that the material is selected from the standpoint of its testimony to Christ. The apostolic κήρυγμα presented Christ to men, to be received by faith, and it is for Christ and for faith that the author looks when he goes to the Old Testament.<sup>20</sup> He has his own special themes to expound: the superiority of Christ to Old Testament figures and institu-

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.* 62.

<sup>18</sup> *Hebrews* 471-476.

<sup>19</sup> S. Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Van Soest, Amsterdam (1961) 16-17, makes it clear that it is not easy even to determine the exact number of direct quotations, and he documents a number of assessments.

<sup>20</sup> M. Barth, *op. cit.* 56f.

tions, especially his superiority as high priest 'after the order of Melchizedek' to the Levitical system of priesthood and sacrifice, and the absolute necessity for cleaving to Him by faith. His themes have determined his selection of Old Testament passages. A number of striking facts, however, call for comment and, if possible for explanation.

First of all, there is the absence of certain material which might have seemed highly appropriate for the writer's purpose and yet which he failed to employ. Why, for example, is there no quotation from the Prophets to enforce the lesson that the Old Testament sacrifices could not take away sins?<sup>21</sup> Perhaps more striking still is the omission of reference to Isaiah 53, apart from the probable echo of its language in 9:28.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the absence of such passages as Isaiah 1:10ff.; Jeremiah 7:21ff.; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21ff.; Micah 6:6ff. is due to two facts. On the one hand, his concern was to show that these sacrifices were intrinsically incapable of dealing with man's sin, while these passages in the prophets are directed rather against an abuse of the sacrificial system by the employment of offerings without penitence.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, there was a passage in the Psalter (Ps. 40:6-8) the language of which suited his purpose admirably, for it not only indicated the failure of the sacrifices truly to meet the Divine pleasure but also indicated the true way in the preparation of a body for One who should offer the final and truly efficacious sacrifice. He need not multiply words, for his point had been completely established by the quotation<sup>24</sup> of this one passage. Isaiah 53 certainly might have seemed strikingly appropriate, for in it the language of sacrifice is applied not to an animal but to a Person, and the author of the Epistle is himself concerned to show Christ as the final sacrifice. However, it could be argued that although the Sufferer of the fourth Servant Song is clearly a sacrifice it is less clear that He is a Priest. In this Epistle the arguments concerning sacrifice are dependent on the arguments concerning priesthood and not vice versa, and so the Servant Songs would have been less useful to the author than Psalm 110, which not only spoke prophetically of a great

<sup>21</sup> Westcott, *Hebrews* 475, remarks on this.

<sup>22</sup> V. Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching*, Epworth Press, London (1940) 150f., 186; M. D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, SPCK, London (1959) 123f.

<sup>23</sup> 4 Cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Rediscovery of the Old Testament*, James Clarke, London (1945) 109-113.

<sup>24</sup> Heb. 10:5ff.



High Priest who was of a different order from that of Aaron but indicated something of His Kingship also, all of which served his great aim of showing the transcendent greatness of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we notice that, as Westcott remarks, 'with two exceptions (2 Sa. vii. 14; Is. viii. 17f.), all the primary passages which are quoted to illustrate the true nature of the Person and Work of Christ are taken from the Psalms. No direct prophetic word is quoted.'<sup>25</sup> We might add also that, despite the number of quotations from the Pentateuch, none of these directly set forth positive testimony to Christ. In connection with this phenomenon we must remember the new conception of the meaning of the Old Testament which we find in the New Testament over against that of the rabbis. No longer is the law treated as central to the whole, the Prophets and Writings being treated chiefly in terms of their testimony to and enforcement and application of the law. Instead, Christ is the great Subject of the Old Testament and all is related to Him. Of course, many passages in the Pentateuch testified to Him,<sup>26</sup> but the writer is using it chiefly in this Epistle to demonstrate the inadequacy of the Levitical system contained in it and perhaps felt that the issue could be presented more clearly if he brought positive testimony to Christ rather from other parts of the Old Testament.

A third fact that emerges is the great importance in the Epistle of four passages from the Psalter, *i.e.* 8:4-6; 95:7-11; 110:4; 40:6-8. S. Kistemaker argues persuasively that these four citations dominate the whole Epistle, and he says, 'All other citations are more or less subservient to these four passages, which follow one another in subsequent order.'<sup>27</sup> Only one other passage has any arguable claim to be placed alongside these in terms of its importance for the thought of the Epistle and that is Jeremiah 31:31-34. This is quoted in full in 8:8-12 and in part in 10:16f., the former being the longest Old Testament quotation in the whole New Testament. Kistemaker<sup>28</sup> maintains, however, that the Jeremiah passage is integrated into the thought of the Epistle in such a way that it subserves the ideas set forth in the major quotations from the Psalter. He points out that this concentration upon the Psalter for the quotations of central

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Cf.* Lk. 24:27, 44; Jn. 5:46; Rom. 3:21.

<sup>27</sup> *Psalm Citations* 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Psalm Citations* 129-131.

importance may be due to a very practical reason. 'Although the author to the Hebrews may display exquisite literary ability, this does not imply that all the recipients of his letter were talented in reading and writing. Much was communicated by word of mouth; much had to be remembered. It is not surprising at all that the author, in an attempt to reach perfect communication, strengthens not only his whole Epistle with quotations from the Psalter known in the liturgy of the Church: indeed in his first chapter he avails himself of five passages from the Psalms and one from the Hymn of Moses (Deut. 32).'<sup>29</sup>

If Kistemaker is right in his thesis, then his work makes a contribution to the debate concerning the employment of Testimonia from the Old Testament by the early Church. C. H. Dodd's challenge<sup>30</sup> to Rendel Harris's theory<sup>31</sup> of a primitive Testimony Book compiled and employed by the early Christians to show the Old Testament witness to Christ has emphasized instead the special interest of the first-century Church in extended passages of Scripture. He maintains that 'these sections were understood as *wholes*, and particular verses or sentences were quoted from them rather as pointers to the whole context than as constituting testimonies in and for themselves'.<sup>32</sup> F. C. Synge,<sup>33</sup> however, maintains that Dodd's theory does not stand up in any attempt to apply it to this Epistle. 'What is important is the fact that the context of his citations is of no consequence. Nothing is ever gained in the understanding of his purpose in quoting by study of the context. The study may, indeed, be misleading.' Kistemaker rejects Synge's point, however, maintaining, for example, that 'it was not the mere citation of 2 Sam. vii. 14a<sup>34</sup> that was all-important, rather it was the Scripture portion in its context, which provided all the links with the other quotations in the first chapter of Hebrews'.<sup>35</sup> However, as Kistemaker himself notes,<sup>36</sup> we have evidence from Qumran and from Jewish Midrashim which

<sup>29</sup> *Psalm Citations* 14f. <sup>30</sup> *Scriptures*. <sup>31</sup> *Testimonies*.

<sup>32</sup> *Scriptures* 126. Lindars' *Apologetic*, accepts Dodd's general thesis, declaring (14) that 'the importance of Professor Dodd's work can hardly be over-estimated'. He builds upon it his own view that the passages were chosen because of their apologetic value, and that the apparent variety in their interpretation is often due to a shift of application (or a series of such) in which the original apologetic application is pushed somewhat into the background.

<sup>33</sup> *Hebrews and the Scriptures*, SPCK, London (1959) 54.

<sup>34</sup> Heb. 1:5.

<sup>35</sup> *Psalm Citations* 92.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

shows that certain Old Testament quotations were brought together through a common theme. Early Christian liturgy may well have done the same.<sup>37</sup>

(c) *The hermeneutical standpoint*

In what way or ways does the Old Testament bear witness to Christ? Some writers persist in treating the writer's use of the Old Testament as allegory, especially those who emphasize a connection between Hebrews and Philonic thought. R. M. Grant, for example, while applauding C. Spicq's attempt to restore Philo to his earlier position as a very important influence on the Epistle to the Hebrews, criticizes his distinction of Philo's work as 'bizarre and in bad taste' and that of the Epistle to the Hebrews as 'essentially theological and, more precisely, Christological'.<sup>38</sup> The real difference, Grant declares, 'lies not in method but in purpose. Philo wants to find God and the soul; the author of Hebrews wants to find Jesus. In both cases the Old Testament is taken allegorically. The one finds philosophical allegory; the other finds predictive allegory.'<sup>39</sup> E. C. Blackman, in tracing the influence of Philo's allegorizing upon Christian writers, declares, 'If there is any one of the New Testament writers on whom the mantle of Philo might be said to have fallen, it would be the author of Hebrews.'<sup>40</sup>

It is necessary to protest that allegory and type must be clearly distinguished and that the writer of our Epistle is a typologist and not an allegorizer.<sup>41</sup> Type sees a divinely intended correspondence between two persons, events or institutions in *history*, and its historical reference is fundamental to the very notion of it. Allegory, on the other hand, may discard history altogether, for it is interested not so much in facts as in ideas. By

<sup>37</sup> S. Kistemaker, *Psalm Citations* 24, 32f., etc.; M. Barth, *op. cit.* 73. This idea has points of contact with A. Guilding's views concerning the influence of the synagogue lectionary upon the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament in her, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1960): see especially 100. For critique see L. Morris, *The New Testament and the Jewish Lectionaries*, Tyndale Press, London (1964). It is interesting to notice that the issue was raised as far back as Westcott. He says (*op. cit.* 476) : 'It would be of great interest to determine, if there were adequate evidence, how far the quotations are connected with the Lessons or Psalms of particular days.'

<sup>38</sup> C. Spicq, *L'épître aux Hébreux* I, Gabalda, Paris (1952) 61.

<sup>39</sup> R. M. Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit*, SPCK, London (1957) 55.

<sup>40</sup> E. C. Blackman, *Biblical Interpretation*, Independent Press, London (1957) 88.

<sup>41</sup> E. F. Kevan, 'The Principles of Interpretation', in C. Henry, *Revelation and the Bible*, Tyndale Press, London (1959) 283ff. He prefers the term 'homology' to 'type'.

contrast with typology, 'allegory is a much more rationalistic phenomenon'.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the writer shows that he never loses sober contact with history by giving a purely literal interpretation of certain passages (e.g. in Heb. 3:2, 5; 6:13, 14; 8:5; 11:18).<sup>43</sup> The combination of literal and typological interpretation of the same passage also occurs.<sup>44</sup>

A. T. Hanson<sup>45</sup> has recently advanced the thesis that the chief in which the New Testament writers considered that the Old Testament bore testimony to Jesus Christ was in giving evidence of His pre-existent activity in Old Testament days. He agrees with most New Testament scholars that there is little allegory in the New Testament<sup>46</sup> but he maintains that the extent of typology has also been greatly exaggerated. He has an important chapter on the Epistle to the Hebrews and so we must face some of his arguments.

Hanson declares<sup>47</sup> that, relative to the size of his work, this author shows more interest in the pre-existent activity of Christ in Old Testament history than does any other New Testament writer. He discusses the interpretation of five passages in the Epistle: 3:1-6 ; 4:1-9 ; 7; 11:24-28; 12:22-27. His arguments are, however, open to a number of serious objections. On 4:1f., he says, 'The R.S.V. by translating "good news came to them" rather blunts the point here. It was not just any good news that Christians and ancient Israelites had in common, it was the gospel, the knowledge of Christ. This is made certain by the phrase "the message which they heard" in verse 2.'<sup>48</sup> He goes on to discuss the terminology of the passage and especially the use of the word  $\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\upsilon\eta$  in it. It is far from clear, however, that this

<sup>42</sup> G. von Rad, 'Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament', in C. Westermann, *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, John Knox Press, Richmond (1963) 21. J. Barr, *Old and New*, has a chapter (chapter 4) in which he discusses typology and allegory. He maintains that the distinction between them has sometimes been too narrowly defined on the basis of the attempt (mistaken, in his estimate) to make a clear-cut distinction between Greek and Hebrew ways of thought. However he agrees cautiously that the allegorizing of Philo is further removed than most from the kind of typology which keeps close to history, and it is this which is the main point at issue for us here.

<sup>43</sup> A. B. Mickelsen, *Interpreting* 255.

<sup>44</sup> *Interpreting* 251.

<sup>45</sup> *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, SPCK, London (1965).

<sup>46</sup> 'Real Presence and Prophecy are the dominating and controlling (categories of interpretation) in the New Testament. Typology is marginal (though tending to increase), and is not invested with any great christological significance. Allegory is rare, incidental, and used for illustration rather than proof' (*Jesus Christ* 177).

<sup>47</sup> *Jesus Christ* 48.

<sup>48</sup> *Jesus Christ* 59.

term had attained to such a fixed technical sense in reference to the gospel that it must be so interpreted in this passage, but this is the implication of the words 'made certain' quoted above. In his discussion of Melchizedek as a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ, our interest centres in his understanding of 7:3, which most commentators consider impossible to square with attempts to identify Christ and Melchizedek. Hanson says, 'If Melchizedek was the Son of God, why is he described as resembling the Son of God? But the phrase does not necessarily rule out identity.'<sup>49</sup> He illustrates his point from the language of Daniel 3:25 and Philippians 2:7. There is a very important difference, however, between these examples and Hebrews 7:3, for both his examples concern the likeness of a particular instance to a general type, and not the identity of person in two historical manifestations. That there is at least a sense in which Melchizedek and Christ are comparable as instances of a special kind of priesthood is not in question, however, and so Hanson does not satisfy us at the most crucial point of his interpretation of Hebrews 7.

His discussion of the other passages is perhaps less open to fatal objection in the realm of detailed exegesis, but at best he presents a plausible alternative to the usual interpretation of these passages, not, in the present writer's judgment, conclusive reasons for overthrowing this. A discussion of his whole thesis would take us far beyond the scope of this article and would involve, for instance, a critical discussion of his contention that the New Testament writers usually understood passages where *κύριος* occurs in the LXX in terms of the pre-existent Christ.<sup>50</sup> However, we may ask if the early church as a whole held this view of the testimony of the Old Testament to Christ. If so, why, as Hanson suggests, was the author so disinclined to make an unambiguous identification of Christ with Melchizedek?<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, if this hermeneutic was not the common property of all Christians, why does he not state it or argue for it, as, on Hanson's view, so much of his thought in this Epistle depends upon it?

Bultmann and members of his school are opposed to

<sup>49</sup> *Jesus Christ* 69.

<sup>50</sup> *Jesus Christ* 11f., *et al.*, especially chapter 8.

<sup>51</sup> *Jesus Christ* 71.

typology of Hebrews on the ground that it can only be based upon an untenable view of history as cyclic, for they find the idea of repetition to be the dominant one in typology.<sup>52</sup> For Bultmann, of course, the presence of the supernatural element involved in the divine control of history cannot be admitted. Remove his antisupernaturalism, however, and the objection disappears. Especially is this so when it is realized that typology does not fasten on to mere repetition but that it discloses a profound Divine purpose. 'It is not in fact true that the return of the similar is the constitutive idea of typology. On the contrary typology is concerned with the depiction in advance of an eschatological and therefore an unsurpassable reality, which stands towards the type in the relation of something much greater or of something antithetically opposed . . . Thus typology belongs in principle to prophecy.'<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the literal and the typological methods of interpretation, we have the idea of a continuity of principle. For example, in 12:5 the author says, 'And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?' He then quotes Proverbs 3:11,12. On what ground can this passage be applied to his readers? On the ground that God is unchanging and that the basic principles which lie behind His dealing with 'sons' is the same from generation to generation, under the New Covenant as under the Old.<sup>54</sup>

(d) *Theological presuppositions*

Space does not permit us to do more than touch upon some of the more important of these. The doctrine of the Incarnation lies behind some of the applications of Old Testament passages to Christ. For example, because He is God, this means that passages which in their original context clearly apply to God may be applied to Him (e.g. the quotations of Dt. 32:43 LXX in 1:6 and of Ps. 102:25-27 in 1:10-12). On the other hand, because He is Man, passages originally applicable to man may be applied to Him (e.g. the quotation of Ps. 8:4-6 in 2: 6-9).<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> R. Bultmann, 'Ursprung and Sinn der Typologie als hermeneutischer Methode' in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (1950) cols. 47ff.

<sup>53</sup> W. Eichrodt, 'Is Typological Exegesis an Appropriate Method?', in C. Westermann, *Essays, op. cit.* 233f. <sup>54</sup> Cf. also 10:30, 37f.

<sup>55</sup> 2:13 is probably not another example of this, for its quotation of Is. 8:17f. may be based on the typological principle, the prophet Isaiah in his attitude to God and in his relationship to others constituting a type of Christ.

Then there is what might be called a 'sacramental' doctrine of the land of Canaan. A study of Hebrews 3, 4 and 11 gives the impression that the writer conceives of the land of Canaan with all its material blessings as furnishing a kind of sacrament for the people of Israel, so that in and through their earthly rest they might enter into spiritual rest in God Himself. In this case perhaps the writer is suggesting, not only that the entry into the land typified the New Testament experience of entry into rest in God through Christ, but that something of this could be apprehended and experienced by men of faith even then.

### III. THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

#### *(a) The conception of the nature of the Old Testament*

A study of this book immediately reveals an important contrast between it and Matthew and Hebrews in its use of the Old Testament. They have many quotations from the Old Testament, while the Revelation has none whatever. Nevertheless, it can be safely stated that no book of the New Testament owes more to the Old Testament than this does. It has been estimated that more than two-thirds of its verses contain allusions to it. Donald Guthrie declares: 'There is no conscious attempt to construct a mosaic from Old Testament materials. Rather has the language of the Old Testament so moulded the author's thought that he cannot write without reflecting it. As Swete remarked, it is as though his "words and thoughts arrange themselves in his visions like the changing patterns of a kaleidoscope, without conscious effort on his own part".<sup>56</sup> It is important to recognize this fact, for it means that the book is more than a dramatic compilation; it is an experience under the control of the Holy Spirit (i. 10).<sup>57</sup> It is evident that the Seer had a very high conception of the Old Testament Scriptures. He is giving an account of visions vouchsafed to him by God concerning most solemn and awesome events which were to take place and he employs in the process language saturated with echoes of the Old Testament. It is difficult to avoid concluding that the Scriptures were to him as truly Divine in

<sup>56</sup> H. B. Swete, *Revelation*, Macmillan, London (1907) 53.

<sup>57</sup> *New Testament Introduction: Hebrews to Revelation*, Tyndale Press, London (1962) 285.

origin as the visions, the work of the same Spirit through whose activity he himself was made an instrument of Divine revelation. It is the vast extent of these allusions which leaves the reader with this impression.

*(b) The principles of selection*

The purpose of the writer governs his use of Scripture. He is frankly a Seer, burdened With visions which it is his duty to set forth, and these visions constitute, as the very first word of the book reminds us, an ἀποκάλυψις. Accordingly, he finds the bulk of the Scripture language which he employs in the apocalyptic literature of the Old Testament, especially in the books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah. However, wherever there was vivid imagery in the Old Testament, there was a potential quarry of language for his use. Only about a dozen or so of the Old Testament books have made no apparent contribution to his phraseology. Of these about half are historical books, which probably afford less scope for this kind of use than other kinds of Old Testament literature, and most of the others are smaller prophetic books.

*(c) The hermeneutical standpoint*

We are confronted here by an extremely formidable and—it might seem at first—insurmountable difficulty. Before we can study the hermeneutics of John the Seer we must decide how we are going to interpret his own book! The book has been conceived in four important ways. However, we note that the Praeterist, Historicist and Futurist interpreters are agreed that the book deals largely (from the beginning of chapter 6 at the latest) with events which lay in the future when John was writing, even, if with the Praeterists, this is conceived to be the immediate future. Even the Idealist view, represented by such a writer as W. Hendriksen,<sup>58</sup> which interprets the book in terms of great principles seen to be operative throughout human history, nevertheless notices that these principles are set forth especially in terms of their operation during the Christian dispensation. The modern study of New Testament eschatology<sup>59</sup> can help us to get our bearings here. The recognition that

<sup>58</sup> *More Than Conquerors*, Tyndale Dress, London (1947).

<sup>59</sup> The literature is enormous. For the idea of 'realized eschatology' see, for



there is a realized as well as a futurist eschatology in the New Testament, and that in a very real sense the eschatological Kingdom of God which shall be consummated at His return has already come for those who are His, in virtue of His first advent and all which that effected, provides us with a means of approach to the book even though we may not have determined our attitude towards its interpretation in detail. The writer is manifestly dealing with eschatology. Hence his allusions to the Old Testament are to be understood eschatologically. However, we must bear in mind the distinction between those views which, for all their differences, maintain that the book sets forth an eschatological programme, and the view that it gives us eschatological principles. The latter we shall denominate 'Idealist' and the former—for sake of convenience—'Realist'.

John is certainly no speculative allegorist, with no interest in history. It is true that there is an allegorical reference in 11:8, which should be compared with Galatians 4:24ff, but the allegorizing is extremely restrained, and the verse need mean no more than that 'the Judaism out of which Christianity came is viewed as having all the characteristics of "Sodom" and "Egypt"'.<sup>60</sup> In fact, it is probably best to see his language here as an example of 'continuity of principle' rather than true allegory. Balaam and Balak are treated as real historical characters (2:14), and the reference to 'Moses, the servant of God'(15:3) is also worth noting. Often it seems that he uses Old Testament language simply as a vehicle for his thought, without any idea of 'fulfilment', however understood, being present. 4:1-8 (which contains much of the imagery of Ezk. 1 and Is 6) is a clear example of this.

The line between type and predictive prophecy is not always very easy to draw (*e.g.* which of the two is Ps. 2?), but John would appear to make, more use of the latter than of the former.

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example, C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, Hodder and Stoughton, London (1936); O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, SCM Press, London (1959); D. Daube and W. D. Davies, *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, Cambridge University Press (1964); W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment*, SCM Press London (1957); G. E. Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, Paternoster, London (1959).

<sup>60</sup> Mickelson, *Interpreting* 274.

Jesus Christ is set forth in terms of the kingly figure of Psalm 2:9 (19:15), of Psalm 89:27 (1:5) and of Ezekiel 34:23 (7:17) and as the Lord's Servant of Isaiah 53:7 (5:6) and Isaiah 49:10 (7:16f.). A study of the last two chapters of the book in particular gives the impression that John sees much that he records there as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy (*cf.* 21:1 and Is. 66:22, 21:3 and Ezk. 37:27, 21:4 and Is 25:8, 35:10, and 22:3 and Zc. 14:11).

The most striking feature of the hermeneutics of John, however, is the presence on a vast scale of the idea which we have called 'continuity of principle'. Indeed, for the Idealist this dominates the Old Testament hermeneutics of the book almost as much as typology dominates the Epistle to the Hebrews. A word or phrase comes to stand for a certain idea such as a characteristic activity of God or attitude of human society. This may be well studied in chapter 18. In this chapter the word 'Babylon' acts as a symbol for society in its ungodliness and iniquity. The language of this chapter alludes to many of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Babylon (*cf.* Is 47; 48; 52; Je. 50; 51), and combines with these language connected with some of Ezekiel's prophecies about Tyre (Ezk. 26; 27), because these two had so much in common. The dispute between the Realist and Idealist schools of thought would appear to be largely due to the presence of much language which could be interpreted either as depicting the real equivalent or fulfilment of events set forth in the Old Testament prophets, or in terms of abiding principles symbolized by Old Testament language. In other words, the line between direct prophecy and continuity of principle is not always easy to draw,<sup>61</sup> and the extent to which the reader of the Apocalypse sees the one or the other as dominant will probably determine whether he is to be an Idealist or one of the varieties of Realists.

*(d) Theological presuppositions*

It is impossible for us to attempt to be exhaustive here, and we will simply select some of the principles which are of special importance in their influence upon John's hermeneutics.

Jesus Christ is Divine and so language used in reference to

<sup>61</sup>*E.g.* Rev. 13:1-8 (*cf.* Dn. 7).

God in the Old Testament may be applied to Him. A striking example of this occurs in the description of the 'one like a son of man' (1:12ff.). The reader is immediately reminded of Daniel 7, and yet is amazed to discover that some of the language used reminds him not so much of the 'one like unto a son of man' in that chapter but of the 'Ancient of Days' (*cf.* Rev. 1:14 with Dn. 7:9). Notice also the following: 1:17 (Is. 44:2, 6); 2:23 (Je. 17:10); 5:6 (Zc. 4:10); 22:12f. (Is. 40:10; 44:6; 48:12).

There is an essential continuity between Old Testament Israel and the church of Jesus Christ, so that the one can be described in terms which are echoes of language applied to the other. In Isaiah 62:2, Zion is promised Divine vindication and the reception of a new name from God, and this receives Christian application in Revelation 3:12 (*cf.* also Ezk. 48:35). Notice also the following: 1:6 (Ex. 19:6); 3:5 (Ex. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Dn. 12:1); 7:16 (Is. 49:10). The New Jerusalem is identified as 'the Bride, the wife of the Lamb' (21:9f.) and a great deal of the phraseology employed in connection with it is taken from Old Testament descriptions of Jerusalem. It should be noted, however, that there is a possible hint of some difference in the mode of being of Israel and the church when Revelation 1:12f. is compared with Zechariah 4:2.

The use made of Psalm 2 in the Apocalypse suggests that John had a doctrine of the church's union with Christ, so that, because it is one with Him, the church inherits some of the Old Testament promises made to Him by the Father: 2:26f.; 19:15 (Ps. 2:8f.).

#### IV. THE HERMENEUTICS OF CHRIST

Here we are going to employ material both from the Synoptic Gospels and from the Gospel of John, but the latter will always be used to supply additional illustrative references for a point, never to establish a point. This is due not to any nervousness in accepting the witness of the fourth Gospel to the teaching of Christ, but to avoid lengthy critical discussion which would extend this paper beyond reasonable limits and would probably divert attention from the main points at issue.

##### *(a) The conception of the nature of the Old Testament*

Our Lord's conception of the Old Testament was a very big

one. Although recognizing human authorship (*e.g.* Mt. 15:7; 22:43; Mk. 7:10, Jn. 5:46), He saw these men as the instruments of God (Mk. 12:36; Jn. 10:34f.). Consider especially the implications of Mk. 7:9-13, where, over against scribal tradition, He sets 'the commandment of God', 'the word of God', which is further defined as what 'Moses said'. It possesses abiding authority over men, as His use of the perfect γέγραπται would appear to indicate (Mt. 11:10; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 6:45). Scripture is the living Voice of God, as is seen from the use of the present tense in Matthew 13:14, Luke 20:42.<sup>62</sup> Notice also the striking words 'to you'<sup>63</sup> in Matthew 22:31.

*(b) The principles of selection*

Our Lord made use of Many different Old Testament books in His teaching, especially the Prophets, the Psalms and the Pentateuch. There is an appropriateness about the wording of Luke 24:44, for the 'Psalms' (the word is probably a synecdochism, the Psalter constituting the first book of the Hagiographa and also its largest) had been quoted by Him more frequently than any other book outside the Law and the Prophets. The three books used most frequently are Isaiah, Psalms and Daniel. This provides us with a clue to the principles of selection which governed His use, for these three books contain especially full testimony to the 'Coming One'.<sup>64</sup> The Rabbinic concentration of attention upon the Law was replaced by Him with a Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament (Mt. 26:54-56; 4:16-21; 18:31-34; 24:25-27, 44-47; Jn. 5:38-40). Much of the material finds its place because He believed it to contain testimony to Himself.<sup>65</sup> Other quotations and allusions find their occasion in the necessities of controversy with the Jews. Especially is this true a material from the Pentateuch (*e.g.*

<sup>62</sup> R. Nicole, 'New Testament Use of the Old Testament' in C. Henry, *op. cit.* 140, estimates that the New Testament contains forty-one instances of quotations from the Old Testament, where the introductory verb is in the present tense.

<sup>63</sup> Although it is possible to understand these words in relation to the principle of solidarity, the hearers being one with those to whom the words were originally addressed in the one life of the people of Israel.

<sup>64</sup> We use this term to cover the various figures of Old Testament prophecy which He saw to find their fulfilment in Himself.

<sup>65</sup> J. Barr says: 'The relation of the preaching to the text seems to be active rather than passive. It quotes scripture and seeks scriptural control; yet it is also highly constructive and imaginative in its selection and combination of biblical passages' (*Old and New* 138).

Mt. 15:1-6, Mk. 12:26f., Jn. 7:22). He illustrated His teaching from the history of His people as recorded in the Scriptures and we notice here His fondness for the book of Genesis (*e.g.* Mk. 10:6ff.; Lk. 17:26-32).

(c) *The hermeneutical standpoint*

It is important to notice the stress which Jesus laid upon the need for a true understanding of Scripture. The Jews shared His high estimate of its inspiration and authority, but they frequently misunderstood its teaching. In passages like Matthew 12:3-8; Mark 12:10f., 26f.; John 10:34-37, we find Him bringing out the significance and implications of Old Testament passages which they had never understood in that way before. To these may perhaps be added the words of Mark 13:14, 'let the reader understand', if these are the words of Jesus calling attention to passages in Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11) rather than the words of the evangelist calling attention to the words of Jesus. Notice also the phrases 'Moses commanded . . . Moses allowed' in Mark 10:3, 4 and the emphasis upon the interpretation of Scripture in Luke's account of the post-resurrection encounters of our Lord with His disciples (Lk. 24:27, 32, 45). Probably the Devil's attempt to induce Him to presume upon the Divine providence (Mt. 4:6, 7) was rejected on the ground that the Scripture he quoted (Ps. 91:11f.) was misinterpreted or misapplied, for it could not be understood in such a way that it contradicted the teaching of another passage (Dt. 6:16).

We find Him clothing His own thought in Old Testament phraseology as in Mark 3:27 (Is. 49:24f.); Luke 19:43 (Is. 29:3; Je. 6:6; Ezk. 4:2) ; 23:46 (Ps. 31:5). He interprets literally its history (Mt. 23:35f.; Lk. 17:26-32; Jn. 8:44), its precepts (Mk. 1:44; Jn. 8:17) and, apparently, its prophecies (Mt. 11:2-6; *cf.* Is. 35:5f.; 61:1; Mk. 14:62; *cf.* Dn. 7:13; Ps. 110:1; Lk. 22:22; Is. 53:12). He found types of Himself and His work in the Old Testament, although it must be said that explicit examples of this are not of great frequency (Mt. 12:40; Jn. 1:51; 3:14).<sup>66</sup> It may be that He is speaking in typological

<sup>66</sup> It may be that His quotation of Is. 61:1f. (Lk. 4:17-19) is based on the idea that the prophet constituted a type of Him who was the greatest Prophet of all. On the other hand, He may have seen this passage as continuous with Is. 53. Hanson makes surprisingly little use of the infrequency of typology in our Lord's teaching, but see his comment on Mt. 12:38-41, *Jesus Christ* 175.

terms when he speaks of John the Baptist as the coming Elijah (Mt. 11:14; 17:10-13). Continuity of principle also occurs in His teaching. He quotes Isaiah 6:9f. as fulfilled in the people of His day (Mt. 3:10ff.) because the very same attitude was manifest in them and those contemporary with the prophet himself. Consider also Mark 7:6f.; Matthew 24:37; John 13:18; 17:12.

*(d) Theological presuppositions*

We will simply mention some of the presuppositions which we found in earlier sections of this study.

Scripture passages and phraseology used in relation to God can be applied to Him (Mt. 11:10; cf. Mal. 3:1; Mt. 15:24; Lk 19:10; Jn. 10:1-16; cf. Is. 40:11; Ezk. 34:11-16), and so, as His use of Scripture during the wilderness temptation reveals, can precepts and principles intended for the life of man (Mt. 4:1-11). The church as the true people of God lies behind passages like Luke 12:32 (Dn. 7:18, 22); John 6:45 (Is. 54:13).

## V. CONCLUSION

It is interesting to note that all the major types of interpretation which we have discovered in Matthew, Hebrews and Revelation can be found also in our Lord's own approach to the Old Testament. Although there is no flat uniformity of approach within each book, we may say that Matthew's favourite is literal interpretation plus fondness for noting the peculiar appropriateness of certain words and phrases, the writer to the Hebrews employs typology extensively, and John in the Revelation makes much use of the device we have called 'continuity of principle'. It is true that the Qumran community also employed a kind of *midrash peshet* with real similarities to the approach of the New Testament writers.<sup>67</sup> However, more important than such similarities of method is the difference of substance, the Qumran commentators seeing the Old Testament as fulfilled in the Teacher of Righteousness and his community, while the New

<sup>67</sup> Especially in the *Habakkuk Commentary*. For the relationship between Qumranic and New Testament use of the Old Testament see e.g. K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew*, C. W. K. Gleerup, Uppsala (1954); E. E. Ellis, *St. Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh (1957); and F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts*, Tyndale Press, London (1960).

Testament writers viewing it as fulfilled in Christ. This Christological understanding of the Old Testament, C. H. Dodd has argued, requires us to assume the presence of a creative mind, and, he maintains, we need look no further than our Lord Himself.<sup>68</sup> Nothing we have encountered in this study leads us to question this.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *Scriptures* 110.

<sup>69</sup> We have not attempted a critical examination of the views of Lindars (*vide supra*, p. 56). An article of this length could only touch his discussion of a few details and his work merits a full-scale examination. However, it is interesting to note his statement that his work does not imply a necessarily negative attitude to C. H. Dodd's contention that the Christian use of the Old Testament stems from our Lord Himself (*Apologetic* 30).