

A Brief Discussion on Typology

And [Jesus] replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old."

-Matthew 13:52

Typology has two meanings. The first one is to categorize things into different groups for future study. When one tells another, "An apple is a type of fruit," one is engaging in typology. But the other meaning is used by Christians and builds on this idea in a particular way. According to Wikipedia, "In Christian Theology ... a doctrine or theory concerning the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament. Events, persons or statements are seen as types *prefiguring or superseded* by antitypes, events or aspects of Christ or His revelation described in the New Testament." (italics mine)

We see this theory within the Bible itself. Saint Paul calls Adam a "type" of Christ in Romans 5:14 -- "Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come." In 1 Corinthians 15:22, we read "For just as in Adam we all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life." We see another example in verse 45 -- "'The first man, Adam, became a living being.' The last Adam a life-giving spirit." and a similar one in verse 47 -- "The first man was from the Earth, Earthly; the second man from Heaven." And Saint Paul was not the only one to do this. We find in 1 Peter 3:20-21 -- "... in the days of Noah ... in which a few persons ... were saved through water. This prefigured baptism." And for my final example now, Jesus Himself engaged in typology, giving a prophecy that used Jonah as its type -- "An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah." (Matthew 16:4)

Note that all these examples demonstrate that the antitype must be at least equal to the type, and is oftentimes superior to the type. This obvious and important fact of typology is, nonetheless, often forgotten or even ignored when not agreeable. Perhaps the most important omission comes when questioning if Mary the Mother of God was without sin. Almost every Protestant apologist I know of agrees that Mary, the Mother of God, is the antitype of Eve, yet they ignore the fact that Eve was made without sin (it was her, along with Adam, that introduced sin to mankind). If Mary was born with original sin, then she would be lesser to Eve, and Eve would be greater than Mary. This thought is repulsive to my Protestant friends, yet it is their own logic that gets them there. The common response is to simply deny the logic as it applies to the purity of Mary.

There are three main branches of Christian typology. The first is prophecies, but I think such connections are so obvious that I will not spend time here talking about them. The second method of typology is looking for direct parallels, such as demonstrated above. But there is a third method of typology, and it is called the Theory of History. Ironically, this theory was made possible by the works of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a man whose influence has proven to be the greatest Earthly bane to Christianity. With the Theory of History, one views the entire Jewish and Christian experience as a complete and interrelated story. Just as a good fiction writer will shape every event and symbol within his book so it all fits together at the conclusion of the mystery, so, too, does God shape real events to fit the climax of His "story": the revelation of salvation. This suggests that types and antitypes are found not only throughout the Bible, but in sources outside the Bible. The danger with Theory of History comes when one loses sight of what God wants man to know, and instead looks at God as a secondary character to a bigger picture. This is where believing that the Bible is divinely inspired *and* that the traditions followed since earliest Christian times are critical. I'll give an example at the end of the paper.

Typology allows us to have a deeper understanding of God's plan in numerous ways. We are allowed to assume things about the New Testament people, places, events and symbols that are not explicitly explained within the New Testament. We can better understand God's revelation by seeing how some things change and how others remain the same. We can also understand better why the Catholic Church believes in the things that most Protestants do not. And we can even make our own discoveries about the Bible, as so much learning can come from typology that the Church does not have an official position on. Far from being a people who blindly follow the Pope, Catholics and our apostolic brethren (Orthodox and Anglican) have a treasure trove of excitement and adventure just waiting to be discovered.

I am going to give a few examples of how typology works. I hope the gentle reader will be able to do his own typology from there. As long as a Catholic does not arrive at a conclusion that contradicts the Catechism, little (if any) harm should come of it. The essential understandings have already been studied extensively and are well explained in the Catechism. Most of what is left may be helpful to some, but not necessarily helpful to others. As such, it is okay for disagreements on these minor issues. In return for his efforts, the student can discover for himself endless wonders as he searches for Jesus in his own way.

The first example I would like to discuss is the bronze serpent (Numbers 21:4-9) and the crucifixion. We read in Genesis 3:1-5 that it was the serpent that led man to death. In the time of Moses, the serpent was actually causing death among the Hebrews. In both cases, man's refusal to obey God (sin) led man to death.

The parallels between the snake and Jesus both being hung on poles are obvious. When we remember that the bronze serpent brought forgiveness of sin, healing, and salvation from death, the connections between the bronze serpent and that of Jesus become pretty solid. But there is one detail about the bronze serpent that seems to be overlooked -- the people had to *look upon* it to be healed. Having the snake in their midst was not enough. Acknowledging the fact that there was this healing symbol in the vicinity was not enough. They had to make the effort to go see it. If the bronze serpent is the type of God's forgiveness, healing and salvation, and if the crucifixion is its antitype, then it is *very* appropriate for the crucifix to be present at mass -- even a necessity. This can also be used in answer to those who think they can be "Christians" and not go to church, and in response to Protestants and Muslims who claim the crucifix is idolatry. Some may claim that Hezekiah destroying the serpent while destroying all other idols in Israel (2 Kings 18:4) is proof that God looked at it as an idol, but this is absurd. First of all, no such command from God is mentioned as being given to Hezekiah, so he was acting on his own initiative. And even so, the given reason was because "the Israelites were burning incense to it." It was not the serpent that was the problem, but rather the worship of it.

The second example I would like to explore is Mary as Queen of Heaven. The fact that the queen mother is a legitimate political office among the Jews goes all the way back to King Solomon and the first Biblically mentioned queen mother, Bathsheba. But there is at least some question as to why Jesus would need a queen mother. Again, the theory of typology, especially the idea that what is old must either prefigure or be superseded by the new, answers this question. We see throughout the Old Testament, and even in a few places in the New Testament, that the King of Heaven will be in the line of David. We also see that this king will be anointed by God (which is where the term "messiah" comes from). So we know that the King of Heaven must be a *legitimate* descendant of David. When we look at the Book of Kings, beginning with the aforementioned Solomon and Bathsheba, we see that all the legitimate kings (those of Judah) are identified by their *mothers*. The illegitimate kings (those of Israel) are *not* identified by their mothers. This is interesting, because they had queen mothers as well

(we see Jezebel acting *as* a queen mother for her son Jehoram when her husband Ahab died). Using typology, to deny Mary the title is to associate Jesus as an illegitimate king. This would suggest that Jesus was inferior to the kings of Judah, something the theories of typology would reject.

For my third example of how to work with typology, I want to go to the baptism of Jesus, which is covered in all four gospels. There is much question as to *why* Jesus needed to be so baptized. Many Christians suggest Jesus was teaching through demonstration, which is not necessarily wrong. Unitarians and Muslims suggest that the baptism proves Jesus is not divine because He needed to be cleansed of sin. But I think that if we remember the aforementioned references to Jesus being the new Adam, all the times Jesus referred to Himself as the "Son of Man," and the explicit statement that Jesus was "one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15), we have a clue that the Old Testament can unravel for us. And for the final clue before going to the Old Testament, let us also look at Hebrews 2:17 where we find "therefore, He had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people." As a true human, Jesus had to experience everything a human must experience (except sin). Every time we can find something in the Old Testament that is declared as part of the human experience it must therefore apply in some fashion to the life of Jesus. One of the lessons of the Great Flood (Genesis 6:5-8:22), as well as the Mosaic sin offerings, is that the state of man requires cleansing. It is not because Jesus sinned that He needed baptism, but rather the need for Him to fully experience the human condition so He could truly be called "one of us."

But there are times when we can take typology too far, and this is why we need the Catechism to keep us honest. I recently had a Muslim friend claim that Jesus did not die on the cross, but rather that He spent the three days in the tomb praying just like Jonah spent three days in the whale praying. Going back to what we discussed earlier, Jesus Himself claimed to be the antitype of Jonah, so a connection clearly exists. The idea is that since Jonah did not die, Jesus did not die. Well, we have a 2,000 year tradition that was started by those who knew Jesus best that says otherwise (not to mention that one of them also wrote the account being disputed). One really needs a strong case to say otherwise. So let us look at what evidence we have.

The first piece of evidence is the account of Jonah, verses 2:3 and 7 in particular. There, we see Jonah twice suggesting that he was at the very edge of death. If this is all we have, then typology would tell us that Jesus either could be at the edge of death, or that he could have crossed over into death because the antitype can either match or exceed the type. So while typology will not deny the idea that Jesus did not actually die on the cross, neither does it provide any evidence of it. Even if this was all there was, tradition should be held as true. But there is more. Jonah was not killed by the ship's crew; he was thrown overboard alive. All four gospels claim Jesus died from crucifixion. And for those not familiar with how crucifixion works, there is no way to fake being dead. The normal position of the body while hanging on the cross forced the lungs to be full of air. One had to push up with one's feet to exhale and bring in fresh air. It only takes a few minutes of seeing no struggle to know one is dead. And if that was not enough, Jesus had a spear thrust into His heart (through a lung) to prove beyond any possible doubt. So, far from typology proving an alternative to the Passion narrative by having an equivocal interpretation, we see conclusive evidence that Jesus exceeded Jonah in regards to entering the land of the dead.

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