

redemption recognized at the close of Jonah's psalm (salvation is of the Lord — Jonah 2:9) is evident in God's purposes of mercy shown through the whole book and specifically applied to the men of Nineveh at its conclusion (4:11).

The deliverance of Jonah from the deep manifests the power of God to save from death and symbolizes the resurrection. Such a message has comfort not only for the individual servant of God: it applies also to his people as a whole. Here also the book Jonah prepared for the exile. Buried in the sea of the nations, Israel was not cut off completely. Because salvation is of the Lord, his people would emerge from their captivity to carry forward his work and proclaim his word to the nations.

Thus the typical foreshadowing of the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 12:38-40; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32) is not an isolated aspect of the history of Jonah. Jonah as the individual servant of the Lord represents the whole nation called to be God's servant. His judgment, deliverance, and mission are pregnant with meaning against the background of the calling of the people of God. This connection is not arbitrary but inescapable, particularly in relation to the corporate solidarity evident in the Old Testament. In this way Jonah is a type of Christ, the Head of the people and the Suffering Servant, who bore the judgment, emerged victorious in the resurrection, and discharged the mission in which the people failed.

### *The Text in God's Total Revelation*

In the remarks just made we have come to a consideration of the second major step in the use of the biblical-theological method for interpreting texts of Scripture. Once the text is seen in terms of its own theological horizon, and the more immediate theological context is related to the broader structure of the period of that revelation, we are ready to proceed to a consideration of the relation of the text to the whole of revelation and its significance for us. This means that the Old Testament theology must be related to the New, and that within New Testament theology we must become

aware of the divisions that are made by the work of our Lord: his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

The relation of the New Testament to the Old is eschatological; all the promises are fulfilled in the "last days" by the coming of the Lord. In his presence the covenant is realized and sealed. Fundamentally, therefore, there are but two epochs, the "former days" and the "latter days," the era before Christ and that which is dated "anno Domini." Since the latter includes the interim between the first and second coming of Christ it embraces fulfillment which is not yet openly manifest, although it is realized in Christ. We do not yet see all things subject to him, "But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even *Jesus*, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor . . ." (Heb. 2:9).

In interpreting the revelation of the "former days" as it focuses on Christ we must bear in mind the principles we have already considered. Christ is revealed in the Old Testament both as Lord and as Servant. His revelation as the Lord is direct; the grace which is shown in his coming and dwelling with his people in theophanic glory is the same grace which is fully manifest in the incarnation. The exercise of that saving lordship results in the realization of the covenant promise, which is nothing short of life in God's presence forever. Old Testament saints were made citizens of the heavenly Zion by faith, and New Testament believers are added to the same great heavenly assembly of saints and angels (Eph. 2:12, 19; Heb. 11:14-16; 12:22-23; Matt. 8:11, 12).

However, just because the final redemption is accomplished in history by the incarnate Son of God, the saving work of the Lord in the Old Testament is not complete. It has a prospective reference pointing forward to the great day of culmination. The Old Testament people of God are saved in hope, rejoicing in the promises seen afar off, and acknowledging that they without us could not be made perfect (Heb. 11:13, 40; cf. I Pet. 1:12).

This provisional aspect of the Old Testament revelation of the lordship of Christ is even more evident in the revelation of his work as Servant. When Israel is saved and judged through the Old Testament men of God, this work can only anticipate the true salvation to be wrought by Christ. It is indeed the Spirit of the Lord who comes upon these men of God, yet the central work of redemption is not theirs to accomplish. Even Moses is but a servant in the house of God, preparing for the coming of the Son (Heb. 3:1-6).

Because of the continuity of God's work of redemption, the connection between salvation in the Old Testament and the New is organic. There is one saving Lord, and one true Israel, the people of God. But because of the epochal progression of redemption and revelation to fulfillment in Christ, there is a dependence of the partial on the total, of the provisional on the final, of the old on the new. In the form of revelation, therefore, the principle of analogy operates. The essence of the covenant is the same, and only in Christ is it actualized: I will be your God, and ye shall be my people. By faith, by a "realized eschatology," believers in all ages share this covenant relation, and their experience of fellowship with God is actual; their life is not a parable of salvation but the experience of it. Yet the redemptive manifestation of God to which faith is directed culminates in Christ, and redemption and revelation in the earlier ages foreshadow Christ.

### *Symbolism*

In this structure of redemptive history symbolism operates with a double reference. Until the heavenly reality is manifested, the covenant fellowship is mediated through earthly symbols, "like in pattern" to the heavenly archetype (Heb. 9:24, 25). With the coming of grace and truth in Christ the reality to which the symbol pointed is revealed. It is not only in retrospect that the reference to Christ is established. Because of the promise aspect of the covenant, the faith that rested in the heavenly realization of earthly symbols

also looked forward to the manifestation in history of the same divine reality (cf. Heb. 11:10, 13-16, 26).

It is important to note that the eschatological realization of redemption is not a symbol, but the actuality. This is the meaning of the emphasis in John's Gospel on the realization of truth (*aletheia*) in Jesus Christ (e.g. John 1:17). The incarnation is not a symbolic dwelling of God with men. Rather, the glory of God which appeared in the symbolic cloud above the symbolic tent is now really present (John 1:14).

It is evident, then, that symbolism is of particular importance in relating the revelation of the "past ages" to the fulfillment in Christ. Symbols abound in Scripture, not incidentally, but because of the structure of the history of redemption which is at once organic and progressive.

Any brief treatment of symbolism is in immediate danger of foundering in the tempest of modern controversy: in philosophy, aesthetics, cultural anthropology, linguistic studies, and not least in modern theology the issue of symbolism is central. The preacher can scarcely be competent in all these areas, but he must have working principles for the interpretation of biblical symbolism.

Contemporary discussion certainly should warn us against underestimating the importance of symbols. Any naive repugnance to the "oriental imagery" of the Bible fails to take account of the symbolism in all speech and life. The most literally-minded scientist becomes surprisingly oriental in his dreams!<sup>2</sup> Indeed, science itself is a triumph of symbolism; the equations of modern physics have replaced the models of Newtonian days, but the symbolical function has become so much the more evident. Ernst Cassirer has said that "instead of defining man as an *animal rationale*, we should define him as an *animal symbolicum*."<sup>3</sup> Symbols as

2. Cf. Cyril Richardson, "The Foundations of Christian Symbolism," in F. Ernest Johnson, ed., *Religious Symbolism* (N. Y.: Harper, 1955), p. 2.

3. *Essay on Man* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 26.

distinct from signals are the mark of human thought, in Cassirer's view.

Students of linguistics who have analyzed the symbolic function of language have called attention to the "faded metaphors" that fill our speech and furnish the material of its development.<sup>4</sup> The preacher who would plough under all the symbolism of Scripture in favor of a bare "literalism" should be prepared to assert not only that God has eyes, but that these eyes have legs, since they "run to and fro through all the earth" (Zech. 4:10).

Of course, the most extreme literalist would indignantly declare that his rule is to be "literal where possible" and that we are compelled to take anthropomorphic descriptions of God figuratively. The canon "literal where possible" is itself a confession of bias, although an ineffective one, for it does not even serve to defend against the reduction of all of revelation to myth. Bultmann could claim to be "literal where possible"; he simply cannot regard the supernatural as possible, so he would salvage an existential message by way of symbolism.

The interpreter, and certainly the preacher, should carry no such prejudice against symbolism. The concreteness and imaginative appeal of symbolism is the glory of language. The richness of scriptural symbols which pervades our hymns should give power to the pulpit as well.

The fear of symbolism and the desire for literalism cannot be set aside, however, by a simple appeal to the universality of symbolic forms. It is the question of meaning which is at issue. It may be granted that every word is a symbol and that language itself is therefore totally symbolic in form. It is another question, however, whether the meaning of language must be limited by its form. It is not surprising that semantical theory has often insisted that the term "God" is meaningless. The semanticist is only reading back the pre-suppositions of his own approach, which restricts meaning

4. Cf. Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 140f.

to the experimentally verifiable. In appreciating the structure of symbolism the Christian does not accept the skeptical doctrine that human experience is ultimate. It is part of the wonder of the creation of man in God's image that the creature who knows by analogy in the discursive process of temporal thought nevertheless is able to know the revealed truth of God. It is this which delivers theology from mere shadow-play with symbols of human thought that are held to be empty of the absolute truth they purport to declare.

The desire for literal interpretation of Scripture reflects a proper conviction as to the revealed truth of the Word of God. Its suspicion of symbolism, however, overlooks the precision of meaning which symbolism may convey. In view of the history of biblical interpretation this oversight is understandable. Symbolism has been notoriously abused by the most fanciful misinterpretation. Free rein was given to arbitrary allegorization because no clear principles for interpreting the meaning of symbolism were maintained.

Yet symbolism does have meaning, and it is the duty of the interpreter to grasp it. The most precise "literal" meaning is conveyed by the symbolism of language itself. To be sure, a word is a symbol with a firm denotation and a structured connotation; its reference is more evident than is the symbolism of a fresh metaphor. Yet a metaphor also has definite meaning, with a denotation fixed by the subject and the context. Figurative language makes meaningful statements. When Jesus said "I am the door" he stated something quite definite about his unique mediatorial role. To understand his meaning it is necessary to discover the precise point of the comparison, to grasp the function of the door in the sheepfold and the respect in which Jesus' work is analogous to this function. This may be interpreted rightly or wrongly, but the statement cannot be dismissed as "merely figurative."

### *Interpreting Biblical Symbols*

It may be helpful, then, to note some evident principles for the interpretation of biblical symbols. *First*, we should

recognize that the symbol is distinct from that which it represents. The Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation passes beyond symbolism at the point of the elevation of the host. If the bread becomes the body of Christ it can no longer represent it. In biblical theology, as we have seen, the realization of the promises in Christ is not in symbol, but reality. In the Old Testament, on the other hand, a symbolic aspect, anticipating the climactic work of Christ, attaches to every manifestation of the saving power of God. The exodus deliverance of the people of God is a great figure of salvation. For some who passed through the sea it may have been the decisive seal of faith; they may have experienced the inward reality of the salvation of the covenant even as they enjoyed this outward realization. Yet many who were thus delivered through the sea perished in the wilderness in unbelief. The exodus deliverance was not in itself the salvation which it symbolized.

Similarly, the outward judgments of God in the history of redemption are not yet the final judgment. Moses, too, must die in the wilderness in divine judgment, but his name is not blotted from the book of life.

Even in the New Testament the distinction between symbol and reality continues. Although the reality is present in Christ, there are stages in his redemptive work. His miracles are still signs of the kingdom. The resurrection life given to Lazarus is not yet the life of glory; Lazarus is still subject to death. The miracles are signs of the new creation, but they are not yet the re-creation of him who is the resurrection and the life.

To be sure, the reality which is symbolized is often present to faith; the blessing of Christ which brings healing often pronounces eternal peace upon the healed. Yet clear understanding of symbolism always requires that the distinction between the symbol and its referent be maintained.<sup>5</sup>

*Second*, there must be a relation between the symbol and

5. Cf. Meredith G. Kline, "The Intrusion and the Decalogue," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XVI (1953), 1-22.

the reality symbolized. Undergirding the structure of relation is the creative and providential power of God. R. B. Kuiper has pointedly remarked that the position of the adjectives in the title of Henry Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* should be reversed. God is the Father from whom every created "fatherdom" is named (Eph. 3:14, 15). The rich fruitfulness of symbolism flows from the relatedness of our thought and experience as it responds to the creative Word of God. The organic unity-in-diversity of the human body is a powerful symbol of the church because both are the work of God; it is the Creator Spirit whose work reveals the order of divine wisdom united to the power of the living God. The union of husband and wife symbolizes the relation of Christ and his church in a fashion that is still more meaningful, for here the richest expression of human fellowship points to union with him whose Image is its ground. This divinely appointed structure of relation is not identity, however. The symbol remains a symbol, and frightful idolatry arises when the highest symbols are identified with that which they symbolize. It is significant that washing and eating rather than sexual intercourse are the functions in which the sacraments are appointed. The limitation of the symbol is thus the more evident, although even those sacraments have been made idolatrous.

The relation which gives meaning to symbolism is not limited to these rich and complex modes of human experience connected with physical and social life. All the categories of thought and experience offer relations which symbolism may use. An object may become a symbol through a play on words, the connection consisting merely in a similarity of sound between the name of the object and the concept which it symbolizes.<sup>6</sup>

*Third*, the reference of the symbols of Scripture is divinely established in revelation. Susanne K. Langer has distinguished

6. So, for example, in Jeremiah 1:11, where the vision of the rod of an almond tree (Heb. *shaqedh*) symbolizes the word of Jehovah "I watched [Heb. *shoquedh*] over my word to perform it."

between the discursive symbolism of mathematics and language and "presentational" symbolism. In the latter category she would place not only the symbolism of art and music, but also that of the rites and myths of religion.<sup>7</sup> Presentational symbolism has meaning, she holds, but it is not meaning which can be reduced to discursive language or thought. There are many who regard biblical religion as a poetic mythology, expressing through intuitive and imaginative forms the reality of man's encounter with the Absolute. They would be hesitant to "demythologize" lest there be found nothing for thought to grasp of this encounter.

The biblical theology of revelation, however, cannot be set at a convenient distance from science in this way. The symbolism of Scripture is communicated in word revelation, and its elements have rational meaning. Indeed, the symbolism of Scripture is characteristically discursive rather than presentational. Rather than there being a wholeness of imagery which baffles thought, the symbolism is organized coherently and conceptually. Not the imaginative details nor the *Gestalt* of vision are brought to the fore, but the conceptual significance. The contrast between the conduct of Elijah and the priests of Baal on Carmel epitomizes the distinctiveness of biblical religion in this respect, though even Baalism now appears to have been more conceptual than the advocates of "primitive mentality" ever imagined!

It is not the poetic ambiguity of scriptural symbols which gives them power; nor is it the exemplification of the archetypal imagery of the unconscious. Rather, it is the truths which they express. Deliberate ambiguity as a literary form is sometimes found. Vos has pointed out the literary effectiveness of Isaiah's term for the idols (*elilim*) which means things of nought, but also suggests Elohim, and the diminutive of El, that is, "godlets."<sup>8</sup> Cullmann has shown the double meaning of such terms as "above/anew" and "lifted up" in

7. *Op. cit.*, ch. 4, "Discursive and Presentational Forms."

8. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 255.

John.<sup>9</sup> Scriptural symbols do grip the imagination, as centuries of Christian poetry attest. But the symbol is never primary or ultimate. The symbols do not fill the horizon of experience but gain their meaning from the context. Very often many separate and varied symbols are used in one context to convey one pattern of ideas. It has often been pointed out, for example, that the symbolic language in which Christ is described in Revelation 1 is not such as to present one imaginative whole. Rather, it is a mosaic of concrete symbolic meanings, which, interpreted in the light of Old Testament revelation, presents an overpowering picture of Christ in his priestly-kingly glory as he addresses his Word to the churches. The imagery serves the meaning; it is not sovereign in its own dimension.

Even in sacramental symbolism the additional factor does not lie in any mystic dimension of the symbolic act, and far less in an identity of the symbol with the reality, but rather in the fact that the appropriation of salvation is symbolized, and that the symbol is therefore a seal of participation in the promised blessing.<sup>10</sup>

The interpreter of biblical symbols needs therefore to seek the meaning of the individual elements of symbolism in the context of scriptural use. As in all exegesis the historical setting must be examined. The whole context of the period of revelation is always significant. Thus the "ladder" of Jacob's dream is linked by the phrase "the top of it reached to heaven" (Gen. 28:12) with the tower of Babel (Gen 11:4) and symbolizes God's visitation in grace by the means of his appointing; in contrast we have the edifice of men's vain worship, which could only bring God's visitation of judgment. The ziggurat tower from the cultural setting of the patriarchal period underlies Jacob's dream.

*Fourth*, the symbols of Scripture may be classified in various groups. Some are provided by God directly: in the

9. Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), pp. 50ff.

10. Cf. M. G. Kline, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

manifestation of his covenant presence (the fire in the bush and on Sinai, the stairway at Bethel); in the confirmation of his covenants (the rainbow for the covenant with Noah); in the communication of his message (the visions of Zechariah or Daniel). Usually these divine symbols are emphatically supernatural. Their immediate divine origin makes them "signs" of God's presence and power.

In addition to these there is the large class of what might be called institutional symbols. These are initially cultic in character: God requires of men worship by sacrifice. We find this beginning with Abel, and it is continued through the patriarchal age.

In the establishment of the covenant with Abraham, circumcision is commanded as a symbol which is not simply cultic but institutional, marking out as it does the people of God. With the establishment of the theocratic form of the covenant, not only is the cultus vastly elaborated to express the principle of God dwelling in the midst, but we have also in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices institutions which relate to the direction of the whole life of the theocratic nation and which have a symbolic aspect.

A third class of symbols might be called the prophetic. Perhaps this might be regarded as an extension of the first. It includes symbolic actions on the part of the prophets at the command of God, for example, Ezekiel's representation of the siege of Jerusalem or Hosea's marriage to Gomer. The symbolic naming of Isaiah's children is a slightly different instance of this. Symbols which find expression in the language of the Old Testament would also be in this group.

Historical symbols form still a fourth class. These are also closely related to the first. God has not only wrought signs directly and commanded men to observe symbolic rituals, he has also directed the course of the history of salvation in such a way that spiritual realities are symbolized in historical events. As we have seen, this is implicit in the very structure of redemption. In the exodus the various types of symbolism are concentrated about the great redemp-

tive action of the Old Testament. The plagues are direct divine judgments with symbolic aspects. The passover is ritual symbolism; the casting down of Moses' rod, prophetic. In the crossing of the Red Sea we have historical symbolism. God's deliverance symbolized a spiritual redemption in which Israel as God's son was set free to serve him.

In the New Testament there are instances of such historical symbolism in the ministry of our Lord. A clear example is the miraculous catch of fish in connection with the calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Luke 5:1-11). To be sure, this is a miracle and a sign of the presence of the Messiah and the kingdom of God. But it is a miracle in which the action of the disciples is involved. Through the miracle the whole incident gains the force of a parable of the kingdom.

When Jesus came to the shore of the lake that morning the fishermen were indeed a picture of fruitless toil. With nothing to show for their night of labor but torn and dirty nets, they were engaged in the exasperating chore of cleaning and mending them. As we learn from Luke's Gospel, Jesus did not simply call them under such circumstances. Rather, after teaching from Peter's boat, Jesus commanded him to put out into the lake and let down the nets. Peter, the experienced fisherman, after voicing a half protest, obeyed the Teacher and soon both boats were filled to sinking.

It is against this background that Jesus says to these awe-struck men, "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." The symbolism of vast success in obedient service of the sovereign Christ is inescapable. We are the more impressed by the repetition of this miracle after the resurrection as the sign by which Jesus made himself known (John 21:1-14).

Instructed by the method of this miracle our eyes are opened to the symbolism of other miracles and events in the life of Christ, who in everything perfectly fulfilled the work the Father gave him to do. When we reflect, for example, on the significance of Jesus' walking on the water

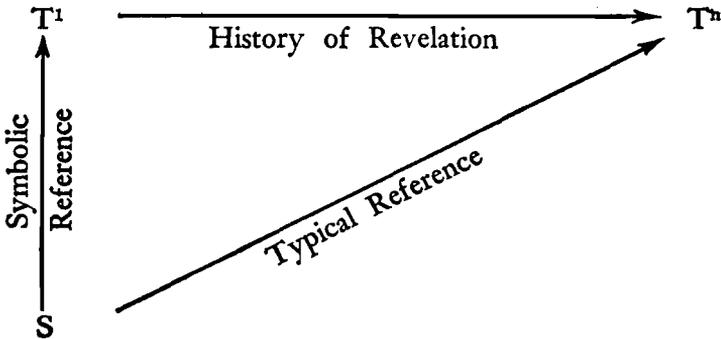
we find there is rich symbolism involved. So Jesus always comes in the storm to strengthen the faith of his own.

Particularly in the Gospel of John our attention is drawn to the symbolic character of the miracles of Christ. Oscar Cullmann has given us a convincing demonstration of this, even if we may feel that he sometimes overstates the case for the sacramental reference of the symbolism.<sup>11</sup>

### *Symbols and Types*

This brief consideration of symbolism in Scripture will aid us in a right approach to typology. A simple schematism that is helpful here is to regard symbolism as involving a vertical reference to revealed truth as it is manifested in a particular horizon of redemptive history. Typology is then the prospective reference to the same truth as it is manifested in the period of eschatological realization.

It might be diagrammed as follows:



S is the symbol. T<sup>1</sup> is the truth to which it refers, as that truth is manifest in the particular period in question.

The line of the History of Revelation connects this earlier revelation with T<sup>n</sup>, the fullness of that truth revealed in Christ. The lines S-T<sup>1</sup> and S-T<sup>n</sup> are the reference lines of symbolism and typology respectively. This diagram is of only limited usefulness. But it does make clear that only the symbolic can

11. Cullmann, *op. cit.*

be typical. As Vos says, "The gateway to the house of typology is at the farther end of the house of symbolism."<sup>12</sup> The diagram also indicates that an Old Testament event or institution may be typical only of the truth which it symbolizes. The only difference is the prospective reference of typology to that truth in its New Testament realization.

Thus the offering of the passover lamb symbolizes substitutionary atonement and therefore typifies this aspect of the work of Christ.

It will be observed that as there are both institutional-cultic and historical symbols, so there is corresponding typology. The tabernacle-temple, the sacrificial system, and the sabbatical calendar with its set feasts are all symbolic elements with most significant typical reference. We have already had occasion to note, for example, how Jesus referred to the Isaianic application of the year of jubilee to the messianic age and claimed that this prophecy was fulfilled in himself.

The exodus, the wanderings, and the possession of the land are symbolic events of the redemptive history and have typical reference to the realization of redemption in Christ. The propriety of historical typology is vigorously defended by Patrick Fairbairn in his old, but by no means outmoded, classic on the subject of typology.<sup>13</sup>

Clearer understanding of biblical theology and sharper discernment of the theological horizons of the periods of revelation will aid us in appreciating the symbolism of Scripture. The reverse is also true. If we proceed to construct the line of typology only when we have first clarified the symbolism we will be able to work in confidence. We honor the Word of God when we recognize the principle of organic connection between promise and fulfillment. Such a method does not commend itself to those who deny or de-emphasize the primary authorship of Scriptures. Only the lack of hermeneutical method can shut us up to recognizing types only where

12. Vos, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

13. Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture* (Edinburgh, 1864), 2 vols. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1952.

the New Testament itself explicitly recognizes them. Such caution is then admirable. But a better grasp of biblical theology will open for us great riches of revelation. We need not lack the sound method to find these and bring them to the people of God.

Perhaps the strongest objection to the use of the biblical-theological approach in preaching is its difficulty. It has been said that this is a scholar's approach to sermons, far beyond the range of the practicing preacher. Once the necessity and fruitfulness of the method is recognized, however, no worthy workman in the Word can refuse the effort it requires. He is called as a scribe of the kingdom to bring forth treasures new and old, and any labor that issues in a fuller preaching of Christ has its reward.

It cannot be denied that scholarship is a necessary ingredient in biblical-theological preaching, but this is no less true of any preaching which is more than trite moralizing or emotionalism.

### *Tools and Methods*

A few remarks about tools and methods may be an encouragement to some to whom this approach might appear forbidding. The layman as well as the preacher can study biblical theology; its basic techniques can be followed to a considerable extent without training in the original languages of Scripture. There is no novelty in the methods that serve biblical theology, although some steps in exegesis assume particular importance.

First, diligent Bible reading is essential. No scholarly technique can be substituted for knowledge of the Bible. The New Testament writers commonly assume in their readers a knowledge of the Old Testament beyond that possessed by many of today's ministers. The points of connection that illuminate the structure of biblical theology may be brought to light by the exhaustive research of the scholar, but they are often evident on the surface to the Christian who knows