

3-1-1967

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### Recommended Citation

Hassold, William J. (1967) "Rectilinear or Typological Interpretation of Messianic Prophecy?," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 38, Article 19.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol38/iss1/19>

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# Rectilinear or Typological Interpretation of Messianic Prophecy?

WILLIAM J. HASSOLD

The history of Biblical interpretation has demonstrated the importance of proper principles of hermeneutics. The Alexandrian school of exegetes in the early church, for example, was committed to an allegorical approach to the Scriptures, and the exegetical products of that school bear the marks of the interpretative principles employed. The works of this school are of little value for the modern exegete because of the false hermeneutical principles followed.

The hermeneutical principles that underlie the interpretation of Messianic prophecy are of palmary importance for its correct interpretation. In Synodical Conference circles there have been two chief approaches to Messianic prophecy. One approach regards all Messianic prophecy as rectilinear, pointing directly to Jesus of Nazareth as the only fulfillment of a particular prophecy. This approach has in the past been chiefly associated with exegetes of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. The other approach recognizes the existence of both types and antitypes. In the words of one of the advocates of this approach, "A prophecy that is Messianic by type is in no wise Messianic in an in-

ferior sense, since the type is not an accidental but a divinely ordained type and is described to us by the Spirit of prophecy."<sup>1</sup> This approach to prophecy allows for more than one fulfillment of a particular prophecy, though it recognizes that the ultimate fulfillment is in Jesus Christ. This second approach has been employed chiefly in Wisconsin Synod circles and has in recent years found advocates within The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod.

The purpose of this article is not to argue directly for the correctness of the one or the other interpretation, though the writer's preference will, no doubt, become clear; rather it is to give a historical survey of the exegetical literature of the two synods dealing with Messianic prophecy and to show how these two contrasting approaches were held by men who were in church fellowship with each other in The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, all the while disagreeing with one another on this issue. By presenting the argumentation of both sides of the problem, this study may be of some assistance in achieving clarity on the issues involved.

## I

The early volumes of *Lehre und Wehre*, the theological journal of the Missouri Synod, do not offer much assistance in determining the exegetical approach to

<sup>1</sup> Paul Peters, "Isaiah 7:14-16," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, LVIII (1961), 102.

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Messianic prophecy followed by the fathers of the Missouri Synod. In 1879, however, an author whose initials are H. F. and who remains otherwise unidentified and unidentifiable, submitted an article dealing with Messianic prophecy. It was a critique of the view held by Professor Franz Delitzsch, that Psalm 72 referred both to Solomon and to the Messiah.

In Delitzsch's commentary the view is expressed that the intercessions and the prayers for blessing in this psalm refer, in the first instance, to Solomon. It was also Delitzsch's view that Solomon, shortly after ascending the throne, may have communicated this psalm to the people of Israel as a cultic prayer on behalf of the new ruler. But then, Delitzsch continued, this psalm was none the less Messianic, and it was with perfect suitability that the church chose this as the chief psalm for the celebration of the Festival of the Epiphany of Our Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Delitzsch presented his reasons for such an understanding of this psalm in the introductory remarks to Psalm 72 in his commentary on the Psalms.<sup>3</sup> They may be summarized as follows: Solomon was a righteous, God-fearing sovereign. He established and extended the kingdom of Israel. He ruled over a large number of people, and personally, he was superior to other contemporary kings in wisdom and wealth. The age of Solomon was a golden age for Israel, the richest in peace and happiness that Israel, God's people, had ever experienced. But then, Delitzsch

<sup>2</sup> H. F., "Über messianische Weissagung," *Lehre und Wehre*, XXV (1879), 193.

<sup>3</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblischer Commentar über die Psalmen* (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1867), 451—452.

pointed out, this description applied only to the beginning of Solomon's reign. It was not true of conditions at the end of his life. That glorious and pure image of God's Anointed which he embodied grew pale toward the end of his reign, and the image was considerably altered. At Solomon's time the only concept of the Anointed possible for the people of Israel was one attached to the kingship of David and Solomon. When, however, the kingship associated with the persons of David and Solomon proved disappointing, the Messianic hope was turned to the future and gained a new form. The picture of the Messiah was given in colors furnished by older unfulfilled prophecies and by the contradiction between the existing kingship and its ideal, and it was pushed off into the future. The concept of the Messianic kingship became more and more superearthly and superhuman and the goal of a faith that despaired of the present. Delitzsch continued:

In order rightly to estimate this, we must free ourselves from the prejudice that the center of the Old Testament proclamation of salvation lies in the prophecy of the Messiah. Is the Messiah, then, anywhere set forth as the Redeemer of the world? The Redeemer of the world is Yahweh. The Parousia of Yahweh is the center of the Old Testament proclamation of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

The first objection the author of the first article in *Lehre und Wehre* offered is that the typological method of interpretation would impose on Scripture more than one single, simple sense. In addition, the writer was of the opinion that there are a number of expressions within the psalm that would

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

be inappropriate if applied to Solomon. For these reasons it was his view that Psalm 72 must refer directly to Christ. The final objection the writer submitted against Delitzsch's *heilsgeschichtlich* interpretation was that if Yahweh is the Redeemer of the world, then, the New Testament is superfluous.<sup>5</sup> H. F.'s summary is:

Delitzsch proves by his example only that anyone who denies the direct prophecy of the Messiah and accepts only a typical prophecy, which is realized by means of a *heilsgeschichtlich* development, must of necessity give up the pure Messianic doctrine of the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup>

Professor George Stoeckhardt is of great importance in the formation of the exegetical tradition of the Missouri Synod. In 1884, while still serving as pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, St. Louis, and as professor *extraordinarius* at Concordia Seminary, Stoeckhardt published a series of articles in *Lehre und Wehre* in which he treated prophecy and its fulfillment.<sup>7</sup> In the first article of the series he called attention to the fact that prophecy and fulfillment stand in close connection with each other, and he was of the opinion that a study of that relationship would be profitable for faith. In the series of articles he did not undertake to study all of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, but he limited himself to a discussion of those whose fulfillment is specifically indicated in the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

In the first article of the series Stoeck-

hardt discussed his principles of interpretation for Messianic prophecy. It is not surprising to find that he rejected the "rationalistic" approach to prophecy, which denied inspiration and revelation, rejected the Word of God, and denied the living, personal God, who revealed Himself to men when and where He willed. He also rejected the "modern supernaturalistic approach to prophecy," which granted concessions to unbelief and discovered errors in Scripture. It was Stoeckhardt's view that this method of interpretation allowed its practitioners to ignore the correctness of the New Testament references to the fulfillment of prophecy.<sup>8</sup> He wrote:

In their view the truth of the Old Testament prophecy rests on the typical character of sacred history. Prophecy is also, according to this modern typical approach, the [prophet's] reflection on history. The prophets meditated on the history of their people, both past and present, and through such meditation discovered the general rules and principles of historical development, which also determine the future. From the occurrences of the past, they draw conclusions as to similar developments in the future. Their sharp eyes see through the purposes God had for his people.<sup>9</sup>

Stoeckhardt continued his discussion by referring to the exodus motif, which is to be found in so much of Old Testament prophecy. One of the frequently recurring precepts of the prophets is that God will turn the captivity of His people. According to this "modern"—to use Stoeckhardt's term—criticism, the historical substratum is the deliverance of Israel

<sup>5</sup> H. F., *Lehre und Wehre*, XXV, 196.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> G[eorg] St[oeckhardt], "Weissagung und Erfüllung," *Lehre und Wehre*, XXX (1884), 42—49; 121—128; 161—170; 193—200; 252 to 259; 335—344; 375—380; XXXI (1885), 220—232; 265—275.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, XXX, 45—46.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

from Egypt and other similar divine acts of deliverance. From these the prophets drew the hope that, as new situations appeared on the horizon, God would once again deliver His people from bondage and work wonders on their enemies with His mighty arm. The theme of bondage and deliverance was constantly repeated in Israel's history. This motif, too, is also reflected in the prophecies that deal with such situations. Stoeckhardt recognized that theologians who follow the typological method of interpretation are willing to acknowledge a divine factor in all of this. They are fundamentally supernaturalists. They believe that it is God's activity that has produced this recurrent theme in the history of Israel. And it is God's Spirit who discloses the basic concepts of history that the prophets express. Therefore, according to this viewpoint, prophecy is grounded in history. Israel's history is typical throughout. The word of prophecy would be only an interpretation of history. In Stoeckhardt's view, then, those theologians who hold the position that there are typical prophecies will acknowledge only indirect prophecy. Since throughout all periods of holy history the same or similar events constantly recur, and that which follows is interpreted by what went before, step-by-step prophecy is changed into fulfillment, and every fulfillment is again a prophecy of a future fulfillment. Thus the prophecy drawn from history concerning the deliverance of Israel from captivity was first fulfilled when Jeshua and Zerubbabel led the Jews back from captivity in Babylon; it was later fulfilled by the redemption accomplished by Christ Jesus; and in turn the third fulfillment will consist in the conversion of Israel at the end of the age;

and the fourth and final fulfillment will follow at the return of the Lord at the end of the age. According to this approach, Stoeckhardt believed that New Testament history appears only as a continuation of the history of the Old Covenant; and that New Testament is both prophecy and fulfillment. Every prophetic expression has accordingly a multitude of senses. People like to speak of the complex character of prophecy. And if one then speaks in a New Testament document of a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, that is only relatively correct. It is one fulfillment among many. The same prophecy was already fulfilled previously and may be fulfilled again at a later date.<sup>10</sup>

Stoeckhardt found only *one* intended fulfillment for every prophecy of Scripture. "We believe," he wrote, "that God allowed the prophets to see the future and especially to behold the salvation of the New Testament directly."<sup>11</sup> Stoeckhardt also believed that the Holy Spirit inspired the words of the holy men of God by which they expressed the hope of Israel. Frequently the Holy Spirit purposely employed symbolic language in prophecy and used coloration from Old Testament institutions and history to make New Testament concepts clear to the people of the Old Covenant. Stoeckhardt held that the inspired Scripture, and thus also prophecy, in spite of all symbolism, is clear, and that therefore every single prophecy has only one intended sense and thus also only one fulfillment.<sup>12</sup>

In the remaining articles of the series

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 46—47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 47—48.

Stoekhardt employed these principles in the interpretation of prophecy. Out of numerous possible examples, only one typical (*sit venia verbo!*) example will be chosen. In discussing Hos. 11:1 in connection with Matt. 2:15, Stoekhardt notes that a mere reading of this passage would lead one to draw the conclusion that the prophet is speaking of Israel, God's people. But, he says, such an understanding of the Hebrew text will of necessity lead one into conflict with the evangelist Matthew, since Matthew understands the passage as referring to the Christ Child. Matthew understands it as a fulfillment of a prophecy that the Child Jesus was to dwell in Egypt for a period of time. How is this difficulty to be solved? Stoekhardt rejects the solution that would suggest that the literal sense refers to the nation Israel and the mystical sense refers to Jesus, for that solution would violate the old Lutheran principle of one simple sense in Scripture. He also rejects the typical interpretation, which would understand the people of Israel as a type of Christ. Ultimately, he says: "The Scripture, the Word of God, compels us not to allow room for the first impression the Hebrew text makes on us but to refer the prophetic statement to Christ, to Christ alone, to the exclusion of Israel."<sup>13</sup>

In the final article of the series, Stoekhardt summarized his exegetical results as follows:

With this we have come to the end of our undertaking, that of showing the correct relationship of prophecy to its fulfillment on the basis of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We have recognized that exactly when one remains firmly with the text the churchly and Lutheran acceptance

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

of direct prophecy and literal fulfillment is proved to be in accordance with the Scriptures, while the modern typological approach is lost in the fog and clouds from which it is developed.<sup>14</sup>

In the years 1890—92 Stoekhardt, who had now been called to a full professorship at Concordia Seminary, contributed another series of articles on Messianic prophecy to *Lehre und Wehre*.<sup>15</sup> In this series he dealt with Christ in Old Testament prophecy and considered the various statements of the Old Testament about the coming Messiah under the rubrics of dogmatic theology. Though Stoekhardt did not explicitly deal with his hermeneutical principles in these articles, a reading of this series of articles will convince the reader that they are the same as those he espoused in "Weissagung und Erfüllung" a few years before.

In 1908 the Rev. Herman Speckhard, pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Saginaw, Mich., offered a "Summary Interpretation of the Song of Solomon," which was published in Vol. LIV of *Lehre und Wehre*. In the introduction to this exegetical work he rejected the literal and typological interpretations of the Song of Solomon in favor of the allegorical interpretation. For the purposes of this paper, one statement is of particular interest: "We need not discuss in detail that such an interpretation [the typological interpretation] of the Song of Solomon is to be

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXI, 275.

<sup>15</sup> G[eorg] St[öckhardt], "Christus in der alttestamentlichen Weissagung," *Lehre und Wehre*, XXXVI (1890), 209—217; 278—286; 317—325; 354—360; XXXVII (1891), 5 to 12; 37—45; 97—107; 137—145; 295—303; 328—332; 365—372; XXXVIII (1892), 7 to 15; 70—79; 132—142; 161—172.

rejected simply because it violates the established hermeneutical principle that a Scripture passage has only *one* intended meaning." Once again the *unus sensus simplex* is the governing consideration in the rejection of the typological method of interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most significant statement of the traditional position of Missouri Synod exegetes on the relationship between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment is that which appeared in Dr. Ludwig Fuerbringer's *Theologische Hermeneutik*. This work gains its significance from the fact that for several decades it was the standard hermeneutical textbook in the seminaries of the Synod. Dr. Fuerbringer called attention to the fact that there is a close connection between prophecy and fulfillment and that this connection has been established by God Himself. Since it is a divinely established connection, no one may dare to change or evade it. He also noted that the same relationship exists not only between the prophecy and its fulfillment but also between the prophecy and the inspired record of its fulfillment. The Christian exegete, therefore, must hold firmly to both factors: (1) In the fulfillment God's foreordained plan is being carried out, and (2) the record of the fulfillment is determinative for the interpretation of the prophecy. As illustrations of this principle, Dr. Fuerbringer called attention to Hos. 11:1 and Matt. 2:15; Jer. 31:15; and Matt. 2:17; and Is. 11:1 and Matt. 2:23.

In the concluding paragraph of this section of his treatise, Dr. Fuerbringer also

laid down the principle that for the proper understanding of Messianic prophecies the exegete must not allow himself to be led astray by the fact that they are often introduced without any close connection with the context, which is itself rooted in the historical situation. As illustrations of this, Dr. Fuerbringer called attention to the prophecies of Is. 7:14 and Micah 2:12-13, which, in his view, are introduced without reference to the context. He then expressed the principle: The interpreter must guard against the perversities of many exegetes, who in the case of such Messianic prophecies find a twofold or even manifold sense in them and thus reject a direct Messianic reference.<sup>17</sup>

Professor Theodore Laetsch contributed two volumes to the *Bible Commentary* begun by Concordia Publishing House. In these two works he offered an interpretation of the prophecies of Jeremiah and of the Minor Prophets. In these works he adheres strictly to the principles enunciated by Stoeckhardt and Fuerbringer. He is entirely consistent with his hermeneutical principles when, for example, he refuses to interpret Hos. 11:1 as a reference to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. He admits that when the Hosea passage is read in its context, without reference to the New Testament, it would seem certain that the prophecy refers to Israel's Egyptian deliverance. Yet he continues:

Yet this interpretation, plausible as it seems, runs counter to the Lord's own interpretation as recorded by His inspired penman, who very definitely states that the words "I called My Son out of Egypt"

<sup>16</sup> H[erman] Sp[eckhar]d, "Summarische Auslegung des Hohenlieds," *Lehre und Wehre*, LIV (1908), 114.

<sup>17</sup> [Ludwig Fürbringer], *Theologische Hermeneutik* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1912), pp. 18—19.

refer to the Christ Child. Matt. 2:13-14 the Holy Spirit tells us that because of Herod's plan to slay the holy Infant, Joseph took the young Child and His mother, departed into Egypt, and remained there until Herod's death, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son.'" He restricts the fulfillment of a divine prophecy to the words quoted, not including any other parts of Hos. 11:1-2.<sup>18</sup>

Though much the same material has been treated previously in this paper, it may be well to allow Dr. Laetsch to express his hermeneutical principles:

Various efforts have been made to solve this difficulty. The literal sense, some say, speaks of Israel; the mystical sense, of Christ. This solution is contrary to the ancient principle of sound Biblical hermeneutics, that every passage of Scripture has but one intended sense. To deny this principle would undermine the very foundation of Scriptural interpretation and open wide the doors to fanciful speculations and to uncertainty. In our day the typical mode of interpretation is favored generally. Israel's history is regarded as the type of Christ's life, and therefore, as Israel took refuge in Egypt and later was brought back to the Promised Land, so Christ fled to Egypt and later returned to His own country. Yet Matthew does not say that a type was fulfilled by Christ's sojourn in Egypt. He speaks of the fulfillment of a historical fact prophesied by Hosea, the historical fact: Out of Egypt have I called My Son. . . . Not God's "prophetic act," as Pusey calls Israel's deliverance, but the word spoken by the prophet was fulfilled centuries later by the

event narrated in Matt. 2:14. Since the Holy Spirit calls the return of Christ out of Egypt a fulfillment of what the prophet foretold, we accept His interpretation as authentic. The eternal God, speaking of His love toward Israel in the distant past, foretells in the same breath an act of love in the distant future, calling His Son, an Israelite concerning the flesh (Rom. 9:5), out of Egypt. To the Eternal past and future is today (Ps. 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8). Whether the prophet himself or his hearers and readers in the Old Testament grasped and understood the meaning of the Lord, is quite a different question (1 Peter 1:11; see also Ex. 12:46; Zech. 12:10; and John 19:32-37).<sup>19</sup>

Though not all examples of the rectilinear approach to prophecy in Missouri Synod literature have been quoted, the selection given is adequate to prove that the direct, rectilinear approach to prophecy was most firmly established in Missourian circles.

## II

The exegetical literature of the Wisconsin Synod on the subject of Messianic prophecy is not as extensive as that of the Missouri Synod. The first theological journal of the Wisconsin Synod, the *Theologische Quartalschrift* (now known as the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*), began publication in 1904.

In the first volume of that periodical Dr. Adolf Hoenecke presented an article dealing with the use of Scripture by the authors of the Formula of Concord. He examined the charge that has occasionally been brought against the writers of that document, that they had been governed by dogmatical rather than by exegetical con-

<sup>18</sup> Theodore Laetsch, *Bible Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 88.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88—89.



siderations in their citation of Scripture in support of their doctrinal formulations. He granted that in the generation which followed the writing of the Formula of Concord dogmatic presuppositions often did determine the meaning the interpreter found in a text. But at the same time he contended that up to the Formula of Concord exegesis was not bound by the presuppositions of dogmatics. He referred, by way of illustration, to the exegetical independence of Martin Chemnitz, one of the chief authors of the Formula of Concord. In reference to the citation of Hos. 11:1 in Matt. 2:15, Chemnitz held it to be forced and twisted (*coacta et contorta*) exegesis to consider this as being only a prophecy concerning the Messiah. He interpreted it in the first instance as a statement concerning the people of Israel. It was Matthew's intention, he held, to meet the objection that Jesus could not be the Messiah because he had come from Egypt, and for that reason he cited the passage from Hosea. If one looks at it in this light, the application of the prophecy to Christ (*accomodatio sententiae propheticae ad Christum*) is readily understandable. It shows a profound parallelism between Israel as God's son and Jesus as the Son. This exegesis, Hoenecke held, was sufficient to show that Chemnitz was not governed by dogmatical presuppositions in his interpretation of the Scriptures. At the same time, it shows that the leading theologian of the Wisconsin Synod at the beginning of the 20th century expressed his approval of the typological method of interpretation of Messianic prophecy.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Adolf Hönecke, "Über den Schriftbeweis in der Konkordienformel," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, I (1904), 122.

In the second volume of the *Theologische Quartalschrift* Prof. August Pieper published a sermonic study on Psalm 22. In this study he raised the question whether this psalm is directly or typically Messianic. He chose the former alternative for the interpretation of the psalm, but nonetheless he did not a priori exclude the possibility of a typological interpretation. He wrote:

The question concerning the typical and immediate Messianism finds its answer in the other question, whether the content exceeds the historical structure of the type or whether it remains within these confines. David was a type of Christ, but self-evidently only in what he was and, of course, not in what he no longer was. Wherever David prophetically says something of Christ that was not to be found in him, he talks without the means of a type, altogether directly messianically. Now in itself it would not be impossible that in one and the same psalm typical and direct prophecy would occur as a mixed prophecy. This is the very thing that Delitzsch and others want here; this is why they speak of a typical-prophetic Messianism of the 22d Psalm. But that this should be the case here is not yet proved by the circumstance that a number of the features outlined here may conveniently be interpreted as referring to David, since they, of course, also apply to Christ and are most naturally brought into relation with Him, once it has been established that the psalm contains directly Messianic elements.<sup>21</sup>

Prof. August Pieper's most extensive discussion of the possibility of typical prophecy is to be found in his commentary, *Jesaias II*, dealing with Chapters 40—66

<sup>21</sup> August Pieper, "Der 22. Psalm, für die Passionspredigt bearbeitet," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, II (1905), 15—16.

of the prophecy of Isaiah. In connection with Is. 40:3-5 he expressed the view that the wilderness voice referred not only to John the Baptizer but also to all others who have a call similar to John's. He wrote:

Still we must hold firm to this, that this prophecy does not refer to John alone but to all preachers who have a call like the Baptizer's, whether they worked prior to or after him. For it is often the nature of prophecy that it places individual future events of the same kind, which in actual occurrence lie before and after one another, on a temporal plane without respect to perspective.<sup>22</sup>

As an illustration of this, Prof. Pieper noted the interchange between the destruction of Jerusalem and the final judgment depicted in the prophecies of Matthew 24.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, Professor Pieper wrote:

Because the Christ of the cross is the climax of the entire dispensation of grace, therefore all prophecies of grace are directed essentially to Him. Because the Christ of Judgment Day is the climax of all manifestations of judgment, all prophecies of judgment apply essentially to Him. But both kinds of prophecies include on the same plane events that are similar to the great climaxes but precede them in time. . . . Thus the oldest literary prophet, Obadiah, connects the coming judgment over Edom with one concerning the Day of the Lord over all the heathen (v. 15) and with the last Judgment (v. 21), and after him this becomes stereotype for all of the prophets.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> August Pieper, *Jesaias II, Kommentar über den zweiten Teil des Propheten Jesaias* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1919), pp. 14—15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Prof. Pieper drew out the implications of his position with respect to Is. 40:3-5 as follows:

The prophet Isaiah himself — as he speaks to us in the following chapters — was this voice. It is here and in verses 6-8 that he speaks of his call and office. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others were the voice for Israel, yet only in a limited measure. . . . They were preachers of repentance to the spiritually devastated Israel of their time. John was the preacher of repentance κατ' ἐξοχήν, the one who, strictly speaking, prepared the way of the Lord. . . . And he who is called to be a preacher of the Gospel after John and after the appearing of the Lord should know that he is also being spoken of in this prophecy, that he is also called to prepare a way for the Lord by the preaching of repentance.<sup>25</sup>

Another discussion of the possibility of typical prophecy appears in a review of Dr. Theodore Laetsch's commentary on Jeremiah. This review was written by Dr. Paul Peters, a member of the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary at Mequon, Wis. After commending the fact that Dr. Laetsch discovered true Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament, Dr. Peters continued:

This recognition of Dr. Laetsch's testimony does not imply, however, that we can always agree with him in every one of his arguments pertaining to his interpretation of a Messianic or non-Messianic passage. We, for example, are not able to follow the author in his use of the word "fulfillment" in reference to Chapter 31:15-17. To find in it only the one meaning pertaining to Herod's murdering the infants of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:17-18) is something that we must question. Because the

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17—18.

New Testament definitely states that this passage has found its fulfillment in Herod's infanticide, Dr. Laetsch finds nothing else in it, no other fulfillment, neither that of the deportation of the Northern tribes to Assyria, 722 B. C., nor that of the great catastrophe of 586 and the deportation of the Jews to Babylon.<sup>26</sup>

After expressing disagreement with Dr. Laetsch's exegesis of this passage, Dr. Peters added:

It is true that Rachel's lament for her children finds its final fulfillment in Herod's murder of the infants of Bethlehem. But is Dr. Laetsch justified in arguing on the strength of this fulfillment that we now have a reason which is definitely decisive against those interpretations referring this passage also to one of the deportations of either the Northern or the Southern Kingdom? . . . While Dr. Laetsch may be correct that this passage does not refer to one or the other deportation, still Matthew's statement that it was fulfilled in Herod's infanticide in Bethlehem does not gainsay one or the other, and for that matter, even a third one that may be found. For an Old Testament promise can have a two- and threefold fulfillment, the final fulfillment being that to which the New Testament refers.<sup>27</sup>

In reviewing Dr. Laetsch's commentary on the *Minor Prophets*, Dr. Peters expands his critique of Dr. Laetsch's hermeneutical principles. He states that a twofold fulfillment does not give us the right to speak of a double sense of prophecy. "It is one thing to say with the author that 'every passage of Scripture has but one intended sense' . . . and quite another thing to guard

against the misunderstanding as if this intended sense is not deep and wide enough to leave room for a multiple, i. e. a partial and a final, fulfillment, so that Hos. 11:1 refers both to Israel and the Christ Child."<sup>28</sup>

In Vol. LVIII (1961) of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Dr. Peters presented an extensive exegesis of Is. 7:14-16. In the first article of the series he offered a discussion of the possibility of typical Messianic prophecy. His discussion centered on 2 Samuel 7:12-17 and Isaiah 40:3-5. After a careful exegesis of the pertinent texts, he stated the principle: "The text and context as it occurs in both the Old and the New Testament can alone determine the mode (whether direct or indirect) and the meaning of this Messianic prophecy."<sup>29</sup>

The exegetical tradition of the Wisconsin Synod, then, so far as it can be traced, has been receptive to the idea of typical Messianic prophecy. This is in sharp contrast to the views of the Missouri Synod exegetes, most of whom rejected the typological approach to prophecy.

### III

The first published defense of the typological interpretation of Messianic prophecy to come from within the Missouri Synod was written by Dr. William F. Arndt and was published in *Lehre und Webre* in 1921. Dr. Arndt held that an understanding of the typical character of the Old Testament is indispensable not only for

<sup>26</sup> Paul Peters, "Bible Commentary, Jeremiah. By Theodore Laetsch, D. D.," *Quartalschrift (Theological Quarterly)*, L (1953), 302.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 302-303.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Peters, "Bible Commentary, The Minor Prophets. By Theo. Laetsch, D. D.," *Quartalschrift (Theological Quarterly)*, LIII (1956), 157.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Peters, "Isaiah 7:14-16," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, LVIII, 104.

understanding the Old Testament itself but also for solving exegetical difficulties connected with the citations of the Old Testament in the New. Dr. Arndt took the position that the use of Hos. 11:1 in Matt. 2:15 is entirely justified because Israel was a type of Christ.

In this article Prof. Arndt also gave the following rules for the treatment of Messianic prophecies: (1) The entire Old Testament has a typical character. (2) Where the Scripture itself points out a type, that is, of course, an absolutely correct interpretation. (3) When the New Testament points out that there are types in the Old Testament, the interpreter's task is carefully to search the Scriptures themselves for an authoritative interpretation of these types. (4) The rule that one can consider only those to be types which Scripture clearly indicates to be such, goes too far. It does not properly evaluate the fact that the entire Old Testament is typical. (5) One must not claim a typical meaning where text, context, and New Testament indicate a verbal prophecy, e.g., in Psalm 22. (6) One should carefully observe how Christ and the New Testament writers point out Old Testament types and proceed according to the analogy of their interpretation. (7) For a typical interpretation not clearly attested by Scripture one cannot claim unconditional acceptance. One must be satisfied to point it out as a possible interpretation.<sup>30</sup>

Shortly after Dr. Arndt's article appeared, Dr. Paul E. Kretzmann published his *Popular Commentary* on the entire Bible. His comments on two of the pivotal

<sup>30</sup> William F. Arndt, "Typisch messianische Weissagungen," *Lehre und Wehre*, LXVII (1921), 359—367.

passages for a typological interpretation of Messianic prophecy are significant. On Jer. 31:15 he wrote:

This verse is quoted by Matthew, chap. 2, 18, with reference to the slaughter of the innocents of Bethlehem, because the extermination of Israel through the Assyrian power was a type of the murder of the children at Bethlehem, and because Rachel was regarded as the mother of Bethlehem and its environs.<sup>31</sup>

Dr. Kretzmann also regarded the citation of Hos. 11:1 in Matt. 2:15 as an application of Hosea's words to the Christ Child's return from Egypt. On Hos. 11:1 he wrote:

*When Israel was a child, at the time of the youth of the nation, then I loved him and called My son out of Egypt, in choosing the nation for His own peculiar people. The inspired writer of the first gospel applies the statement to the return of the Christ-child from Egypt after the abrupt flight of His parents from Bethlehem.*<sup>32</sup>

In a sermon study on Is. 40:1-8, Dr. Alfred von Rohr Sauer interpreted the voice crying in the wilderness in a typological fashion. He wrote:

But whose is the voice that is heard in vv. 3-5? First it was the voice of the Prophet Isaiah himself, who was calling the people of Israel to repentance; it was the voice of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other Old Testament preachers of repentance. All of these were preparatory voices in the wilderness, types of a greater voice to come. *The* voice, however, *the* preacher of repentance, *the* way-preparer in the full sense of the word was John the Baptist.

<sup>31</sup> Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: Old Testament*, II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924), 456—457.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 647.

It was his message: "Repent ye! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2) which marked the culmination of Isaiah's prophecy.<sup>33</sup>

The same approach was followed by Dr. Martin H. Franzmann in his work on Christian discipleship, *Follow Me*, published in 1961. In commenting on the citation of Hos. 11:1 in Matt. 2:15 he wrote:

Once Israel had gone down to Egypt, in a history determined by the guilt of the patriarchs, and had to all seeming been buried there, lost to the mission in the world which God's promise had assigned to her. God's comprehensive governance of history had used that guilt and that history for His own gracious ends, and He had in His love recalled His "first-born" from the land of Egypt (Hos. 11:1). So now the guilt of God's people had banished to Egypt Him who was the compendium of the people of God, the inclusive representative of Israel, *the Descendant of Abraham*.<sup>34</sup>

A similar approach is followed in dealing with the citation of Jer. 31:15 in Matt. 2:16-18. When Israel was led into captivity, the prophet Jeremiah heard her weeping from her grave. Rachel wept then; Matthew heard her weeping again, now at the climax of that long and somber history of guilt and judgment which formed the history of Israel.<sup>35</sup>

The report of the Advisory Committee on English Bible Versions of the Board

of Parish Education (Missouri Synod) in 1962 dealt with the problem of the interpretation of Is. 7:14. The committee reported that as a result of its efforts a number of changes were incorporated in the 1959 printing of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. A number of suggested changes, however, were not accepted by the Standard Bible Committee. The committee of the Board of Parish Education had suggested the translation "maiden" in place of the "young woman" in Is. 7:14, but the suggestion was not adopted. The report then continued: "Our studies indicate that 'young woman' is a justifiable translation, as the basis for a typical interpretation of the passage."<sup>36</sup>

In the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY of October 1964, Dr. Alfred von Rohr Sauer dealt at length with the problems involved in the interpretation of Messianic prophecies. In this article he distinguished three categories of Messianic prophecies. There are direct, or rectilinear, prophecies, such as Micah 5:2 or Mal. 3:1. There are also typical prophecies. Under this category Dr. Sauer lists Is. 7:14 and Ps. 2:7. His third category, application, is in essence an extension of the second category. In Dr. Sauer's definition, "It involves those Old Testament passages which are quoted as being fulfilled in the New Testament but which in their original Old Testament context do not look like prophecies at all."<sup>37</sup> Under this

<sup>33</sup> Alfred von Rohr Sauer, "Sermon Study on Is. 40:1-8 for the Third Sunday in Advent," CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXI (1950), 850.

<sup>34</sup> Martin H. Franzmann, *Follow Me: Discipleship According to Saint Matthew* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Reports and Memorials, Forty-Fifth Regular Convention, Cleveland, Ohio, June 20—30, 1962*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n. d.), p. 204.

<sup>37</sup> Alfred von Rohr Sauer, "Problems of Messianic Interpretation," CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXXV (1964), 571.

rubric Dr. Sauer placed Jer. 31:15-17; Ps. 2:8; and Hos. 11:1.

At the conclusion of the article Dr. Sauer discussed the guidelines which determine the category under which Messianic prophecies may be discussed. He wrote:

How do I know whether I am dealing with a direct prophecy, a typical prophecy, or the New Testament application of an Old Testament text? The answer is that the original Old Testament text and its context must determine what the text meant at that time. If the literal sense of the passage clearly refers to an ideal deliverer of the future *and not to any contemporary figure*, then a direct prophecy may well be involved. If the literal sense permits an identification of the deliverer with a leader of that day as well as with an ideal figure of the future, this may suggest a typical prophecy. If the literal sense has to do with an incident or circumstance which is relevant for the people of that day and which has nothing about it that is inherently predictive or prophetic, but which is interpreted Messianically in the New Testament, then the interpreter may regard this as the application of an Old

Testament passage to a New Testament situation.<sup>38</sup>

#### IV

As a result of this study of the exegetical traditions of the Missouri and Wisconsin synods, several conclusions may be drawn from the evidence presented.

1. The possibility of predictive prophecy has never been drawn into question by the advocates of either position.

2. The concern of both the advocates of rectilinear prophecy and the advocates of typical prophecy is to be faithful to the clear sense of the Scriptures.

3. While disagreeing on the proper hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of Messianic prophecy, the advocates of both positions acknowledge the orthodox theological position of the other.

4. In the opinion of the writer the argumentation for the typological approach to Messianic prophecy carries greater conviction than does the opposite position.

St. Louis, Missouri

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 574.