
Typology and the Levitical system—1

The author here begins a two-part study on typology, particularly relating it to the sanctuary, the Levitical system, and the book of Hebrews. In this first article he deals with such questions as Does typology provide a valid and serious way of understanding the Old Testament? Is sanctuary typology a dualistic vertical typology or does it function in the same framework as the rest of Old Testament typology?

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any Christians regard the Old Testament Levitical institutions as little more than a historical curiosity, to be studied only for information concerning the religious milieu of ancient Israel. Others view the Hebrew sanctuary and its services as occupying a useful, though ancillary, position in illustrating the gospel.

For Seventh-day Adventists, however, the significance of the Levitical system is not simply a matter of historical research or gospel illustration; it is the

raison d'être of the Advent Movement. For the Adventist pioneers, "the subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His

people."¹ Over the past fourteen decades the doctrine of the sanctuary has continued to lie at the foundation of Adventist theology and mission and has remained the most distinctive contribution of Adventism to Christian thought.

Within the constraints of this article it is not possible either to summarize all of the lines of Biblical, historical, and theological evidence that SDAs have

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published² or to provide a comprehensive statement of historic Adventist teaching on the sanctuary and its services.³ Rather, we will emphasize perhaps the most basic, and at the same time the most overlooked, aspect of this subject—hermeneutics. We will focus upon the *how*, that is, the method or approach employed in unraveling the meaning of the Levitical institutions. For whatever may be said about interpreting the details of specific passages, the historic Adventist interpretation of the sanctuary in the last analysis stands or falls depending upon the validity of its hermeneutic method.

One thing Christian interpreters are generally agreed upon: The basic New Testament hermeneutic key for unlocking the meaning of the Old Testament sanctuary and its services is that of *typology*. But where they disagree is on the question What is the precise nature, function, and purpose of the typological approach to Scripture? Much of the current criticism of the historic Adventist sanctuary theology stems in fact from a fundamental disagreement over the answer to this crucial question.

We can isolate four major areas of particular concern with regard to the typological approach to the Levitical system. The *first* area relates to the nature of Biblical typology in general. Should it be viewed according to the traditional or the postcritical school of thought?⁴ Historic Adventism has consistently subscribed to the traditional mode of interpretation.

The *second* area concerns the relationship between the sanctuary typology of Hebrews and the typological perspective elsewhere in Scripture. It involves the question whether sanctuary typology should be viewed from a vertical (earthly-heavenly) dimension not unrelated to dualistic thought forms that are alien to the Biblical perspective, or from only a horizontal (historical) dimension that accords better with the modern world view.⁵

The *third* major cluster of concerns involves the relationship between sanctuary type and antitype, particularly as

elucidated in the book of Hebrews. Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally understood that there still exists a basic continuity between the essential contours of type and antitype, the earthly and the heavenly, the copy and the original, based upon such passages as Hebrews 8:5 and 9:24. Recently, however, this position has been seriously challenged from both within and outside of Adventism.⁶ Scholars have vigorously argued that the book of Hebrews portrays a "tremendous disparity" between types and antitypes and that it attempts to modify the type to fit Christian beliefs.

The *fourth* major area of concern builds on the third and deals with the role of Hebrews in interpreting the Old Testament sanctuary. Does Hebrews offer the only New Testament interpretation of the sanctuary services, and therefore must Hebrews be regarded as the only ultimate norm for interpreting the Old Testament sanctuary types? If so, then traditional Adventist interpretations could be considered illegitimate because they fail to accept what is seen as Hebrews' normative alterations of the Old Testament types to fit the New Testament fulfillment.

The remainder of this article will analyze the first two of these problem areas, and a subsequent article will take up the final pair of related concerns with regard to sanctuary typology.

Let us first consider the matter of Biblical typology in general. A number of prominent Biblical scholars have in recent decades given a strikingly positive assessment of the role of typology in Scripture. For example, noted New Testament theologian Leonard Goppelt, who produced the first comprehensive survey of New Testament typology from a modern historical perspective,⁷ has in later articles continued to emphasize that typology "is the central and distinctive New Testament way of understanding Scripture."⁸ Old Testament scholar G. Ernest Wright asserts that "the one word which perhaps better than any other describes the early Church's method of interpreting the Old Testament is 'typology.'"⁹ Church historian

R. M. Grant concurs: "The New Testament method of interpreting the Old was generally that of typology."¹⁰ And New Testament scholar E. Earle Ellis (following W. G. Kümmel) maintains that "typological interpretation expresses most clearly 'the basic attitude of primitive Christianity toward the Old Testament.'"¹¹

These recent affirmations of the centrality and importance of Biblical typology appear remarkable in view of the prevailing negative evaluation previously seen among critical scholars. Owing to the triumph of historical criticism within liberal scholarship, all serious interest in typology had been virtually eliminated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Except in the more conservative circles, typology was regarded as merely "an historical curiosity, of little importance or significance for the modern reader."¹² However, after World War II strong advocates of the historical-critical method, which had dealt the deathblow to nineteenth-century traditional typology, exuberantly embraced a "post-critical neo-typology."¹³

We have already acknowledged that there are differing modern views of the nature of Biblical typology. According to the traditional view (which forms the basis for historic Adventist interpretation of the sanctuary), typology is the study of those Old Testament persons, events, or institutions that God has specifically designed to serve as predictive prefigurations (types) pointing forward in specific details to their fulfillment in Christ and/or gospel realities brought about by Christ. According to the postcritical view, typology is regarded as a common human way of analogical thinking, which in Scripture involves the retrospective recognition (in the freedom of the Spirit) of general correspondence between persons, events, and institutions within the consistent divine revelation in history. Thus the postcritical view represents a significant departure from the historical view. The differences can be outlined as follows:

The author of Hebrews does not read alien thought forms back into the Levitical system, but simply recognizes and elucidates that which was part of Israel's understanding of the sanctuary from its inception.

Traditional	Postcritical
1. Rooted in historical realities—historicity of the types essential.	1. Historicity not essential.
2. Divinely designed prefigurations.	2. Analogies/correspondences within God's similar modes of activity.
3. Prospective/predictive.	3. Retrospective—little or no predictive element.
4. Prefigurations extend to specific details.	4. Involves only general "parallel situations."
5. Includes vertical (sanctuary) typology.	5. Rejects vertical as alien to Biblical perspective (Hebrews said to be dualistic).
6. Involves consistent principles of interpretation.	6. No system or order; based upon freedom of the Spirit.

As we look at these two views of typology the question immediately arises, How can we possibly decide what is the *Biblical* perspective on typology? How can we allow the characteristic conceptual elements or structures of typology to emerge from within Scripture, instead of projecting upon Scripture our own preconceived understanding of typology as others have?

Fortunately, the New Testament writers provide a solution to this problem. We can clearly identify six verses in the New Testament as typological because they employ the word *type* (*typos*) or *antitype* (*antitypon*) as hermeneutic terms to describe the New Testament authors' interpretation of the Old Testament. These verses are Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; 1 Peter 3:21; Hebrews 8:5 and 9:24. We can engage in a detailed exegesis of these New Testament hermeneutical *typos* passages, and from such analysis should emerge at least a preliminary delineation of the fundamental conceptual structures of Biblical typology. The existence of typology may then be identified in other scriptural

passages where the same structures are present but the actual terms *type* and *antitype* are absent.

In a separate study,¹⁴ the writer has conducted a detailed examination of the New Testament hermeneutical *typos* passages in their context: Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; 1 Peter 3:18-22; and Hebrews 8:5 and 9:24. From this study we can define five structures of typology. The first conceptual element may be termed the historical structure. The remaining four structures are more theological in nature: an eschatological structure, a Christological-soteriological structure, an ecclesiological structure, and a prophetic structure. Space permits us only to summarize and briefly illustrate each.

1. The *historical structure* of Biblical typology underscores the fact that typology is rooted in history. This is in contradistinction to allegory, which is not primarily, if at all, concerned about the literal historical sense, but with the figurative or spiritual kernel hidden under the historical husk. The historical structure involves three crucial aspects.

First, the historical reality of the Old Testament type is assumed by the Biblical writer and may consist of persons (e.g., Adam, Romans 5), events, (e.g., the Exodus, 1 Corinthians 10; the Flood, 1 Peter 3), or institutions (e.g., the sanctuary, Hebrews 8 and 9). So crucial is the matter of historicity that the typological arguments of Romans 5, 1 Corinthians 10, and 1 Peter 3 would collapse if the historical reality of Adam, the Exodus, or the Flood was not accepted. Likewise, the concern of the author of Hebrews throughout the Epistle "is to ground Christian confidence in objective facts. . . . *Real* deity, *real* humanity, *real* priesthood—and we may add, a *real* ministry in a *real* sanctuary."¹⁵

As a second aspect of the historical structure, the New Testament authors point out the historical correspondence between the type and antitype. Thus Adam is a type of Christ (Romans 5); the Exodus events occurred as types corresponding to the experience of the Christian (1 Corinthians 10); the Flood corresponds to its antitype, Christian baptism (1 Peter 3); and the old covenant sanctuary, with its sacrifices and priesthood, is a copy and shadow of the new covenant realities (Hebrews 8 and 9). The content of the correspondence extends even to details connected with the type, but always to such details as are already symbolic of salvation in the Old Testament (e.g., Heb. 8:5; 9:24; 13:11-13).

As a third aspect of the historical structure, the type and antitype are never on the same plane. The New Testament antitype invariably involves an absolute escalation, or intensification, of the Old Testament type. For instance, Israel's food and drink in the wilderness are intensified to become the Christian Lord's Supper of the antitype (1 Corinthians 10). In Hebrews the inadequate, temporary Old Testament sacrifices and ceremonies are escalated into the once-for-all efficacious sacrifice and superior permanent priesthood of Christ.

2. The *eschatological structure* further clarifies the nature of the historical

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correspondence and intensification described above. Notice how the Old Testament persons, events, and institutions take on an eschatological aspect in their New Testament fulfillment. In 1 Corinthians 10 the experiences of Israel in the wilderness are types (*typoi*) of those "upon whom the end of the ages has come" (verse 11, R.S.V.).* In Romans 5 Adam is a type (*typos*) of "the one who was to come" (verse 14, R.S.V.)—the second Adam, whose coming brought about the eschatological new age. In 1 Peter 3 the salvation of Noah and his family through the Flood finds its antitype (*antitypon*) in the sacramental salvation of the eschatological "now" (verse 21). And in Hebrews 8 and 9 the Old Testament sacrifices are linked with the once-for-all sacrifice "at the end of the age" (chap. 9:26, R.S.V.).

3. The *Christological-soteriological* structure suggests that Old Testament types find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Sometimes it may be in the form of a correspondence between an Old Testament reality and the person of Christ, as in Romans 5 (Adam → Christ) and Hebrews 8 and 9 (priesthood and sacrifices → Christ as high priest and His sacrifice). At other times it may be in the larger context of the new covenant brought about by Christ, as with the sacraments and the believers' experience, in 1 Corinthians 10 and 1 Peter 3, and the heavenly sanctuary of Hebrews 8 and 9.

4. The *ecclesiological* structure of Biblical typology includes three possible aspects related to the recipients of Christ's saving work: (a) the individual worshiper, (b) the corporate covenant community, and (c) the sacraments of the church. In 1 Corinthians 10 all of these aspects come to the fore. The experiences of ancient Israel in the wilderness happened typologically (*typos*) as types (*typoi*) of eschatological Israel, the Christian church (verses 6, 11), and involved the sacraments (verses 2-4) and a personal decision whether to be faithful or disobedient (verses 5-10). In Hebrews the sacraments are perhaps

mentioned briefly (chap. 6:2-4), but the emphasis is upon the individual worshiper (chaps. 9:9, 14; 10:2, 14, 22) and the eschatological community (chaps. 10:8-13, 21; 12:22-24).

5. The *prophetic structure* in Biblical typology also includes three aspects:

a. The Old Testament types *point forward*: they are advance presentations, or prefigurations, of the corresponding New Testament realities. Thus in 1 Corinthians 10 the wilderness experience of ancient Israel is shown to be a prefiguration of the experience of the Christian church (verses 6, 11). Likewise, in Hebrews 8 and 9 the Old Testament earthly sanctuary is portrayed as "a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary" (chap. 8:5, R.S.V.), "a shadow of the good things to come" (chap. 10:1, R.S.V.).

b. In the typological relationship there is a *divine design* in which the Old Testament realities are superintended by God, even in specific details, so as to prefigure the New Testament realities. This divine design is implied in all the hermeneutical *typos* passages, but is most explicitly revealed in Hebrews (e.g., chaps. 8:5, 6; 10:1).

c. The prefigurations involve a "must needs be" quality giving them the force of prospective-predictive foreshadowings of their New Testament fulfillments. This is most clearly illustrated in Hebrews 8 and 9. Just as the earthly high priest offered gifts and sacrifices, so "it is necessary [must needs be] for this priest [Christ] also to have something to offer" (chap. 8:3, R.S.V.). Again, as the earthly sanctuary was cleansed, so it must needs be with the heavenly counterpart (chap. 9:23).

In summarizing the nature of Biblical typology, which is the first of the two major areas of concern we are covering in this article, we underscore the following: The structures of Biblical typology, as they emerge from representative scriptural passages, harmonize fully with the traditional view of typology. In contrast with the postcritical neotypology, according to the Biblical perspective the New Testament fulfillment must be

rooted in the historical reality of the Old Testament type; the correspondence consists of a divinely designed prefiguration; it is basically prospective/predictive, and not simply retrospective; and it involves a correspondence of details as well as general "similar situations." If the Biblical understanding of typology coincides with the traditional view, then we may conclude that the historic Adventist approach toward typology—which follows the traditional view—is consonant with the Biblical perspective.

Regarding the second cluster of issues—involving the relationship between the sanctuary typology as illustrated in Hebrews and the typology elsewhere in Scripture—we find that Hebrews has the same basic typological structures as we have found in hermeneutical *typos* passages outside the Epistle. Although Hebrews broadens the typological correspondence to include a cultic institution, as well as persons or events, and although the vertical (earthly-heavenly) correspondence is introduced in addition to the horizontal (historical), yet the basic structures of typology remain unchanged. The inclusion of the cultic, or sacrificial, institution simply serves to expand the scope of typological realities to encompass three categories: persons, events, and institutions. Likewise, the introduction of the vertical dimension actually serves to reinforce the element of escalation, or intensification, that forms part of the historical structure.

The vertical dimension in Hebrews should not be regarded as a reinterpretation of the Old Testament cultus, based upon vestiges of mythic-cosmic analogy and Platonic-Philonian dualism that are alien to the fundamental Biblical perspective.¹⁶ Rather, the earth-heaven sanctuary correspondence is at home already in the Old Testament. The first mention of the sanctuary in the Old Testament (Exodus 25) implies vertical correspondence. The author of Hebrews cites Exodus 25:40 as scriptural support for a vertical correspondence between earthly and heavenly sanctuaries, and a

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careful analysis of this passage confirms the conclusion drawn in Hebrews 8:5.¹⁷ According to Exodus 25:40, the "pattern" (*tabnith*, LXX *typos*) of the earthly sanctuary shown to Moses on the mount is a miniature model of the heavenly sanctuary. The vertical correspondence implied in Exodus 25 is also explicitly indicated in numerous passages throughout the Old Testament.¹⁸ The author of Hebrews therefore does not read alien thought forms back into the Levitical system, but simply recognizes and elucidates that which was part of the warp and woof of Israel's understanding of the sanctuary from its inception at Mount Sinai. By the same token, historic Adventism in its emphasis upon the vertical typology between the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries remains faithful to the fundamental Biblical perspective.

In conclusion, the hermeneutical approach of historic Adventism toward the Levitical institutions withstands the rigorous test of *sola Scriptura*. The traditional Adventist understanding of the nature of sanctuary typology (1) harmonizes with the Biblical view of typology in general and (2) takes seriously the vertical dimension that is indigenous to the basic perspective of Scripture. A subsequent article will

apply the same *sola Scriptura* test to other crucial hermeneutical issues impinging on a called church's understanding of the Levitical system.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 423.

² Among recently published sources, see especially Arnold V. Wallenkamp and W. Richard Leshner, eds., *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies* (Washington, D.C.; Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1981), and William Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1982).

³ Such summary statements have been the focus of previous articles and issues of MINISTRY magazine. See, e.g., the Special Sanctuary Issue of MINISTRY, October, 1980; L. E. Froom, "The Sanctuary: Pivotal Teaching of Adventism," MINISTRY, August, 1982, pp. 18-20; and Frank B. Holbrook, "Sanctuary of Salvation," MINISTRY, January, 1983, pp. 14-17. See also the present writer's unpublished paper "Righteousness by Faith in the Sanctuary Typology of the Pentateuch" (Andrews University, 1976). Photocopies are available from the author.

⁴ For a survey of the two major views of typology and the leading proponents of each view, see the present writer's published dissertation *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Typos Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1981), pp. 46-88.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-75, 99, 100, 338-342.

⁶ The leading proponents of this view are identified, and their arguments more fully articulated and critiqued, in a paper by the present writer, "Principles of Hermeneutics: The Nature of Typology in Hebrews," to be published as part of a book prepared by the Hebrews Subcommittee of the Daniel and Revelation Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

⁷ Leonard Goppelt, *Typos: Die typologisch Deu-*

tung des Alten Testaments im Neuen (Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1939; reprint ed., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftlich Buchgesellschaft, 1966). English translation, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982).

⁸ ———, "Typos, antitypos, typikos, hypotyposis," in G. Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 8, pp. 255, 256.

⁹ George E. Wright, "God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital," *Studies in Biblical Theology*, No. 8 (London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 61.

¹⁰ Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 54, 55.

¹¹ E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1978), p. 165, citing Werner G. Kümmel, "Schriftauslegung," RGG³, vol. 5, p. 1519.

¹² Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, "The Reasonableness of Typology," in Geoffrey W. H. Lampe and Kenneth J. Woolcombe, *Essays on Typology* (Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 22. Naperville, Ill.: A. R. Allenson, 1957), p. 16.

¹³ This phrase was coined by Gilbert F. Cope, *Symbolism in the Bible and the Church* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 20.

¹⁴ Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, pp. 191-408.

¹⁵ William G. Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence: The Book of Hebrews Speaks to Our Day* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assn., 1979), p. 91. (Italics his.)

¹⁶ For further discussion, see Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, pp. 338-343, 355-358.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 367-388.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Ps. 11:4; 18:6; 60:6; 63:2; 68:35; 96:6; 102:19; 150:1; Isa. 6:1ff.; Jonah 2:7; Micah 1:2; Hab. 2:20. For further discussion and bibliography see Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, pp. 382, 383.

* The Scripture quotations marked R.S.V. in this article are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952 © 1971, 1973.