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TYPOLOGY : A FIGURE OF SPEECH MOVING IN TIME

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It is difficult to provide a brief and concise definition of typology or figuralism. Indeed, the elusive nature of typology seems to resist any attempt to force a narrow definition. If we tried to take into account everything typology may refer to, we could enumerate at least nine « things » : 1) a way of reading the Bible ; 2) a principle of unity of the « Old » and the « New » Testaments ; 3) a principle of exegesis ; 4) a figure of speech ; 5) a mode of thought ; 6) a form of rhetoric ; 7) a vision of history ; 8) a principle of artistic composition ; 9) a manifestation of « intertextuality ».

In the traditional and most commonly understood sense, the word typology was used when certain real or supposedly historical events, persons or « things » in the Old Testament were seen also as prefigurative symbols, i.e. « types », of which, the « fulfilment » or « reality » was given in the New Testament which were called « antitypes ». Thus the crossing of Jordan (an event) is a type of baptism, Joshua (person) is a type of Jesus and the manna (a thing) is a type of the Lord's Supper. It seems to me a curious phenomenon that whilst theologians tend to be silent about typology today, discussion of it has been taken over by some secular scholars : literary critics, art-historians or historians, such as Erich Auerbach, A.C. Charity, Barbara Lewalski, Frank Kermode, Sacvan Bercovitch, and above all, by Northrop Frye.

Why this silence about typology today ? First of all, because it is a forgotten grammar and a neglected field and, as Northrop Frye says, it is

assumed to be bound up with a doctrinaire view of Christianity. But more than that, typology is risky because it is an extremely sensitive issue among those who have not entirely forgotten about it. There are two antagonistic groups who passionately resist typology. Evoking a famous passage by St Paul we might say that for the first group typology is « scandal » and for the second one it is « foolishness ». From the first group we hear the passionate protest of the American Jewish literary critic Harold Bloom :

*The Old Testament is far too strongly a poetry to be fulfilled by its revisionary descendent, the self-proclaimed New Testament (...) Frye's code, like Erich Auerbach's Figura, (...) is only another belated repetition of the Christian appropriation and usurpation of the Hebrew Bible...*¹

While Bloom and others consider typology as a means of « usurpation » of the strong text of the Hebrew Bible, there is another group for whom typology is not « scandal » but rather « foolishness ». A knowledgeable theologian wrote in the first half of this century :

*typology has always flourished in times of ignorance and decay of learning.*²

While the first group rejects typology on behalf of the Old Testament, this second group dismisses it on behalf of the New. Marcion rejected the Old Testament in the second century, and certainly, this Marcionite tendency is detectable in some 20th century theology. We might remember that there have been tendencies in Germany in the 1930s to eliminate the Old Testament from the canon as it was seen as a remnant of Judaism. This was, of course, an extreme case, and therefore one cannot but appreciate that the only comprehensive and standard monography on typology, Leonard Goppelt's *Typos* was written in such a climate in 1939.³ Well, prejudice, whether anti-Christian or anti-semitic may be a great obstacle in accepting typology.

After Goppelt some Old Testament scholars like Gerhard von Rad or patristic experts like Lampe, Daniélou or de Lubac have also turned to

1 The quotations are conflated from various writings of Harold Bloom cited in the notes of Linda Munk's manuscript : « The Seamless Garment : for Northrop Frye », pp. 39-40. I am most grateful to Dr Linda Munk for passing her manuscript for me.

2 J.R. Darbyshire, « Typology », in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. XIX (Edinburgh, 1921), pp. 503-4.

3 Leonard Goppelt, *Die typologische Deutung des Alten Testaments in Neuen* (Gutersloh, 1939). The second enlarged edition was published in 1969. The English translation was published in 1982 : *Typos. The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. D. Madvig (Michigan : W.B. Eerdmans, 1982).

typology. But I find that recently the most significant theoretical insights were gained by the literary critic Northrop Frye. Therefore I am now turning to his ideas.

At the beginning of *The Great Code* Frye writes as follows :

The analytical and historical approach that has dominated Biblical criticism for over a century was of relatively little use to me (...) At no point does it throw light on how or why a poet might read the Bible (...) There remained the more traditional approaches of medieval typology and of certain forms of Reformation commentary. They were more congenial to me because they accepted the unity of the Bible as a postulate.⁴

Frye mentions that in the Bible the « two testaments form a double mirror, each reflecting the other but neither the world outside. »⁵ Frye has introduced at least a significant theoretical innovation concerned with typology besides his own application of typology as a way of writing about the Bible. One of his genuine insights concerns typology as a figure of speech. If compared, for example, with metaphor we can see that while the metaphor is a simultaneous figure of speech, « typology is a figure that moves in time : the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future. »⁶ Illuminated by Kierkegaard's book *Repetition* Frye observed that there are only two figures that move in time : « causality » and « typology ». ⁷ But while the first rhetorical form is a backward-looking, past-oriented one and is based on reason, observation and knowledge, typology is a forward-looking, future-oriented figure based on faith, hope and vision.

In my paper I wish to elaborate Frye's thesis on typology as a figure of speech « moving in time ». Therefore, I will begin with discussing the linguistic and temporal aspects of typology, then I go on exploring it in the hermeneutical context of meaning and I shall conclude with some aspects of reading, as typology, in my view, is ultimately a way of reading.

Frye = "remembering the future and forecasting the past"
 (no word is understood in terms of the old the old is understood in terms of the new)

4 Northrop Frye, *The Great Code : The Bible and Literature*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, p. xvii.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

7 Kierkegaard distinguishes « recollection » and « repetition ». The first is typical of ancient, i.e. Greek philosophy and the latter of « modern », i.e. Christian, philosophy. « Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions, for what is recollected, has been, is recollected backwards, whereas repetition properly so called is recollected forwards. » In, Soeren Kierkegaard, *Repetition. An essay in Experimental Philosophy*, translated by Walter Lowrie, Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row, New York, Evanston and London, 1941, p. 33. It is also significant that Kierkegaard notices : « when the Greeks said that all knowledge is recollection they affirmed that all that is has been ; when one says that life is a repetition one affirms that existence which has been now becomes. » *Ibid.*, p. 52.

I. Language and time

Typology, as we have seen, contrary to the opinions of its frequent misinterpreters and misusers, is not a doctrinal issue, but is rooted in, and has much to do with, the *language* of the Bible. It is more closely bound up with what Frye calls the metaphorical-poetic, « this is that » phase of language. If so, then we must have a closer look at the special nature and dynamics of this language.

Proclamation, persuasion, power : these kerygmatic aspects are indeed important marks of biblical language but in our search we have not yet arrived at the heart of the problem. The power of the « Word », the « double-edged sword » is, above all, *a creative power*. I do not suggest that the words have power in themselves as this notion would assume magic ; this creative power is attributed to their divine provenance. Thus the Word is able to reach its readers again and again, after more than a thousand years, and, as Isaiah says, it never remains « void », it « prospers in the thing it was sent to ». But biblical language does not simply create readers, but with the help of reading it is also able to *recreate* itself.⁸ We shall see that reading and interpretation is also a rewriting, or recreating, of the text. Repetition of a motif on a higher level — this is what Goppelt has called *Steigerung*⁹ which also means a leap both forward and upward « like a shift of music into a new key as it crescendoes into a climax. »¹⁰

8 « Recreation » seems to have become a significant term recently among philosophers like Paul Ricœur or literary critics like Northrop Frye or Michael Edwards. Ricœur writes : « It is not regret for the sunken Atlantes that animates us, but hope for a recreation for language. » In, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1967, p. 349. Frye writes : « Every reader recreates what he reads : even if he is reading a letter from a personal friend he is still recreating it into his own personal orbit. Recreation of this sort always involves some kind of translation. » In, *Creation and Recreation*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980, p. 65. While for Frye reading is recreation, it is interesting that Michael Edwards stresses that writing itself is also recreation. « All writing is recreative — all writing, indifferent to any such ambition or even opposed to it, will involve the world in itself and will change it, in the transforming mystery of words. Writing, by its very nature, consumes and renews. » In, *Towards a Christian Poetics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, W.B. Eerdmans, 1984, p. 146. Later Edwards says : « Writing really does recreate the world for us, but is only a sign, an analogy, of Recreation proper, which is in the power of God. Whenever it claims otherwise, whenever it proposes itself as a sufficient, autonomous realm to be inhabited, it is a form not of new life but of death, and we are once again in the presence of demonic parody (...) the paradoxical privilege specific to the writer is to know that his success and failure are directly related to the activity of God. He attempts to recreate the world through words, as God created the world and will recreate it through the Word ; he fails to do so — his word being neither a scripture nor the text of the world to come — because of his alienation from that Word, because at the end of the day, at the end of the recreative process, his text is still written in a fallen language. » *Ibid.*

9 The English translation of *Steigerung* is « heightening », cf. Goppelt, *Typos* (1982), p. 33.

10 B. Anderson, « Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah », in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, London, SCM, 1962, p. 90.

Applying, on the other hand, Ricœur's idea of the « fullness of language »¹¹ to my subject, I am proposing the idea that biblical language is *fulfilment-language* because its provocative, enigmatic nature yearns for stillness and fulfilment. It is resolved, « satisfied », if it comes to a fullness, if it is « fulfilled ».

In order to understand the nature of this fulfilment-language we have to anatomize the two words : « figure » and « fulfil ». *Figura* is the Latin translation of the Greek *typos* which means pattern, « example », « model », « mould ». This noun is derived from the verb *typtein* which means « to strike » or « to stupefy with a blow », « to stamp a mark », « to impress a figure ». *Typos* may denote also « scar », « print of nails » (John 20 : 25). It may also refer to the « example of obedience of faith », a « model » to be imitated by the Christian. St Paul uses the word in such a sense several times. Leonard Goppelt writes : « The more a life is moulded by the word, the more it becomes *typos*, a model, or mould. »¹² In Romans 6 : 17 the teaching is called a *typos*, a « mould », into which the Christian is placed to be formed by God. The « fulfilment » of *typos* is the *antitypos*. The latter word is used only twice in the New Testament, in Hebrews 9 : 24 and 1 Peter 3 : 21.

The most significant application of the word is by St Paul who uses it as a hermeneutical term. In the classical passage of 1 Corinthians 10 St Paul describes some events of the Old Testament as *typoi* in order to show that those events point to significant events in the present stage of salvation history. Old Testament events are seen as examples that are evoked to warn those, who, in the present (and higher) stage of salvation history are meant to be the people of God.

St Paul's most famous application of *typos* as a hermeneutical term is in Romans 5 : 14 when he speaks of Adam as « the *figure* of him that was to come » (*typos tou mellonthos*).

Let us now turn to the verb « fulfil » : the verbs « fill up », « fulfil » or « complete » are used in the New Testament with conspicuous frequency. We often read that prophecies are fulfilled, « time is fulfilled » (Mark 1 : 15) ; « the law is fulfilled », « the Scripture is fulfilled » and we hear time and again that things happen « so that it might be fulfilled ».

We should notice that this fulfilment language is used even in the negative sense, Jesus Christ chides the religious authorities :

Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.
(Matthew 23 : 32).

11 Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970, p. 31.

12 Leonard Goppelt, « Typos », in, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Friedrich (Michigan, W.B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 53.

St Paul writes that the Jews disobeying the Gospel « fill up their sin » (1 Thessalonians 2 : 16). The recurring formula « that it might be fulfilled » is most frequently used by Matthew but it also turns up in John.

From these examples we can infer that the biblical use and operation of « fulfilment » is far more complex than a simplistic and mechanical « prediction-fulfilment » model would suggest. The biblical idea of fulfilment is organically bound up with biblical language. As Breward Childs has convincingly argued, the biblical sense of « fulfilment », unlike the Greek sense of truth, does not involve the idea of exact correspondances or the matching of two independent entities. Fulfilment in the Bible is the « filling in » of the « word ». ¹³

Behind the biblical dialectics of promise and fulfilment, concealment and revelation, there is a special view of time characteristic only of the Bible. Gerhard von Rad has shown that the Israelite perceptions of time was totally different from our modern understanding of it : Israel knew only « filled time » ¹⁴ and time was known only from its content. Oscar Cullmann who in his epoch-making and much discussed book *Christ and Time* (1946) has convincingly demonstrated the sharp contrast between the « linear » conception of time in the revelatory history of the Bible and the « cyclic » conception of Hellenism. A philosophical speculation concerning the nature of time is totally alien from the world of the Bible because it presupposes that God the creator gives meaning to time. In the Hellenic world, on the contrary, time has no meaning and it is observed only as the rhythmic rotation of nature. The Bible, however, radically affirms the *arche* and the *telos* (the beginning and the end) and as soon as they are recognized we can connect these two points thereby constituting a « line ». ¹⁵ C.A. Patrides applied the metaphors of « phoenix » and the « ladder » to distinguish between the cyclical, meaningless flux of time in the Greco-Roman world, and, on the other hand, the affirmation of a progressive view of time and history in the Bible and in early Christianity. ¹⁶ The Bible, as we said, affirms the creator who gives meaning to time. Since creation had suffered a severe blow by the Fall, God decided to work out a plan of salvation for human kind. This redemptive plan appears to us human beings as a « line » because it is temporally structured and is carried out in history. God gives promises to his chosen ones and the historical expectations tend to proceed towards the

13 Breward S. Childs, « Prophecy and Fulfilment », in *Interpretation*, vol. XII, July 1958, p. 267.

14 Gerhard von Rad, « The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions », in *Old Testament Theology* (New York : Harper and Row, 1965) vol. II, trans. D.M.G. Stalker, pp. 99-125.

15 Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time. The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (London : SCM, 1962). The German original is from 1946.

16 C.A. Patrides, *The Grand Design of God. The Literary Form of the Christian View of History* (London : Routledge, 1972), pp. 1-12.

arrival of a Messiah as the divine plan is moving towards his completion. The mid-point of this line is the Christ-event and the end or the complete consummation is the *eschaton*. In a nutshell this is Cullmann's notion of the *Heilsgeschichte* translated into English either as redemptive history or salvation history.¹⁷ In the New Testament time is never spoken of in an abstract way, it is always mentioned in connection with this redemptive process. Cullmann has pointed out that the first deviation from the Christian understanding of time was by the Gnostics who, in fact, supplanted the Christian view of time with unbiblical Hellenistic concepts. In his fight with the Gnostics Ireneus recognized that « the Christian proclamation stands or falls with redemptive history ».¹⁸

Having seen *Heilsgeschichte* as a temporal framework of typology we can say that the biblical interplay between figure and fulfilment is not to be seen in exact correspondances (which would derive from an ultimately Greek understanding of truth) but in terms of the biblical view of time articulated by the power of the Word, as Breward S. Childs puts it :

*The word sets an event in motion which is then filled up. The filled word is one that has reached wholeness and, therefore, fulfilled. The kairos of both the word and the event are the same. The chronos is, however, different, and it is during this time that the creative word strives for its filling. The length of time which is needed for the word to reach its completion is not decisive.*¹⁹

II. Meaning

Fulfilment-language by its nature, gradually generates « meaning » for the reader. I am proposing the thesis that meaning in the Bible tends to be a dynamic process rather than a static entity : meaning is in the making, it is gradually being born. To reflect on the hermeneutical context of typology I shall invite a modern technical term in theology, the *sensus plenior*.

The *Sensus Plenior* gained wider currency in Roman Catholic theology after the papal encyclical of 1943 encouraged Catholic theologians to adopt methods of critical and historical exegesis in the study of the Bible. The category was intended to help in understanding of some messianic prophetic texts like Genesis 3 : 15 ; Isaiah 7 : 14 ; Hoseah 11 : 1 etc.

¹⁷ Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, London, SCM Press, 1967. (The German original *Heils Geschichte* is from 1965).

¹⁸ Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁹ Childs, *op. cit.* (1958), pp. 267-8.

The most significant theological discussion of this question was presented by Raymond E. Brown who proposed the following definition in 1955 :

*The Sensus Plenior is that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of the biblical texts (or a group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation.*²⁰

Brown emphasized that the *Sensus Plenior* is not a new sense but it belongs to the literal sense ; it is, as he later puts it, the *approfondissement* of the literal sense.²¹ I would suggest that the fuller sense of Scripture is the literal sense that is pregnant with a future. The prophet does not simply « foresee » the future. For him all the futurity is within the « thing » but it is understood only later on the basis of the progressive revelation. The *Sensus Plenior* is usually recognized in retrospect : just as in Jesus' lifetime the disciples were unable to understand some of their master's sayings (for example about the temple) or his actions (for example the footwashing) but Jesus promised to send them the Paraclete who would enable them to understand these sayings and events. According to J. Coppens the « evangelists themselves have developed the *sensus plenior* of the words of Christ. »²²

Thus Matthew, for example, when speaking about « fulfilling Scripture » recreates an Old Testament passage by « filling in » the « hollow mould » of some enigmatic texts in the Old Testament. The meaning has been there for centuries but it comes to fullness, according to Matthew, only in Christ. For him this Old Testament passage is like a « seed ». A « seed » contains the tree and the branches in potential yet no scientific-microscopic analysis can demonstrate what the seed carries. The « surplus » of meaning, the « fullness » of a passage, the *Sensus Plenior* can only be recognized in due course, when the time is « ripe » for that.

Critics of the *Sensus Plenior* are probably right when they say that this theory is based on a traditional view of inspiration which attributes intention to the author. However, I believe that the *Sensus Plenior* remains

20 R.E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore : St Mary's University, 1955). « The *Sensus Plenior* in the last Ten Years », in *Catholic Biblical Commentary* 25 (1963) pp. 262-85 ; « The Problems of the *Sensus Plenior* » in *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 26 (1968).

21 Brown (1968), *op. cit.*, p. 72.

22 Quoted by Brown (1955), *op. cit.*, p. 145.

a useful category even for a new, reader-oriented theory of inspiration. In order to develop this new idea further, in the last section of my paper I shall turn to the question of reading.

III. Reading

At the beginning of my lecture I suggested that typology is a way of reading the Bible. But what is « reading ». How is it related to « language » and « meaning », how is this threefold hermeneutical scheme accomplished in reading ?

We have seen that reading is the recreation of the text. I wish to expand this view by suggesting that reading is ultimately appropriation.

To understand what this word means I turn again to Ricœur. Ricœur has worked out a new theory of interpretation in which he has introduced one of his key-terms : « appropriation ». We speak about appropriation, he says, when « the interpretation of the text ends up in the interpretation of the subject », the text is « completed » (we can even say : « fulfilled » or, even « satisfied » !) if the reader better understands himself.²³ Interpretation overcomes estrangement of the cultural distance in so far as it appropriates (« swallows up ») what was alien before.

In his *Interpretation Theory* he defines it as follows :

*Appropriation ... ceases to appear as a kind of possession, as a way of taking hold of things, instead it implies a moment of dispossession of the egoistic and narcissical ego.*²⁴

Moreover, interpretation as appropriation is also a kind of actualization and thus reading can be compared to the performance of a musical score. In the actualization of the text, reading becomes like speech. Interpretation should appropriate not the intention of the author but the intention of the text. The essence of Ricœur's new theory of interpretation is that the text itself has intention : the text speaks, the text orientates our thought. Therefore interpretation is not an act on the text but of the text. Appropriation is the recovery of what is at work, in labour, in the text. Reading is only resaying what the text says by itself, it is an act in which the destiny of the text is « fulfilled ».²⁵ This is exactly what is happening in

23 Paul Ricœur, « What is a Text ? » in David Klemm (ed.), *Hermeneutical Enquiry*, vol. I. Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1986, p. 246.

24 Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, Texas, Texas Christian University Press, 1976, p. 94.

25 Ricœur, « What is a Text ? », p. 246.

typology : the reader not only recognizes that the text has been once fulfilled but he himself or she herself fulfills the text by identifying himself or herself with it.

Now we have come to see what a huge difference there is between « usurpation » and « appropriation ». Was Harold Bloom right in saying that the writers of the « New » Testament audaciously « usurped » the strong poetry of the Hebrew Bible ? How can we suggest that Bloom is mistaken ? Let us make clearer the semantic difference between the two words. What is the meaning of « usurpation » ? The word undoubtedly evokes a feverish ambition for possession and this ambition has definitely to do with the hardening of one's ego ! « Appropriation », as we have just heard from Ricœur, is exactly the contrary : « a moment of dispossession of the egoistic and narcissistic ego. » Appropriation is like « swallowing up » or digesting something that was originally alien from us. Perhaps that is the reason why in the Book of Revelation the Seer of Patmos hears a voice telling him to go to the angel who stands with a little book in his hands to take the book away from him and to eat it.

Take it, and eat it up : it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. (10 : 9)

My conclusion is, that a fulfilment of the biblical text in reading, ideally results in the loss of one's ego. And only by losing one's ego will one be capable of being seen through and transmitting light, only by losing our ego can we become what Frye calls « transparent ». Now this is the very point where Ricœur's theory of the text and Frye's vision of the Bible coincide. Frye writes :

At the end [of the Bible] the reader, also, is invited to identify himself with the book ... The apocalypse is the way the world looks after the ego has disappeared.²⁶

This identification is probably due to the kerygmatic language and the authority of Scripture. The Bible has indeed a special authority. We may recall Auerbach's almost famous notions about the Bible's « tyrannical » claim to truth :

The Bible's claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer's, it is tyrannical — it excludes all other claims. The world of Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality — it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy. All other scenes, issues, and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it,

²⁶ Frye, *The Great Code*, pp. 14-15.

and it is promised that all of them, the history of all mankind, will be given their due place within its frame, will be subordinated to it. The Scripture stories do not, like Homer's, court out of favour, that they may please us and enchant us — they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels.²⁷

This declarative statement is both true and false at the same time. It is true because it understands the authoritative claim of Scripture but it is false because it depicts this claim as an alien, totalitarian threat to man. It is exactly this Ricœurian notion of appropriation that Auerbach, unlike Frye, did not take into consideration. At the end of the Bible, Frye writes quoting Milton, that the ultimate authority is not the « external Bible », but the Word of God in the human heart. Only when the book is indeed « swallowed up », only then can we speak about the disappearance of the ego. Paraphrasing Frye's notion about the purpose of studying Shakespeare, we can say that the end of reading the Bible is not to admire it but to possess it so that its verbal energy can filter into us and shape our way of thinking. Such an « interpenetration » — using again Frye's word — is the true purpose of reading the Bible, this interpenetration is taking place in typology : Eliah becomes John, John becomes Eliah or Adam becomes Christ insofar as Christ becomes Adam.

However, Frye does not only speak about a « moment » of dispossession like Ricœur, but about an eventual final vision that is conveyed to us by the language of love, in which there is no ego, no argument, nor « Old », nor « New » Testament, in which life is not opaque but becomes transparent. It is the appropriation of the surprizing final vision of the Seer of Patmos : namely, that the strong, victorious Lion of the tribe of Judah and the weak Lamb pitifully slain, are one.

²⁷ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971, pp. 14-15.