Catholic Biblical Association  Chicago, IL August 5-8, 2006

Report of Discussion of Continuing Seminar on Biblical Issues in
Jewish-Christian Relations: Typology

After introductions Amy Jill Levine announced that she is sending out two articles on the Akedah one by Larry Kant of Lexington Theological Seminary and one by André LaCoque of Chicago Theological Seminary. They will be added to the session bibliography.

Present were:

Day 1 Sunday August 6
We began with a reading of Gen 22:1-19 followed by a reading of two excerpts from Origen’s homilies on Genesis and Exodus #8 (sections 6 and 8). This lead to comments both critical of and favorable toward Origen’s typological interpretation, summarized as:

Critical Concerns:
- Does this not amount to Origen reading his own soul into the text of Genesis? Is it not eisegesis? He is so far from the original audience of the text – how can he not misrepresent the original intention of the author? It demands a second stage of hermeneutics where we explain why he assumes what he does and how we approach the text with different assumptions.
- There are specifically Jewish readings of the text (Gen 22) and specifically Christian readings, but can we not establish an objective reading?
- Typology is helpful to get into Genesis 22, but it does not get to the heart of the text. Genesis 22 is essentially about an inner struggle.
- Genesis 22 is a Jewish text to which both later Judaism and Christianity are heirs. Does Origen not separate it from its Jewish origin or, more precisely, does he not separate from how Jews have understood the passage?
- Patristic commentaries are “bad Scripture Study (as currently practiced) but good Theology.” Origen does well by Fourth Century standards.
- The historical-critical method does provide a common denominator for people coming from different confessional traditions. There needs to be an objective core on which we can agree.
- You can use Church Father commentaries to gain new insights, but you still must deal with the question, “What does it mean today?”
- One participant found he was less concerned about typological interpretation by Jews than by Christians. The Jews would offer it as one among many readings. Would the Christians do the same? (Some thought they would. See “Question group B” below)
Positive Remarks:
- But Origen’s task was to render a scriptural text useful to a Christian group. How else can he have done this, given his situation? He was trying to save this text from people like Marcion, who would say it was irrelevant to Christians.
- My wife who has studied Zen saw a koan near the end of Origen’s interpretation.
- Reading Origen’s remarks helps to clarify the distinction between exegesis and eisegesis, but moderns are the first to care about an original meaning of the text. (Later comment: it is overstated to say that "moderns" are the first to care about the "original meaning" of a text. For example, in Justin's Dialogue w/ Trypho, Trypho states that Isaiah 7:14 refers to the birth of Hezekiah. Not only moderns are concerned about such things.
- One participant was not keen on the topic of typological interpretation, but as he engaged it, found it leading me to bigger questions about how we appropriate truth and how we come to knowledge about something.

As the discussion moved on, we sought to address the “seven overarching questions about typological interpretation” listed in the agenda. In the presentation below they are addressed in four groups:

A. Questions (1 and 2)
1. How exactly does typology work?
2. What are the limits or controls to which it is subject?
- It is not a method with fixed rules, but a partisan proclamation of central faith convictions that Jesus is Savior of the World, and then a theological dance with the text.
- It seems then to be a very individualistic or private reading.
- For Christian typological interpretation the believing community at large is the control. If a Christological interpretation is out of synch with what enough other Christians actually believe, it is not accepted or preserved.
- The anti-types (New Testament or Christian realities that correspond to the “types” in the First Testament) have to be similar enough to the alleged “types.”
- It is more an art than a science.
- The Fathers were keenly attentive to textual and rhetorical features of the text.
- The faith context of the interpreter is important, but you really have to deal with the text in se at least as a starting point with sets certain limits for the interpretational field.

B Questions (3 and 4)
3. Does it always involve supercessionism, that is to say, is all typological interpretation Anti-Jewish?
4. Is typological interpretation to be repudiated?
- Justin Martyr’s typological interpretation seems inseparable from his pronounced anti-Judaism.
- The main point of typological interpretation is not anti-Judaism but seeing the text as applying to the interpreter’s present.
- The difference between the Jewish typological interpretations adduced by
Levenson, as opposed to those done by the Church Fathers seems to rest in the fact that the Jews were open to different alternatives, which would often be listed on the same page – suggesting that any one of the interpretations was not ultimate. Can we be sure that Christian writers like Origen were not as open to other readings? Did they assume that was how things were or is that our assumption? In the Middle Ages extensive lists of alternative interpretations of biblical passages were read. Although we need not assume all interpretations were necessarily equal, there must have been a general acceptance of the fact of multiple interpretations.

C. Questions (5 and 6)

5. Is it appropriate and good in some cases?

6. What differentiates good or legitimate typological interpretation from bad?
   - The fact that the method of typological interpretation emerged within such a polemical context does make it difficult. But is it not possible to accept the method while repudiating the polemic?
   - Here are two good principles:
     1) No typological interpretation is good if it is “anti-anyone.”
     2) No typological interpretation is a good one if it affirms superiority (“God is everywhere and in everything – except arrogance.” A. J. Heschel)
   - Some of the new forms of biblical interpretation work in ways similar to typological interpretation, for example, feminist criticism or post colonial criticism. These do not replace historical criticism, but address the implementation of the text to the present situation. They are applied after historical criticism, and may lead us to correct what we think are our objective observations.
   - It is important to be conscious of the work of the Church Fathers, but not to do exactly what they do.

D. Question 7

7. What pastoral demands does typological exegesis necessitate?
   - Many people (among them our students) want to take the Church Fathers’ interpretations without taking into account their commitment to Christ and how that affects their reading. They take the Patristic interpretation as objective truth-end of discussion! They need to be made aware that typological interpretation is faith driven and its context has to be taken into account. It is also a problem in that many who reach for the Patristic interpretations do not recognize who gets hurt by some of their pronouncements. That is, they fail to look at the ethical implications of the Church Fathers' interpretations when concretized as pronouncements.
   - We can read Origen’s interpretation, but reject the anti-Jewish aspects of it in the present – but to do this we need to explain the historical context which led him to present it as he did.
Day 2 Monday August 7
In this session we met with the Task Force on “The Fourth Gospel and the Old Testament” convened by R. Francis Martin. Both parts of the session were given to the discussion of the paper by Andrew Minto on John 3:14-15.

I will not give a full summary of the discussion, since after a ten-minute presentation by Andrew, the floor was opened to all questions, and the discussion moved in various directions, without textual or topical guidelines.

It is important to note that not everyone in the room was a regular member of either our group or the Gospel of John and the Old Testament group. I learned after the session that one of the most alarming statements was made by a “walk-in.”

Some of the topics from Day 1 were discussed further, with Francis Martin responding or clarifying his remarks about the spiritual sense and why his group is addressing it. Several of us were concerned as the discussion went on that it seemed as though once they discerned what the author of the Fourth Gospel was saying, that ended the matter. They were surprised at the fact that people concerned about Jewish-Christian relations might be upset by some of this (for more see Day 3). It was asked:

- Doesn’t the fact that John sees so much of the Old Testament fulfilled in Christ imply that it has no additional meaning?
- Is it really true that the bronze serpent “didn’t work”? It seems it did work and was later misused.
- Andrew Minto asserted that typology and teleology were retrospective, not prospective, but one participant argued that this is not the case in John 5:38 (“Moses wrote about me…”)
- Andrew Minto said he did not see Jesus as replacing Israel but completing it.
- This led to the rejoinder by Isaac Kalimi that “when New Testament authors see all the types as pointing to Jesus, what is left for the Jews? Nothing.”
- Andrew added that the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul are not the complete Christian view. PBC 2001 “On the Jews and their Sacred Scriptures…” has to be factored in.
- But can typological interpretation be used without leading to contempt? (Smiga) How are we to use patristic exegesis without continuing to pass on the patrimony of contempt?
- Much discussion ensued from Andrew Minto’s statement to the effect that “If there is no Ancient Israel there can be no Christianity.” He seemed to expect that once we heard that, our concerns about potential anti-Judaism would be allayed. They were not. This was a moment where the differences between our presuppositions were apparent. Of course, what is missing from his formulation is “present-day Israel.” It is all well and good that Ancient Israel existed, but what of the fact that modern Judaism remains alive and well?
- One participant remarked “The Jews still have the covenants. There is something wonderfully beautiful and terribly awful in our separation.”
- An interesting intervention regarding the continued role of the bronze serpent was that it did re-emerge in Judaism not only in the passage about the image of it in the temple being removed, but also in the Seraphim (burning ones) of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1.
- One participant asked whether the author of the paper had reified his focus by
making it all teleological. Could John be combining prophecy and teleology; could the relation of the two texts (John and Numbers, NT and OT) be more a conversation than a one-way highway?

Day 3 Tuesday August 8
First Hour
We began with the discussion of next year’s topic. The topic of “the Land” had been suggested by Phil and initial response from members of the group was positive. Phil’s actual suggestion was:

The Land in biblical thought, the attendant pastoral or theological question being how Christians can affirm contemporary Jewish attachment to Eretz Israel without any positive Christian precedent to draw upon and without conflating theological respect with simplistic answers to modern geopolitical conflicts. Rich Lux has been finishing his book on this.

Ensuing discussion confirmed the group’s desire to have this as our next topic with the following eight considerations:

1. We must be careful to focus the discussion since current conversation on the issue is so highly charged that reasonable discussion of it is quite difficult. Perhaps it could be focused upon Jerusalem.

2. An important theological consideration is the relationship of the Spiritual and the Physical.

3. We might need three sessions for this:
   a) The Land in Biblical Texts
   b) The Land in Later Jewish Writings
   c) The Land in Later Christian Writings.

4. Perhaps only two years (or even one) will be needed.

5. It will need more time if we connect with other groups. Having a session with another group limits how much we can cover. Perhaps we need not meet with another group.

6. While it will be helpful to take note of some of the variety of modern Jewish positions on this issue we should guard against getting bogged down in the complexities of current events.

7. We should take into account appropriate magisterial documents that deal with the Land, and also quotations from John Paul II.

8. There must be some way in which we can be apprised of the Muslim position, but much concern was expressed about how that can muddy the waters, and that it involves texts from after the time not only of the Bible but even of the Mishnah. (David Bosworth could make available a seminal article on the topic of the Islamic presence and claims). This last was a point of some debate.

This is the mandate for John Clabeaux and Phil Cunningham for next year.

Second Hour
The major concerns about the discussion on day two involved statements like “Jesus uses the language of the Old Testament to reveal himself.” and “Jesus didn’t replace Judaism, he completed it.” These are appropriate to the time the Fourth Gospel was written, but is not a good way to think about the situation now.
Other comments included:

- A Jew fully immersed in his or her Judaism can know a great deal about Jesus – more in fact than many Christians. It is true that a Christian, after undergoing an experience like Pentecost, can suddenly see things in texts like Psalm 118, but what do we do with present day Jewish experience? How does it fit with all of these Christological insights?
- Much popular spirituality deals with Judaism in Christian texts like Romans as though the newer thinking about Paul never emerged. A helpful image is constellations. The stars (the texts) are there, but the constellations (interpretations) are the lines one draws from star to star.
- One participant appreciated the distinction that was made between typology and prophecy and that typology was essentially retrospective, and said, “We do need, as a community, to come to some agreement on the patterns we see.”
- One participant said, “Our interaction with the other group did not shock me as much as other dialogues of which I was a part. The real shift in thought necessary in the post-Holocaust period has simply not yet penetrated Christian discussion generally.”
- The points that were of concern to us are, unfortunately, how most Catholics still view things.
- We do need to be in some kind of dialogue with the practitioners of typological interpretation. But typological interpretation has to be done with a second naïveté. You cannot pretend you are Paul or Origen discovering these connections for the first time. A Christian believer recognizes in the text something in which he or she believes. With typological interpretation one leaps from the present to the past. Yet to do historical criticism you have to be post Enlightenment, and as a Catholic, post Vatican II. We dare not ignore the historical critical realities and we cannot abide supersessionism. All handling of typological interpretation has to be addressed with the limits supplied from historical criticism and the conviction that the Jewish covenant is a lasting covenant.

The following final comments addressed questions 6 and 7:

6. What differentiates good or legitimate typological interpretation from bad?
7. What pastoral demands does typological exegesis necessitate?
- Bad typological interpretation breaks with Nostra Aetate. The statement “She [the Church] deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of antisemitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews” was stated so strongly precisely to include such major figures as Augustine or Aquinas.
- Both Jews and Christians have canonized texts. We do not have to canonize the interpretations too, do we?
- How are we to apply interpretations of the Church Fathers that disagree with each other as much as they do?
- One participant expressed, “This entire discussion has been very important to me personally. When I first learned the historical critical methods I began to notice problems with the ways so many people speak of the Jews. I felt isolated. This
reminds me that there are others who share my concerns about the Anti-Jewish potential of these ways of reading the passages.”

- We really need to work on the Office of Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours. They contain many typological interpretations that are not in accord with current Catholic teaching on Jews and Judaism.
- In RCIA you read what the Church Fathers say, but not without current pronouncements. That is a good thing. An important resource is the USCCB collection of documents “The Jews, the Bible, and the Death of Jesus.”
- If we meet with another group in the future we should ask that they read a paper or background document summarizing the key concerns we have with support from the post-Conciliar and USCCB documents.

Respectfully submitted,

John Clabeaux