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# Current Roman Catholic Thought on Prophetic Interpretation

By WALTER E. RAST

It is common knowledge by now that Roman Catholicism today is in the midst of a widespread movement of renewed interest in the Bible. One could cite as an illustration the discussions on the schema dealing with the church at the recent session of the Vatican Council in which New Testament ideas of the church played a noticeable role. Though for non-Roman Catholics the schema on the church may still leave something to be desired, the attention given to Biblical material indicates an important development.<sup>1</sup> Roman Catholic Biblical study is provoking thought at many levels of the church's life, in theological formulation, preaching, teaching, and the liturgy.

This movement has various aspects to it. One promising area is the increasing study of the Bible by the laity, made possible by the production of a considerable number of aids for Bible study. Materials ranging from those produced by St. John's Abbey or the Paulist Fathers in this country to the top-selling single-volume edition of the Jerusalem Bible published under the guidance of the École Biblique in Jerusalem indicate something of what is being made available in various parts of the world.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion of this schema by Edmund Schlink in *Dialog*, III (Spring 1964), 136—142.

<sup>2</sup> C. Umhau Wolf in "Recent Roman Catholic Bible Study and Translation," *Journal of Bible and Religion*, XXIX (1961), 280—289, gives a good summary of various publications by Roman Catholics. The Jerusalem Bible has appeared in a multivolume work with extensive

Behind this more popular transmission, however, is an abundance of scholarly activity devoted to the problems and principles of Biblical interpretation. It is in this latter area, including the comprehensive question of prophetic and Messianic interpretation, that some significant work has been produced in Roman Catholic circles. To properly appreciate what Roman Catholic scholars are writing about the prophets today, it is important for one to know something of the background of recent developments in Biblical studies generally, of which the problem of prophetic interpretation is one reflection. The present article will trace some of the high-points of these developments first of all and then will turn to deal with recent trends in prophetic and Messianic interpretation.

One factor especially appears to be important in the current revival and influence of Biblical studies. This is the opening up of Roman Catholic scholarship to the use of the various critical tools available to scholars today for Biblical research. For some time Roman Catholic scholars had worked freely in such supportive fields as philology, textual criticism, and archaeology, and an impressive list of contributions in these areas could be listed from the last century and the present one. But such study tended to restrict itself from any

notes. The one-volume edition was issued as *La Sainte Bible traduite en français sous la direction de L'École Biblique de Jérusalem* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1956).

direct application to the mainstream of theological work. It would be safe to characterize the picture up until only recently as one in which Biblical study and dogmatic theology lived next to each other without meeting one another.<sup>3</sup> There appeared to be little attraction on the part of dogmaticians toward thinking out the significance of the work of their Biblical colleagues for what they were saying, and when Biblical scholars took to theologizing, it was customarily done in terms foreign to their positions as Biblical scholars. Thus, as late as 1947 a Protestant writer, after praising the contributions of Roman Catholic Biblical scholarship in various areas, could go on to express disappointment that "when the Catholic writes about Jesus, Messianic prophecy, and the doctrines expressed in the various New Testament books, he is controlled at every point by loyalty to the teaching church."<sup>4</sup> This meant that there was little opportunity for Biblical studies to penetrate to the heart of the church's life and thought.

Such a situation produced a spirit of defensiveness within the Roman Catholic Church generally toward the work of historical criticism, particularly as this had developed in Europe. The experiences of the Modernist controversy served only to sharpen the distrust of the use of historical methods in studying the Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Leo

XIII in *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) condemned the rationalist basis of the Modernist movement, while at the same time promoting the philological and textual work of Biblical scholars. But the general reaction of Roman Catholicism toward the historical investigation of the Bible was to adopt what some have called a "siege mentality," and this undoubtedly because the theological implications of historical criticism were more immediate than in the case of textual work or philology.

One cannot entirely impugn this reserve in Rome toward such study. Biblical criticism in some of its early proponents was tied to certain presuppositions which led to unhappy results for Christian faith and theology. It was the genius of Roman Catholicism's greatest Biblical scholar of the first part of this century, M. J. Lagrange, that he saw that the principles of historical research in the Scripture were not necessarily connected with the conclusions that certain scholars were drawing from them. Subsequent Biblical study has profoundly confirmed this insight of the founder of the Dominican school in Jerusalem, the *École Biblique*. Lagrange shines like a brilliant star in the history of Roman Catholic Biblical scholarship of this period, but his work was often overshadowed by the preoccupation of the hierarchy with the Modernist movement. He was, though living at the right time, a man ahead of his times. His time has come today, though he died in 1938, and contemporary Roman Catholic Biblical scholars all over the world draw their inspiration

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John L. McKenzie, "Problems of Hermeneutics in Roman Catholic Exegesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXVII (1958), 197.

<sup>4</sup> James H. Cobb, "Current Trends in Catholic Biblical Research," *The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow*, ed. H. R. Willoughby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c. 1947), p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> A brief history of the reactions of the Roman Church to Biblical criticism, including the Modernist controversy, can be found in Jean

Steinmann, *Biblical Criticism*, Vol. LXIII of *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1958).

from his exemplary career and accomplishments.<sup>6</sup>

Today the siege is off, and Biblical scholars in the Roman Catholic Church are employing, often with enviable skill, the various tools available for study of the Bible. In the Old Testament this includes research into comparative literatures of the ancient Near East. It comprehends study of the literary forms and genres of Biblical and extra-Biblical literature as well as questions regarding the composition and transmission of the Biblical writings, their authorship, and dating. It includes, finally, the question of the bearing of such work on theological formulation, and there is a growing eagerness to discuss the relation of Biblical studies to other theological fields. Lagrange saw all this as a legitimate undertaking which the church should not be fearful of supporting and from which it could reap rich harvests. He combined in his own life a first-rate scientific scholarship with a profound commitment to the Christian faith.

More recently Roman Catholic Biblical study has received its clearest impetus from the encyclical of Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, issued in 1943.<sup>7</sup> Drawing its inspiration from the work of such men as Lagrange and his followers, this document is a masterpiece of saying what should be said and leaving unsaid what should not be said. More than anything else, this en-

cyclical provides the platform for present-day Biblical research in Roman circles, and one can notice in current works in various languages a repeated appeal to the directives set down in it. Though not an *ex cathedra* pronouncement, it asks of Biblical scholars that they explicate the meaning of the Biblical text according to the intention of the inspired author, and in order to accomplish this they are to employ all the critical tools available, including also the methods of Form Criticism. The effect of all this has been to plunge Roman Catholic scholars into many areas of Biblical study which had long been the domain of scholars of other Christian denominations. Thus it is not uncommon today to find the former participating, and often leading, in interconfessional discussions and research. Roman Catholic scholars today could hardly be said to be, in Pope's words,

Exegetes who major issues shun  
And hold their farthing candles to the sun.<sup>8</sup>

One of the problems of Old Testament interpretation which has not been brushed aside in Roman Catholic publications is the relation of the Old Testament to Christ. As will have been anticipated in the foregoing sketch, the problem of how Messianic passages in the Old Testament are to be interpreted has not been untouched by the current developments in Biblical study.

A fundamental problem that the historical study of the Scripture raises for Messianic interpretation is what various Old Testament Messianic statements meant originally in the mind of those who spoke them, such as prophets as well as the hearers to whom they were addressed. In

<sup>6</sup> For a fine account of Lagrange's work see F. M. Braun, *The Work of Père Lagrange*, adapted from the French by Richard T. A. Murphy (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., c. 1963).

<sup>7</sup> A handy collection of translations of the encyclicals dealing with Biblical studies and decrees of the Biblical Commission is found in *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, 4th ed. (St. Meinrad, Ind., 1946).

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Braun, p. 161.

giving attention to such questions Roman Catholic Biblical scholars have had to face the same issues as their Protestant counterparts, and often their solutions have not been greatly different, a fact that has had interesting ecumenical implications. Since 1943 such work has had the support of the magisterium, and Biblical scholars have been as obligated to inquire after the original meaning of the prophets as to state the fuller meaning of their words in the light of the coming of Christ.

The consequences of this kind of historical inquiry have been far-reaching, especially toward the traditional way Messianic prophecy had been presented in Roman Catholic textbooks on doctrine. It had been the custom in dogmatic textbooks to list prophetic predictions and to show their immediate fulfillment in Christ.<sup>9</sup> This way of relating Messianic prophecy to Christ assumed a straight line correspondence between the prophecy and its fulfillment. Such an approach has been challenged by recent Biblical scholarship, with the result that tension has sometimes arisen between the Biblical and more traditional dogmatic theologian. Such a situation is referred to by the president of the Catholic Biblical Association at its annual meeting in Buffalo in 1956. At this important colloquium, which was devoted entirely to the problems of Messianic interpretation, Thomas Aquinas Collins made these remarks in his opening address: "Professors of Sacred Scripture find it difficult — nay, impossible — to keep silence when they discover Messianic texts misinterpreted or misused, especially in

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Roland E. Murphy, "Notes on Old Testament Messianism and Apologetics," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XIX (1957), 5.

manuals of Apologetics and Dogmatic Theology. They insist that in many instances the texts referred to simply do not prove what they are alleged to prove."<sup>10</sup> At the same time he went on to assert that Biblical scholars must take seriously their responsibility to provide an alternative that will set forth the Christological importance of the Old Testament.

Though there may be those Biblical scholars who still maintain the view of Messianic prophecy as direct prediction, their number has waned considerably. At the same time those who have disavowed this interpretation have been quick to point out that they have not disowned the Old Testament's final meaning in Christ. The consensus seems to be that the connection between the Old Testament prophecy and Christ is more complex than the scheme of direct prediction and fulfillment would allow.<sup>11</sup> Historical investigation of the meaning of the texts themselves provokes the question of what significance direct predictions of Jesus Christ could have had for men living in the age of the Old Testament. It introduces into the interpretation of the Scripture a notion of growth, which appears to be more in harmony with the Bible's own view of revelation. God's revelation of Himself is not a one-level disclosure, just as the history in which He works is not static but consists of dynamic change and movement. It is recognition of this

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas Collins, "Presidential Address," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XIX (1957), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the sharp criticism of the view which tried to find predictions of details in the life of Jesus in the Old Testament by John L. McKenzie, *The Two-Edged Sword* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., c. 1956), p. 206.

dimension that necessitates some modifications in the exegesis of various Old Testament Messianic texts as over against the older interpretation.

Roman Catholic scholarship has given full place to this more complex character of Messianic expectation. As an example we could point to E. F. Sutcliffe's note on Gen. 3:15 in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*. Sutcliffe holds out for the Messianic importance of this passage as containing a promise of victory for the "woman's Seed" (taken in a collective sense) over that of the serpent's. However, he goes on, "But how and by what means and under whose leadership this victory was to be achieved was not yet revealed and became clear only with the gradual progress of revelation."<sup>12</sup> The implication of such a view would be that the Biblical reader must actually perform a dual task of seeing (1) what the words meant to those to whom they were first spoken, and (2) what they mean in the light of the fuller revelation which has come in Christ.

First there is the obligation to find out what the texts meant originally. Here the encyclical of Pius XII urged that "the interpreter must, as it were, go back wholly in spirit to those remote centuries of the East, and with the aid of history, archaeology, ethnology, and other sciences accurately determine what modes of writing, so to speak, the authors of that ancient period would be likely to use, and in fact did use."<sup>13</sup> Though this specific directive deals with the contribution of Form Criti-

cism, it supports the task of seeing the prophet in terms of his times and surroundings.

A careful application of such methods to the prophets of the Old Testament has been carried on by a number of Roman Catholic scholars in this country and elsewhere. To single out several examples, there is the commentary on Isaiah II in the *Lectio Divina* series by Jean Steinmann. Steinmann, who has contributed studies on various prophets to this series, pursues an interpretation of Is. 40—55 which sets these chapters in the context of the exilic age.<sup>14</sup> In a work on Hosea, he takes up the question of the origin of the phenomenon of prophecy and its early manifestations in Israel.<sup>15</sup> In English there are two well-written popular studies, one specifically on the prophets by Bruce Vawter,<sup>16</sup> and one on the religion of Israel, part of which is devoted to the prophets, by John L. McKenzie.<sup>17</sup> Study of this sampling of works reveals that they all attempt to interpret the prophets according to the directives of *Divino afflante Spiritu*, that is, in the context of the prophets' own cultural setting. This holds as well for those passages in them which are characterized as Messianic.

Turning to several such Messianic pas-

<sup>14</sup> Jean Steinmann, *Le Livre de la Consolation d'Israel* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1960). Steinmann also has commentaries on Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and another on Isaiah in this series.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Steinmann, *Le Prophétisme biblique des Origines à Osée* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1959).

<sup>16</sup> Bruce Vawter, *The Conscience of Israel* (New York: Sheed and Ward, c. 1961).

<sup>17</sup> John L. McKenzie, *The Two-Edged Sword* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., c. 1956). See especially chapter 9, "The Hope of the Future," pp. 189—210.

<sup>12</sup> E. F. Sutcliffe, "Genesis," *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, c. 1953), p. 188.

<sup>13</sup> *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, p. 97.

sages in the prophets and psalms, it will be helpful to see how they have been dealt with in Roman Catholic scholarship. At the 1956 meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association, John L. McKenzie delivered a paper on "Royal Messianism," in which he dealt with several Messianic psalms and prophetic passages which center in a kingly figure.<sup>18</sup> This article is significant again in that it illustrates the use of the tools of historical research and attempts to determine the original setting and meaning of the passages investigated.

One of the values of this article is McKenzie's discussion of what he understands by Messianism, or the Messianic hope. Such clarification is necessary because the term "Messianism" today is capable of a wide range of meanings. How the term is defined determines what parts of the Old Testament are brought in for consideration. Is Messianism, in other words, limited to those passages which are clearly eschatological? Can the term be used for historical kings as well as the ideally expected king? Again, must all passages that are Messianic be read eschatologically? McKenzie prefers a broader definition and employs the term "Messianic" without limiting it to an eschatological expectation. For instance, he takes the oracle of Nathan in 2 Sam. 7 as a Messianic passage, though it is "neither directly nor indirectly eschatological."<sup>19</sup>

The substance of McKenzie's paper is that the royal Messianism of the Old Testament takes its starting point at the cove-

nant made with David in 2 Sam. 7. A considerable development takes place after this oracle, but all Messianic passages dealing with a kingly figure find their roots in the eternal covenant made with the Davidic dynasty, which embodies in it the future hope for the whole people of Israel. In the case of some Messianic passages it is sufficient that they be explained simply in terms of the contemporary reigning king as the representative of the promise of an eternal dynasty for David. In the case of others the focus is on a future ruler who will possess the characteristics of the ideal Davidic king, but even in the case of these it is not necessary to view them as eschatological in the sense of a royal figure who transcends the future historical Davidic king.

Messianic sections which McKenzie would explain in terms of the reigning king as the embodiment of the promise to the dynasty of David are Psalms 2, 110, 72, and 45. For example, he writes of Psalm 110: "Therefore there is nothing in the text of the Psalm itself which imposes upon us the conclusion that the Psalmist is looking beyond the reigning Israelite king."<sup>20</sup> In a similar way Is. 9:1 ff. gives no indication that the prophet is looking beyond his own time for a ruler to fulfill the hope expressed here. In the case of Micah 5:1 ff. it is a future ruler who is expected, but he is conceived of as being in the historical line of David. In Jer. 23 and Ezek. 34 and 37 we have examples of oracles delivered in the face of the collapse of the Davidic dynasty. Jer. 23 is the most probably eschatological of all the passages considered, while Ezek. 34 and 37 express the hope of a *David redivivus*.

<sup>18</sup> John L. McKenzie, "Royal Messianism," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XIX (1957), 25 to 52, reprinted in John L. McKenzie, *Myths and Realities* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., c. 1963), pp. 203—231.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

What this approach is undertaking is an exegesis of the texts in their Old Testament context apart from their final New Testament reference which relates them to Christ. The Old Testament scholar is first of all responsible for setting forth this meaning of the words. Only then can the next step be taken of penetrating to their Christological significance, a task which McKenzie's article does not perform but for which his study is excellent preparation.

Another paper was presented at the same meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association by Roland Murphy on "Old Testament Messianism and Apologetics." In this paper Murphy addressed himself to the question of how Old Testament Messianism might be related to the New Testament and the work of Christ. Murphy advocated a synthetic approach to Old Testament Messianism in place of a proof-text method. According to this interpretation, Messianism is viewed in a broad way as composed of many different aspects, and it sees Christ as the fulfillment in the sense that all these different lines of hope run into Him. In the Old Testament such ideas as those of the suffering Servant, the ideal King, the Son of man in apocalyptic, and the general hope of an age of prosperity for Israel lie next to one another and are mostly independent of one another. But in Jesus Christ these various motifs achieve a remarkable unity and fulfillment.<sup>21</sup>

These two papers indicate well the present status of Roman Catholic discussion on the Messianic question. The movement is away from the straight-line application

of Old Testament prophecies to Christ. Rather it is held to be probable that in most cases the prophet saw the fulfillment of the promise as likely to be manifested in some more immediate reality than that which eventually came in Christ. Thus we cannot speak of the prophet as seeing Christ directly in the sense of giving a photograph of what His life would be.<sup>22</sup>

And yet the Old Testament, rightly understood, can be said to be prophetic of Christ, and this in the manner of something like the synthetic approach advocated by Murphy, which is typical of the position opted for by many. The Messianism of the Old Testament is thus a much more expansive idea than that formerly held. It becomes a fundamental motif which links the history of the Old Testament as a whole to Christ. John L. McKenzie, who has discussed Messianism at various points, has well stated this by writing: "Modern biblical studies have given the messianic belief a breadth and a depth which we never perceived in earlier generations, and they have shown us that messianism influenced the composition of the New Testament far more than we realized. Jesus was the Messiah, the fulfillment of the hope of Israel, not by verifying predictions of isolated episodes in His life but by bringing the reality for which Israel hoped."<sup>23</sup>

It should be noted, however, that when we come to individual passages there is often considerable variety of opinion among different scholars, though the basic methods may be agreed upon. For example, if we pursued the many expositions

<sup>21</sup> Roland E. Murphy, "Notes on Old Testament Messianism and Apologetics," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XIX (1957), 5-15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10 f.

<sup>23</sup> John L. McKenzie, *Myths and Realities*, pp. 233 f.

of such a passage as Is. 7:14 made by Roman Catholic exegetes, we should find a number of opinions about its original meaning as well as the way the passage is related to its New Testament fulfillment. This prevents us from viewing Roman Catholic scholarship on the Messianic problem as unified across the board. The encyclical of Pius XII was important in this regard, too, in that it made room for the freedom to hold differing opinions on individual passages by pointing out that the number of passages on which the church had made an authoritative interpretation was really quite small.<sup>24</sup>

But one question might still concern us. That is how the recent views of Messianic interpretation could be acceptable in light of the fact that the Pontifical Biblical Commission on June 28, 1908, decreed against an idea of Messianic interpretation which would see them in the light of some more immediate fulfillment than in Christ.<sup>25</sup> The answer for this is to be found in the idea of "reinterpretation" in Roman Catholic thought and procedure. The idea of the church and tradition is a dynamic one. The church can change in the sense that it can come to fuller understanding as over against earlier periods, though its fuller comprehension now does not necessitate a charge of ignorance or sinfulness against the church in the past. What was held in the past can be "reinterpreted" in the light of the present knowledge given to the church. Thus the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* actually goes considerably beyond the earlier *Provi-*

*dentissimus Deus* so far as Biblical studies are concerned. Yet the former claims to have clear continuity with the latter. Again, because of the new situation that Pius XII's encyclical has created for prophetic studies, it is necessary that some of the decrees of the Biblical Commission be reinterpreted.<sup>26</sup> This goes also for those on prophecy. Thus the newer views on Messianism are not seen as out of line, but they are actually a clarification of this important subject.

The question of Messianism, as we have had occasion to note, comes very close to the general problem of the relation of the Old Testament to the New Testament. This larger question has received considerable discussion in recent works, and since it bears upon the subject of this article, it is important to note a few developments in connection with it.

One important catalyst in the discussion concerning the Christological significance of the Old Testament has come from an extensive exploration of the way the Old Testament was related to Christ in patristic exegesis. A number of Roman Catholic scholars have devoted themselves to making a fresh investigation of the principles employed by the fathers in interpreting the Old Testament in reference to Christ. This task appears to have been undertaken with more than antiquarian interest. In the minds of such leading scholars in this field as Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou the attempt seems to have been made of making available to the

<sup>24</sup> *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, pp. 101 f.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112. Cf. also the decision given on May 1, 1910, regarding prophetic and Messianic psalms, p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> An example of such reinterpretation can be found in Louis F. Hartman, "The Great Tree and Nabuchodonosor's Madness," *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. John L. McKenzie (New York: Herder and Herder, c. 1962), p. 76, n. 3.

church today methods of interpretation which would uncover the profounder Christological meaning of the Old Testament that a literal, historical exegesis might fail to find. In his work *From Shadows to Reality*, Daniélou set forth the typological methods by which patristic exegesis related the central happenings of the first six books of the Old Testament to Christ.<sup>27</sup> De Lubac, in his celebrated work *Histoire et Esprit*, made an investigation of the works of Origen and the methods by which this prolific father arrived at the "spiritual sense."<sup>28</sup>

The works of these two scholars, as well as others who have labored in a similar way, have made an important contribution to the question of the Old Testament's relation to Christ. Biblical scholars, nonetheless, are generally hesitant in promoting an uncritical application of the methods of the fathers to present-day interpretation. At the same time there is an interest in a solidly worked-out typological interpretation,<sup>29</sup> and the studies in patristic exegesis have helped to stir up vital interest in this subject.

A related form in which the relation of the Old Testament to Christ has been put forward in the past few years is in connection with the problem of the so-called *sensus plenior*, or "fuller sense," of Old Testament passages. If by the literal sense is meant that meaning of the words which

the Biblical author had in mind originally, then the question has been raised whether his words contained meaning beyond the literal sense.<sup>30</sup> In a dissertation devoted to this subject and published in 1955 Raymond Brown presented an examination of the theological and exegetical problems of the fuller sense, tracing through the history of methods which have been used to find a meaning above and beyond the literal sense.<sup>31</sup>

Brown is of the opinion that a method which seeks to find a fuller meaning in the Scripture is legitimate and not only has long been employed by the church but should be fostered by it also in the future. But the discussions centered in the *sensus plenior* have been very much divided. Some scholars accept the method, others accept a modified form of it, and many reject it altogether as misleading and prefer to operate strictly with the literal sense.

An illustration of the problem of the *sensus plenior* might show its bearing on the question of prophetic and Messianic thought. If we were to take one of the Messianic psalms, such as Psalm 2, and carry through the work of exegesis, the literal meaning of the passage "You are My Son, today I have begotten You" (v. 7 RSV) would, according to common consensus today, have to be referred to the Israelite king. But the question would then

<sup>27</sup> Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality* (London: Burns and Oates, c. 1960). The original publication appeared under the title *Sacramentum Futuri: Études sur les Origines de la Typologie biblique*.

<sup>28</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit* (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, c. 1950).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. John L. McKenzie, "Problems of Hermeneutics in Roman Catholic Exegesis," p. 201.

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that there is a difference between the use of the word "literal" here and the way it has sometimes been employed, e. g., by historic Fundamentalism. When Roman Catholics speak of the literal sense today, they mean it in terms of *Divino afflante Spiritu*, i. e., in the sense of the original meaning arrived at by an historical exegesis.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary's University, 1955).

arise in what way the psalm could be said to speak of Christ, as the New Testament uses it in Acts 13:33. Some would answer that the Old Testament bears in it a meaning which goes beyond its original sense. As Brown defines the fuller sense, this meaning may not have been known to the original author, but God used his words for a reality beyond the one he was speaking and was aware of.<sup>32</sup>

But others have seen a problem with such a view, believing that it leads to confusion. They prefer not to speak of a meaning beyond the literal sense. The fuller meaning comes in Christ, who not only fulfills the Messianic hope but goes considerably beyond it. Thus if there is a "fuller sense," it is to be found in what Christ says and does, and not in the Old Testament texts themselves. Such scholars prefer to take the Old Testament words in their original setting and meaning, and they assert that this makes their fulfillment in Christ all the more meaningful. In the case of Psalm 2, a Christian can from where he stands affirm that all that the psalm saw in the hope centering in the Israelite king is now more fully manifested in the Lord.

Such scholarship is attempting to keep the lines of thought in the exegetical process clear and consistent in the movement from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Those who adopt such a view are conscious of the complexities involved in an exegesis of the Old Testament that does justice to it in terms of its own specific revelation and yet properly relates it to its New Testament fulfillment. This two-pronged responsibility is well brought out by Bruce Vawter, who writes: "The

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

prophet foretold a messianic king of justice and righteousness, a new Israel, and a new covenant. This is the committed word, on which we can make no improvement. The prophet conceived of these divine works, however, in all the limitations of his age and background, and on his conception we have been able to improve a great deal in view of God's revelation through His Son."<sup>33</sup>

The discussion about the *sensus plenior* as the most appropriate way of getting at the question of the relation of the Old Testament to Christ seems to have almost exhausted itself at the present. But the fundamental problem behind it—how the Old Testament word is related to Christ—will continue to occupy Roman Catholic scholars just as it is an increasingly discussed question among Old Testament scholars of other Christian denominations.

The problem of the relation of the two Testaments should not be concluded without some reference to the contributions made to this question by a number of Biblical scholars in France and Belgium. The *Lectio divina* series, which now numbers over 30 volumes, has included several works relevant for discussions of the relation of the Old Testament to the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> In addition, there is the work of scholars such as Joseph Coppens at the University of Louvain in Belgium and Albert Gelin in France.<sup>35</sup> Their work is of

<sup>33</sup> Bruce Vawter, p. 294.

<sup>34</sup> E. g., C. Larcher, *L'Actualité Chrétienne de L'Ancien Testament, Lectio Divina*, 34 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1962).

<sup>35</sup> Two works by Coppens are especially important for the question of the relation of the Testaments, *Les Harmonies des Deux Testaments* (Tournai and Paris: Casterman, 1949), and *Vom christlichen Verständnis des Alten Testaments*.

prime importance in the discussions on the relation of the Old Testament to Christ. From France also has come only recently the important work of Pierre Grelot on the Christian meaning of the Old Testament.<sup>36</sup> This work is significant because it is actually a treatise in dogmatic theology, which attempts to make use of the research done by Biblical scholars. Grelot, a professor at the Catholic Institute in Paris, sees the Old Testament in terms of prefiguration and as bearing the "mystery of Christ." A translation of this important work is to appear in English in the future.

The present article has attempted to capture some of the major trends in present-day Roman Catholic scholarship on Messianic interpretation. We have not dealt individually with all the articles and books relevant to this discussion, but we have rather tried to ascertain some of the general directions in which such study appears to be going. The following general conclusions would seem to characterize Roman Catholic work at this time: (1) Roman Catholic study is incorporating historical exegesis into its scholarship as a meaningful method of exposition of the Scripture. It is conscious of the fact that these methods raise questions for traditional dogmatics, and there are signs of

a healthy exchange on the part of dogmatic and Biblical theologians regarding their respective contributions. There is an awareness, too, that the relation between the Old Testament and New Testament can only be made with the most careful exegesis all the way down the line. Into this latter deliberation enters the problem of Messianic interpretation. (2) The trend, so far as Messianic interpretation is concerned, is away from a proof-text method of interpretation or of one which makes the correspondence between prophecy and fulfillment a simple, static one. Rather Messianism is being defined in a much broader way, as incorporating much more of the Old Testament than hitherto, and the Old Testament material is being studied in the full light of its own setting. (3) There is no one Roman Catholic view of how Messianic passages or ideas should be related to the New Testament. The attempts of various scholars have yielded a variety of possibilities. Nor need we anticipate that a single view will evolve, any more than that the New Testament employs a single way of seeing the Old Testament fulfilled in Christ. In this area there will thus continue to be experimentation and fresh approaches. (4) The encyclical of Pius XII has created an atmosphere of relaxation and freedom in the discussion of exegetical problems, including the question of prophecy and fulfillment. With such a carefully laid-out mandate, Roman Catholic scholars will hopefully continue to contribute works which produce advance in scholarly understanding as well as edification in the church.

Valparaiso, Ind.

*ments* (Louvain: Folia Lovaniensia, 1952). An important contribution of Gelin, published originally in French, has appeared in English as *The Key Concepts of the Old Testament*, trans. George Lamb (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955).

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Grelot, *Sens Chrétien de L'Ancien Testament, Bibliothèque de Théologie* (Tournai: Desclée and Co., c. 1962). See the favorable review of this work by John L. McKenzie in *Theological Studies*, XXIV (1963), 291—293.