

Echoes of Scripture

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I. Figural Christology

For most Lutherans, knowledge of the Old Testament does not match that of the New.¹ This was not the case with Luther, who preached on the Old Testament at midweek services and whose lectures on Genesis spanned the last ten years of his life and give us a comprehensive picture of what he believed. This deficit has been addressed in including Old Testament readings in the lectionary of the *Lutheran Service Book*, which are coordinated with readings from the Gospels, so that one can be interpreted in the light of the other. This task was undertaken also in a recent book by Richard B. Hays.² Known as “prefiguration” or “figural christology,” Hays’ method intends to open up the christological content of the Old Testament by letting the Gospels shed light on the Old Testament, so that the Gospels and the Old Testament inform each other in a constant conversation.³ Matthew, Mark, and Luke (and not just John) are seen as theologies in their own right, in which Jesus is recognized as the God of Israel.

After the Gospels identify the christological elements in the Old Testament, an intertextual conversation between the two testaments takes place. Reading from the Gospels back to the Old Testament is “retrospective rather than prospective”—that is, the reader of the Gospels looks backwards from the Gospels to the Old Testament and not forwards from the Old Testament to the New. Hence the title of Hays’ book *Reading Backwards*. Such interpretation is called an *intellectus spiritualis*, a “spiritual understanding,” an act of faith.⁴ What the Gospels say about Jesus is focused back

¹ “Many Christians congregations today are in fact naively Marcionite in their worship service and they have no Old Testament reading or if the Old Testament is read it is rarely preached upon.” Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2016), 5.

² His scholarly efforts in this area were published first in Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christian and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2014), given as lectures in the Faculty of Divinity of Cambridge University in the fall of 2013 and the spring of 2014. An expanded version was published as *Echoes of Scripture*.

³ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 347. “In figural interpretation, the intertextual semantic effects can flow in both directions: an earlier text can illuminate a later one, and vice versa.”

⁴ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 3.

on the Old Testament and then resonates or echoes back into the Gospels. Hence the title of Hays' more comprehensive *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*.

II. Christology in the Old Testament: Imposing a New Meaning on an Old Text?

A caveat is in order here: writers of the Old Testament are said not to be aware that they were writing about a future messiah,⁵ and without the Gospels the Old Testament's christological content would not be recognized. Putting this issue to the side for now, prefiguration is productive especially in recognizing a high Christology in Mark and Luke. Pastors in their preaching no longer have to reach out and grasp onto the usual proof passages.

Hays has in his sights the lack of appreciation of the Old Testament among Christians, a defect that can be traced back to Enlightenment scholars who regarded it as inferior to the New, as did Schleiermacher, and so they ignored it. In the Enlightenment way of thinking, Christians can be Christian without the Old Testament. German Lutheran scholar Notger Slenczka proposed that Christians should cut the Old Testament loose and concede it to the Jews, an idea proposed in the second century by Marcion. Out of deference to their Jewish members, scholarly societies have already come to call the older testament the Hebrew Scriptures, implying that it constitutes a self-contained canon. Even in Protestant seminaries, Old and New Testament studies are seen as separate disciplines, without instructors in one discipline looking for meaning in the other.⁶ As it stands now, a canon called the Old Testament assumes a subsequent canon called the New Testament, a phrase taken over from Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25 referring to the Holy Communion, indicating that these books were written within or for the context of the Holy Communion.

Hays has in his sights Udo Schnelle, who says the Old Testament is silent about Jesus Christ; New Testament claims that it fulfills the Old Testament are said to be false.⁷ Schnelle is not alone, as Hays says, because the scholarly climate "for the past two centuries, characteristically judges that the New Testament's christological readings of Israel's Scripture are simply a big mistake: they twist and misrepresent the original sense of the text."⁸ Schnelle says the Old Testament is silent about Jesus

⁵ "The Gospels teach us to read the OT for *figuration*. The literal sense of the OT is not denied or negated, rather, it becomes the vehicle for latent figural meanings unsuspected by the original." Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 15.

⁶ James Starr, review of *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, by Richard B. Hays, *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 83, no. 1 (2018): 233.

⁷ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 3. "[D]as Alte Testament von Jesus Christus *schweigt*." Udo Schnelle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 40; italics in the original.

⁸ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 3.

Christ and that “the resurrection from the dead *of one who was crucified* cannot be integrated into any ancient system of meaning formation.”⁹ Prophecies seen by the New Testament as fulfilled in Jesus originally referred to events that happened and persons alive near the time when the prophecies were spoken.

III. The Old Testament is Christological

Here I would like to put the cards on the table. First, in response to Schnelle, the prophecies were fulfilled near the time they were spoken, but this fulfillment was incomplete and its incompleteness pointed to events and persons beyond the time when they were spoken. Second, the Old Testament—each of its books and as a canonical whole—are in themselves incomplete. Genesis needs Exodus to get Israel out of Egypt, and Malachi looks forward to Elijah, who comes before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Incompleteness in any Old Testament book is resolved in subsequent ones and ultimately in Jesus. The common message is that things will be resolved in the future better than they are now. Messianic anticipation in the Old Testament was accumulative, like a rolling snowball with one prophecy and its fulfillment forging ahead to and laying down a foundation for still another one. Third, Hays’ citation of Luke 24 to demonstrate that the entire Old Testament is irrefutably christological is welcome. Whereas Hays reads the Old Testament retrospectively—that is, looking backwards—N. T. Wright sees it the other way around and puts the weight on prospective continuity in that the story comes forward to meet us, a position with which we can agree.¹⁰

To introduce a theological argument into the middle of an exegetical one, God’s words are inherently christological, since the one who inspires is the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet 1:11), a doctrine which is embodied in the *filioque* of the Creed. The Spirit is not a freelance writer but speaks only what he receives from the Son.¹¹ So also Matthew 28:20 states that the apostles are to teach everything Jesus did. Since God’s word is inherently a christological word in origin and content, we can put to the side the question about which comes first: belief in the Bible or in Christ.

⁹ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 3, 368n; Udo Schnell, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 521.

¹⁰ He states this position against the idea that messianic interpretation is imposed from the Gospels onto the Old Testament. Richard B. Hays, “Continuing to Read Scripture with the Evangelists,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11, no. 1 (2017): 97.

¹¹ The Spirit “will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14–15). All Bible quotations are from the ESV.

IV. Hays' Imposition of Christological Meaning upon the Old Testament

According to Hays, messianic interpretations are imposed from the Gospels back onto the Old Testament and are not derived from the messianic consciousness of the prophets.¹² Hays avoids affirming that the prophetic writings are history, a point on which N. T. Wright and Francis Watson take him to task in their respective reviews of his book.¹³ If we can put that critical issue to the side, his figural reading of the Old Testament from the perspective of the Gospels opens previously unrecognized christological content. What is latently messianic in the Old Testament becomes more accessible with a backwards or retrospective reading of it from the Gospels. Reading one text in conjunction with another belongs to what is called intertextuality, which includes how the four evangelists were reading the Old Testament. When the Gospels and the Old Testament are established as the two poles, conversation between the two begins with the Old Testament providing the hard data and the Gospels providing its christological interpretative meaning. "The literal historical sense of the OT is not denied or negated; rather it becomes the vehicle for latent figural means unsuspected by the original author. It points forward typologically to the gospel story."¹⁴ The christological interpretation is not first derived from the Old Testament texts but is conveyed to them by the Gospels.¹⁵ Hays claims support for his method from Luther's oft-cited word that the Old Testament is the swaddling clothes in which the infant Jesus was wrapped.¹⁶ Scholars may question whether Hays follows Luther here.

In asking about the relation between the two testaments, Hays is hardly treading on unplowed ground. Common is the belief that what was latent in the Old Testament came to light in the New. In grammatical terms, the Old Testament provides the christological or messianic predicate nominatives (as in an intransitive sentence), and the gospel puts forth Jesus as the subject of the sentence. In asking his disciples who he was, Jesus puts himself forward as the subject whom Peter identifies as the Christ in the predicate nominative of the sentence: Jesus is the Christ. This confession that Jesus is the Christ was at the heart of those early Christian creeds that evolved into the Apostles' Creed, and so the creed is the junction where the two testaments form a unified canon. For Hays Old Testament Christology is first

¹² "There is consequently a significant difference between *prediction* and *pre-figuration*. Figural reading need not presume that the OT authors—or the characters they narrate—were conscious of predicting or anticipating Christ" Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 2; italics in the original.

¹³ N. T. Wright, "Pictures, Stories, and the Cross: Where Do the Echoes Lead?," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11, no. 1 (2017): 49; Francis Watson, review of *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, by Richard B. Hays, *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 72, no. 1 (2018): 64.

¹⁴ Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 15.

¹⁵ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 5.

¹⁶ Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 1.

accessible through the Gospels, a position which seems at odds with several citations from the Gospels, as for example, Philip telling Nathaniel, "We have found the Messiah. . . . We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote" (John 1:41, 45). The Old Testament provides the christological scaffolding around which the man Jesus is recognized as the Christ. Christology belongs to the very fiber of the Old Testament.

V. Hays' Literary Method

Hays' method of reading backwards that results in a thorough christological reading of the Old Testament introduces a torrent of fresh air into the stale atmosphere of the closed room of exegetical scholarship, in which the christological content of the Old Testament is either completely denied or limited to direct messianic prophecies or types, some of which may not be completely convincing. Brought to life are previously considered largely christologically barren sections of the Old Testament.

Reading the Gospels in connection with the Old Testament in Hays' proposal is a literary method and not a historical-critical method, so he does not have to come to terms with the situations in which the documents were written or who the authors were. Hays' method, therefore, is compatible with historically radical approaches. As is typical in a new proposal for doing theology, Hays' method is taken over from an external source; for Hays it is Erich Auerbach's figural interpretation that "establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first."¹⁷ These two events are separated by time and "are both contained in the flowing stream which is historical life, and only the comprehension, the *intellectus spiritalis*, of their interdependence is a spiritual act."¹⁸ When the second event occurs, which for Hays is the Gospels, a circular stream of interpretation is established between the second event and the first.¹⁹ When the second occurs, a flowing stream of interpretation is established between the second event and the first. This is an example of intertextuality in which one piece of literature informs another, so that each is understood in the light of each other. Less significant is how and when the conversation began.

For Hays the conversation begins when the Gospel writer recognizes a christological sense in an Old Testament text of which its writer may have been unaware. In terms of production and its reception, the production took place in the writing of

¹⁷ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), 73; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 2.

¹⁸ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 73; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 2.

¹⁹ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 2.

the Old Testament text, and its reception took place when the writers of the Gospels supplied the christological meaning to the Old Testament text.²⁰ Christological meaning is supplied by the evangelists as the recipients of the Old Testament texts. Once communication between the Old Testament texts and the Gospels is established, the conversation, which constitutes a figural or christological reading, goes in both directions. In this way the meaning of both the first and second events are enhanced as each continues to inform the other. In determining meaning the reception of the texts by the evangelists takes precedence over their production by the prophets. Just as the first event in the Old Testament informs the second event in the Gospels, the second event informs the first event. In this way the meaning of both the first and second events are enhanced as each continues to inform the other.

Most theological methods, good or bad, cite a favorite biblical passage for support. For Hays this is Luke 24:13–35, especially v. 27: “In this episode, Luke recognizes Jesus’ role as exegete of the biblical story: the risen Lord becomes the definitive interpreter of the things about himself in all the scripture.”²¹ This pericope is presented by Hays as the core of his approach, that “testimony to Jesus is to be found in ‘all the Scripture’ (ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς), not just in a few isolated texts. The whole story of Israel builds to its narrative climax in Jesus. That is what Jesus tries to teach them on the road.”²²

VI. Evaluation

We do not disagree, but there is more. Hays argues that within the parameters of the narrative of Luke 24, Jesus provides a christological interpretation of the Old Testament that the two Emmaus disciples could not have had without him. Hays deviates from a common view, that the Emmaus disciples simply had a false Christology and not that they had no Christology at all. In spite of being informed of the miraculous events at the tomb, the disciples had not come to terms with the fact that the kingdom of God meant that Christ had to die and be raised from the dead.²³ Hays twists this around, claiming that what is found in the New Testament about

²⁰ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 367n3. “Rather, the discernment of a figural correspondence is necessarily retrospective rather than prospective, that focuses on the intertextuality of *reception* rather than *production*.” Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 2; italics in the original.

²¹ Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 13.

²² Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 14.

²³ See Joshua L. Mann, “What Is Opened in Luke 24:45, the Mind or the Scripture?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 4 (2016): 799–806. Arthur A. Just Jr. holds that the minds of the disciples were opened. Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 1049.

Christ “had never been perceived by anyone prior to the crucifixion and resurrection.”²⁴

One could hardly disagree that Jesus’ interpretation of the Old Testament is Luke’s climax and that the christological motif penetrates its entire narrative, but Hays places the origin of the christological interpretation of the Old Testament not with the prophets but with Jesus and early Christians. Whether Hays is aware of it or not, here are bits of Schleiermacher and Bultmann with their exaggerated appreciation of community as a source of Christian truth. In seeing the Gospels originating within a Jewish milieu, Hays breaks ranks with Rudolf Bultmann, who claimed that the life of Jesus in the Gospels was presented in terms of Greek mythology. Too long have we waited for the death knell to toll for the demythologizing of the Gospels, which sought to make them more authentic for modern man.

There is no shortage of references to show that the disciples had a christological understanding of the Old Testament before meeting Jesus. John 1:45 says that the disciples “found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Even if the disciples during Jesus’ last days and the Emmaus disciples were misinformed in grasping the necessity of Jesus’ suffering and dying, they had understood him as the Christ. So did the enemies of Jesus who thought he was John the Baptist, who had come back from the dead and who was widely regarded as a prophet in the Old Testament sense. Quite apart from the preaching of Jesus, messianic expectation was common among the people (Matt 21:26; Mark 11:32; Luke 20:6). In the two-way conversation, the impetus for a christological reading of the Old Testament begins in the introductions of the Gospels. Although Hays understands this awareness as originating with Jesus, he gives consideration to the attention to the Gospels received from early believers, who came to interpret the person of Jesus in the light of the Old Testament.²⁵ Hays shows ambivalence about historicity in his critique of N. T. Wright and Ben Witherington III that appears in an endnote.²⁶

²⁴ Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 14.

²⁵ “Therefore, it is not surprising that as the earliest Christian communities began to tell and retell stories about Jesus, they interpreted his life, death, and resurrection in relation to those biblical stories (i.e., the text that Christians later come to call the Old Testament). The authors of our four canonical Gospels were heirs of this tradition of story telling, and they shared the early Christian community’s passionate concern—a concern that, as far as we can tell, goes back to Jesus himself—to show that Jesus’s teachings and actions, as well as his violent death and vindication, constituted the continuation and climax of the ancient biblical story.” Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 5.

²⁶ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 368–369n13. Hays takes N. T. Wright and Ben Witherington III to task for “seek[ing] to demonstrate that the Gospels are historical factual accounts of what Jesus did and said.” “I do not, however, share [Wright’s] confidence in attributing [Jesus’] self-conception to the hypothesized Jesus of history.”

In spite of how Hays does not come down explicitly on the side of the reported things as actually happening, his approach opens up the Old Testament as a collection of documents that read through the eyes of the Gospels is seen as thoroughly christological. Thus, the Old Testament and the Gospels constitute one narrative, with the former blending seamlessly into the latter, which, as we shall argue, is better done through Matthew, especially its first verse, and not Mark, as Hays proposes.

VI. Each of the Gospels: One by One

Just as the Old Testament is retrospectively read in the light of the Gospels, each of the four canonical Gospels is retrospectively read in light of earlier ones. Each writer uniquely approached the Old Testament, and yet Hays recognizes a literary interdependence among them, with Mark first, Matthew second, and Luke third. What the first evangelist wrote was ferreted out by later ones. In keeping with the majority scholarly view, Hays holds to Markan priority but disregards Q and the apocryphal Gospels. Hays does not say how the later evangelists came upon the writings of the previous ones; nevertheless, the dependency of one gospel upon another is defensible not only by literary comparison but also by what the Gospels say of themselves. Luke's prologue (Luke 1:1–4) refers to another document called a narrative. Similarly, the ending of John's epilogue says that not all the books in the world could contain what Jesus did (John 21:25). Is John spinning words into thin air to fill up the page, or is he reacting to Matthew's conclusion that implies that all teachings that the followers of Jesus were to believe were to be found in this gospel (Matt 28:20)? Is he also reacting to Luke's implying he had filled in the gaps that Matthew had left open (Luke 1:1–4)?²⁷ In both endings John signals the end of writing Gospels by saying that no book is up to the task of recording everything Jesus said and did (John 21:25).

Hays' figural reading does not depend on determining historical origins for the Gospels or who the authors were. His intertextual method requires no more than showing how one document is interpreted by another and not how they came into existence. For Hays each evangelist had direct access to the Old Testament in this order: Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. Placing Mark as the first Gospel is not without problems for a prefigural reading, since Mark is the most obscure in dealing with the Old Testament. This Hays acknowledges in that, "unlike Matthew, Mark rarely points explicitly to correspondences between Israel's Scripture and the story of Jesus. Readers are left to make the correspondence themselves."²⁸ Mark's style is

²⁷ "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us" (Luke 1:1).

²⁸ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 15.

compared to “Jesus’ enigmatic manner of teaching in parables.”²⁹ To rephrase Hays, with only Mark in hand, readers would have difficulty recognizing which Old Testament references this evangelist had in mind. Hays’ own argument for a prefigural reading of the Gospel supports the traditional order that Matthew wrote first,³⁰ especially when he concedes that “Mark’s use of Scripture is less overt than Matthew and Luke.”³¹ Here is an example. Matthew interprets Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem in the light of Zechariah 9:3 as the entry of a king. Mark does not (11:1–10). Readers of Mark are given no clues to the royal imagery of Jesus riding on a donkey, and so the reader must use his creative imagination to figure this out.³² But is this really possible? On the other hand, Matthew leaves nothing to imagination, as Hays himself says: “Indeed, Matthew leaves nothing to chance: repeatedly he erects highway signs in large letters to direct his readers, making it unmistakably explicit that Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel’s Scripture.”³³ Matthew provides more than sixty explicit Old Testament quotations and “hundreds of more indirect allusions in the story.”³⁴ In Matthew Jesus has such Old Testament precursors as “Isaac, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Wisdom, the Servant, the righteous Sufferer, the Son of Man and more. And . . . the most fundamental prefiguration is Matthew’s astounding identification of Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us.”³⁵ He enacts Israel’s destiny and is also presented as God’s Son. Hays notes that Jesus is “simultaneously the fulfillment of Israel returning from exile . . . and the actual embodiment of Israel’s God eternally present in his people.”³⁶ Hays finds it striking and puzzling that Matthew presents Jesus as both Israel and Israel’s God. Is this reason enough for Hays to ask whether “Matthew has thought this through”?³⁷ Hays’ own scholarship has led him to recognize that Jesus as the Christ is on both sides of the divine-human equation. This means that the common scholarly view should be reexamined, which holds that the fourth century councils at Nicaea and Constantinople were the first to resolve how Jesus could be both human and divine. Matthew’s true genius is his ability to see in Jesus multiple Old Testament figures. To this we add there is a real possibility that we have not identified all of them. All the evidence that Hays unearths points to Matthew as the

²⁹ Lidija Novakovic, review of *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, by Richard B. Hayes, *Theology Today* 74, no. 3 (2017): 300.

³⁰ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 95.

³¹ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 97.

³² Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 105–106.

³³ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 106.

³⁴ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 109.

³⁵ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 189.

³⁶ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 113–114.

³⁷ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 352.

Gospels' point of entry into the Old Testament as a christological document; however, Hays cannot detach himself from the majority view that Mark wrote first.³⁸

Hays intimates that Mark is not very helpful in coming to terms with the Christology of the Old Testament: "Mark delights in veiled indirect allusion."³⁹ Unless one knows a prior script, indirect allusions are difficult, if not impossible, to grasp. Like in-house jokes, only the insiders get them. On top of this, he adds, "Mark shows relatively little interest in Scripture as a repository of explicit predications about the Messiah; rather for Mark, Scripture provides a rich symbolic vocabulary that enables the Evangelist to adumbrate the astounding truth about Jesus' divine identity."⁴⁰ Hays has presented literary arguments that the priority of Mark should be reevaluated. Now turn the table around. If Mark's readers knew Matthew, Mark's theological genius and innuendo would be recognized and enjoyed. In contrast to Matthew's prediction-fulfillment schema, like doing a crossword puzzle, Luke emphasizes promise and fulfillment. Israel's Scriptures are read by Luke as a treasury of God's promises to his people.⁴¹ Luke plays the role of "a skillful storyteller."⁴² Marcion's proposal that an abridged non-Jewish edition of Luke was the church's only Gospel may not be as brilliant as he thought. Luke's use of the Old Testament is profoundly Jewish: "Of all the Evangelists, Luke is the most intentional, and most skillful, narrating the story of Jesus in a way that joins it seamlessly to Israel's story."⁴³ Whereas Matthew writes his Gospel as the conclusion to the Old Testament, with the Jews being subsumed into the Gentiles, who now constitute the church, Luke provides his Gospel as a continuation of Israel's story, and in Acts he stretches that narrative into the life of church.⁴⁴ It is metanarrative in its best form, joining several narratives into one. Since Hays sees Jesus presented as Israel's God in all the Gospels, there are fewer surprises in John, who develops Christology around such symbols as water, bread, shepherd, vine, and especially temple.⁴⁵ Reviewers of *Echoes of Scripture* are less surprised in his exposition of John, since this Gospel is traditionally recognized as the most explicit in setting forth the deity of Jesus. To his credit, Hays has brought the synoptics up to par. The synoptic Gospels are as much theology as is John's Gospel and, for that matter, Paul's Epistles.

³⁸ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 352.

³⁹ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 349.

⁴⁰ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 349.

⁴¹ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 353.

⁴² Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 14.

⁴³ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospel*, 191. See chapter 3, "The Gospel of Luke: The Liberation of Israel," 191–280.

⁴⁴ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 353.

⁴⁵ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 282–345, 354–356.

VII. The Messianic Intentions of the Old Testament Writers

As christologically valuable as Hays' method is of reading the Gospels back into the Old Testament, he does not address the messianic intentions of its writers. In his own words, "Figural reading need not presume that the OT authors or the characters they narrate were conscious of predicting or anticipating Christ."⁴⁶ This "leaves open the possibility of respectful dialogue with other interpretations, other patterns of intertextual reception."⁴⁷ Without a christological understanding of the Old Testament, the confession that Jesus was the Christ would be impossible.

In adding to Hays' proposal, the prophets expressed their messianic anticipation not only in what they wrote but also in their lives, enduring the suffering that Jesus himself later would endure. They not only spoke of the Christ's suffering and death, they embodied it, as in the case of Joseph, who experienced a "resurrection" after he saw himself as good as dead and was presumed dead by Jacob. The persecution that Christ endured was of one cloth with what the prophets endured and the apostles would experience (Matt 5:11–12; Mark 10:38–39). We are comfortable saying with Luther that Christians are little "Christs." Then we should even the more easily say that in their being rejected Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, and David embodied the rejection that pinnacle in the life and death of Christ. Those who killed Jesus engaged in the same activity as those who killed the prophets (Matt 23:32–36).⁴⁸ A retrospective reading from the Gospels back into the Old Testament helps us see prophets' suffering as of one cloth with Christ's. However, the prophets themselves had a prospective awareness in seeing that their sufferings belonged to Christ's suffering. Old Testament Christology is not only a matter of the intellect, in which prophets looked forward to Christ and preached about Christ, but they also embodied this Christology in their lives and sufferings. Using Hays' intertextual method of reading the Gospels and the Old Testament, each in light of the other, when we hear of the suffering of Old Testament saints we learn about Jesus in his suffering, and when we look at the lives of the Old Testament saints we learn more about Jesus. In this circular conversation between the Gospels and the Old Testament, as Hays proposes, we arrive at a more intense Christology in which we are also involved.

⁴⁶ Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 2.

⁴⁷ Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 15.

⁴⁸ "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar."

VIII. The Usefulness of Figural Exegesis

Christology is not one topic among others but one topic that binds the Old and New Testaments together into one canon and determines the character of Christian life. What lies in the Old Testament comes to a fuller and more brilliant expression in the Gospels. So, in affirming that sanctified lives are a result of our being justified, we should also more easily see sanctification in terms of Christ's suffering, first in the lives who came before Christ and now in those who in whom Christ dwells. Hence the Psalms are prayers of David, Christ, and all Christians. Hays' method of reading Christ back into the Old shows that it is thoroughly christological.⁴⁹ This is not only theologically necessary but also homiletically productive for the preacher on Sunday morning.

A prefiguration reading of the Old Testament can be astoundingly christologically productive. Hays achieves his goal. Let me put forth an example of how this could work. The synoptic Gospels report the same event of Jesus receiving a child, and each provides a different theological aspect of the event. Matthew has "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Matt 18:5); Luke goes one step further: "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me" (Luke 9:48). Here is the budding of a trinitarian theology. Thus, the child receives not only Jesus but also the Father who sent him. Mark has "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me" (Mark 9:37). Jesus is both distinct from God and has existence within God. Without Matthew it would be near impossible to recognize Mark's trinitarian theology. Here Mark has a brilliance near that of John's Gospel: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). An intertextual approach provides for this interpretation. For Mark Jesus has no other existence than the one he has with God.

In regard to reading the Gospels back into the Old Testament, consider Matthew 27:9, "Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel.'" Discussion over this passage has centered on Matthew locating these words in Jeremiah and not Zechariah. A preliminary solution is to combine citations from Jeremiah and Zechariah into one. What concerns us here is the christological prefiguration back into the Old Testament. This is found in the words "the sons of Israel." Hearing this, the reader would think back to the brothers of Joseph selling him to the Ishmaelites (Gen 27:38), just as Judas would do in selling Jesus to the high priests and high priests in buying Jesus.

⁴⁹ Something of this can be seen in Jeffrey Pulse, *Figuring Resurrection: Joseph as a Death and Resurrection Figure in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism* (Eugene, OR: Lexham, 2021).

Despite our legitimate concerns with Hays' theology and exegesis,⁵⁰ his figural, intertextual exegesis can help Lutherans to know and love the Old Testament as a thoroughly christological testament.

⁵⁰ Consider also his recent approval of homosexuality: Christopher B. Hays and Richard B. Hays, *The Widening of God's Mercy: Sexuality within the Biblical Story* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2024).