

Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture Series
The Mystery of Israel and the Church

Spring 2013 – Series 11

Typology, How the Old Testament Prefigures the New

Talk #9

Typology of Exodus and the Passover



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Note: *This document contains the unedited text of Dr. Feingold's talk. It will eventually undergo final editing for inclusion in the series of books being published by The Miriam Press under the series title: "The Mystery of Israel and the Church". If you find errors of any type, please send your observations to lfeingold@hebrewcatholic.org*

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Typology of Exodus and the Passover

The Exodus from Egypt is perhaps the most frequent theme for typological exegesis. It is the foundational event in the history of Israel, and as such is thus solemnly celebrated every year in the feast of Passover, and it also plays a central role in the Church's liturgy of the Easter vigil.

Bondage in Egypt as a Type of the World

The people of Israel found themselves in a state of slavery and oppression under Pharaoh. This is a material figure for the spiritual state of slavery to sin before our Redemption by Christ, with Pharaoh representing the devil, the enemy of our souls. The plagues also are moral types of the consequences of sin.

The First Passover and the Passover Lamb

Before the Israelites were permitted to leave Egypt, the Lord sent the last plague, the death of the firstborn of all the Egyptians, from Pharaoh down to the poorest of the nation, and even to the firstborn of all the animals. However, the Jews were spared through the performance of a mysterious rite. They were told to sacrifice the Passover lamb, which was to be pure and immaculate, with none of its bones broken, and to put its blood on their doorways, so that the exterminating angel would *pass over* their houses, sparing all those protected by the blood of the lamb. Then they were to eat of the lamb, leaving nothing over. The commandment concerning the Passover is given in Exodus 12:3–14:

Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household; and if the household is too small for a lamb, then a man and his neighbor next to his house shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old . . . and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening. Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. . . . And you shall let none of it remain until the morning, anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass

over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord.

When the Temple was later established in Jerusalem, another element was added: the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed in the Temple and consumed in Jerusalem (see Deut 16:6). The number of lambs sacrificed in the Temple each Passover was enormous. Josephus, a Jewish historian from the first century AD, reports that in one year it was ascertained by a census that 256,000 lambs were immolated on the eve of the Passover.¹

The Paschal Lamb

The paschal lamb is a clear type of Christ, as witnessed by John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God." Each family was to take a "lamb without blemish, one year old" on the tenth day of Nisan. On the fourteenth day he was to be offered. What is the significance of the tenth and fourteenth day? There is a beautiful typology with the events of Holy Week. Christ chose to enter triumphantly into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Why did He choose that day? It seems that this was the tenth of Nisan (assuming that Holy Thursday was the fourteenth of Nisan). As the paschal lamb was chosen five days before its sacrifice, so the Lamb of God solemnly entered the household of Jerusalem on that same day, in preparation for His Sacrifice. And as the lamb had to be sacrificed in Jerusalem, so the Lamb of God was sacrificed there. As the household would tend the paschal lamb from birth until its immolation, so Mary tended the Lamb of God from birth until His immolation, which she offered, as it were, by her interior consent. As the paschal victim had to be offered on the fourteenth of Nisan in the evening, so Christ offered Himself sacramentally in the Last Supper, and in bloody fashion on the following day.

Blood on the Door Posts

What was the significance of the blood of the sacrificed paschal lambs painted on the doorway of the houses, and poured out on the altar in the Temple every year? All Christians can understand that it symbolically represents or foretells our redemption by the Blood of Christ, and our incorporation into that redemption through the sacrament of Baptism.

Jean Daniélou writes:

There is a very evident continuity between the first-born of the Jews, saved by the avenging Angel because they were marked with the blood of the lamb, . . . and the Christian saved from the death due to sin because he was marked at Baptism with the blood of the Lamb. The continuity is im-

¹ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 6.9.3. The census was taken by the governor Cestius during the reign of Nero.

phasized by the coincidence of time between Christ's death and the anniversary of the Jewish Passover, and of Christian baptism with the anniversary day of Christ's death.²

The paschal lamb sacrificed on the fourteenth of Nisan obviously was a mysterious figure of the bloody sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, which He suffered on the day of Passover (or of the preparation for the Passover),³ at 3:00 in the afternoon, the same hour that the priests began to immolate the paschal lambs in the Temple.⁴ In the Last Supper the night before, Jesus mystically anticipated the sacrifice that He was to make the following day by offering it in the sacramental form of the Eucharist.

The sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God, the new Paschal Lamb, is sufficient to obtain the release of all men (and not just the Israelites, who were a figure of the whole human race) from the bondage of sin and the devil, and from the threat of the exterminating angel in the judgment. The Letter to the Hebrews 9:13–14 speaks of how the sacrifice of Christ fulfilled the figures of the Old Testament:

For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

However, this redemption must be applied to men individually. It is not enough that the Lamb has been sacrificed. We must be protected by His Blood which must be applied to the doorway of our own life. Obviously this ceremony of the Law of Moses is a metaphor or figure of an interior application of the grace of God. How is it to be applied? Just as the Passover prefigures the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary, so it likewise prefigures the institution of the Eucharist, which Jesus celebrated during the Passover on the night before He fulfilled the feast in His bloody sacrifice on Good Friday. The Eucharist is so tied to the sacrifice of Calvary that they are essentially identical. The sacramental or mystical re-presentation of the sacrifice of Calvary is accomplished in the Eucharist, in which the Blood of Christ is mystically separated from His Body in the separate consecration of the Body and Blood.

2 Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality*, 153.

3 There has been much discussion over the date of the Crucifixion, as to whether it occurred on the 14th or 15th of Nisan. See, for ex., Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth. Part Two. Holy Week from the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 106–116; Annie Jaubert, *The Date of the Last Supper* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1965); Pope Benedict, homily of Holy Thursday, April 5, 2007.

4 See Hayyim Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals: A Guide to Their History and Observance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 53. See also Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 6.9.3.

The Consumption of the Paschal Lamb

The rite of the Passover was both sacrifice and banquet of communion. First the paschal lamb had to be ritually immolated, and then it was solemnly consumed by each household on the night after the fourteenth of Nisan. This is a magnificent type of the Eucharist, which is both the great Christian sacrifice and a banquet of communion. And it is first a sacrifice before it is a banquet.

Just as the circumcised Israelites were commanded to partake of the meat of the immolated Paschal Lamb, so the new Israelites in the Church—the baptized faithful—partake of the true Lamb of God, which saves us from the wrath of Satan and makes us pleasing to God, ever more conformed to His Son by whom we are spiritually nourished.

Just as the Jewish Passover was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel, the Eucharist is both the sign and the reality of the New Covenant. In the words of consecration given in Luke 22:20, Jesus states: “The cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” The Eucharist is the New Covenant because it contains Jesus Himself—Body, Blood, soul, and divinity—immolated for us mystically on the altar and containing in Himself all the promises of God.⁵

Moses stipulated that none of the bones of the lamb were to be broken. John 19:31–36 tells us that this was a type of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary in which none of His bones were broken on the Cross, as would have been normal:

Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness -- his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth -- that you also may believe. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, “Not a bone of him shall be broken.”

The Passover Is Consumed in Each Household

The fact that the Passover must be consumed in each household also has a typological meaning. St. Cyprian understands this precept as a figure of the unity of the Church and her Eucharist:

Also, the rite of the Passover contains nothing else in the law of the Exodus than that the lamb which is slain in the figure of Christ should be eaten in one house. God speaks, saying, “In one house shall you eat it; you shall not send its flesh abroad from the house” (Ex 12:46). The flesh of Christ,

5 This section is taken from Feingold, *The Mystery of Israel and the Church*, vol. 1, *Figure and Fulfillment*, chapter 7.

the holy of the Lord, cannot be sent abroad, nor is there any other home to believers but the one Church. This home, this household of unanimity, the Holy Spirit designates and points out in the Psalms, saying, “God, who makes men to dwell with one mind in a house.” In the house of God, in the Church of Christ, men dwell with one mind, and continue in concord and simplicity.⁶

Unleavened Bread of the Passover and the Four Cups of Wine

Another aspect of the typology of the Passover is the unleavened bread (*matzah*) and the wine. The Jews were commanded to remove all leaven from their houses and to eat only unleavened bread for the week of Passover. This was a memorial of the first Passover, when they ate unleavened bread because they left Egypt in haste. In the Jewish Passover *seder*, there is the custom (perhaps of later date than the time of Jesus) of having the youngest child in the family ask why Jews eat unleavened bread. The father responds: “This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in Egypt. He who is hungry, come and eat.”⁷ *Matzah* is also a sign of purity of heart, for unleavened bread is the simplest possible form of bread. Furthermore, leaven puffs up and serves as a natural symbol of pride and hypocrisy.⁸

The unleavened bread of Passover is a figure of the Eucharist in two respects. As a memorial of the food of the Exodus, it prefigures the spiritual nourishment of the Eucharist for those who are renewed by the new Exodus, which is insertion into Christ’s paschal mystery by the waters of Baptism. Secondly, the unleavened bread symbolizes the purity of heart that is efficaciously produced by worthy reception of the Eucharist.

The Passover *seder*, as practiced for roughly the past two thousand years, also combines wine with the unleavened bread, stipulating the drinking of four cups of red wine that represent redemption from slavery.⁹ In his account of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, St. Luke mentions two chalices of wine: a chalice before the institution of the Eucharist, and then another chalice at the end of the supper, which becomes His precious Blood. This detail, which may seem confusing at first sight, corresponds to the structure of the Passover *seder*.¹⁰ The first cup

is drunk at the beginning of the *seder*, after the blessing: “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.”¹¹ The second cup is then mixed with water but not yet drunk. The youngest child asks his father why this night is different from all other nights. The father explains by telling the story of Exodus and interpreting it, which would include the explanation of the paschal lamb and why unleavened bread and bitter herbs are eaten. Afterwards the second cup is drunk. Then there is a blessing over the matzah, and a piece of it is consumed. There follows the dinner, at the end of which a third cup of wine is drunk while reciting the blessing of thanksgiving after the meal. This cup is known as the cup of blessing (*berakah*). Then psalms 115–118 (Hallel) are recited,¹² after which the fourth cup of wine is drunk. Psalms 116 and 118 are messianic psalms, and Psalm 116:12–17 is particularly appropriate to the occasion of the institution of the Eucharist:

What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord.

The earlier chalice mentioned by Luke corresponds accurately to the Passover *seder*, in which there would be sharing of the cup before the blessing of the bread. The first cup mentioned by Luke corresponds to the first or second cup of the *seder*, and the cup which He used to become His Blood is the third cup, after the *matzah*, which He used to become His Body, and the meal in which the paschal lamb was consumed.¹³

The Despoiling of the Egyptians

The Fathers of the Church see an interesting typological significance in another detail of the Exodus story. Just before the Exodus, the Lord said to Moses: “Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, jewelry of silver and of gold” (Ex 11:2). “And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they

6 On the Unity of the Church 8.

7 Quoted in Roch Kereszty, *Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eucharistic Theology from a Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Perspective* (Chicago: LTP/Hillenbrand Books, 2004), 25.

8 We see the typology of leaven standing for hypocrisy in Mt 16:6–12.

9 See David Arnow, *My People’s Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries* (Jewish Lights Publishing 2008), 136. See also Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 52. The general form of the Passover *seder* as practiced today is quite ancient and seems to go back to the time before the destruction of the Temple. See the discussion in Frédéric Manns, *Jewish Prayer in the time of Jesus* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1994), 184–211.

10 See Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 52.

11 See Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper* (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2011), 152.

12 Mt 26:30 and Mk 14:26 probably allude to the recitation of the *hallel* psalms. See Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 55.

13 See Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great*, trans. Francis A. Brunner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 32.

let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians” (Ex 12:35-36).¹⁴

It is surely a strange passage. It seems as if God were commanding the Israelites to commit theft, by borrowing items that they would not be able to return. The Fathers of the Church see in the Egyptian gold and jewelry a symbol or type of cultural goods existing outside the Church, which the members of the Church are called to appropriate and use in the service of the Church. It is neither “theft” nor corruption of the Gospel because all that is good in every culture belongs ultimately to God, its source, and should be used to give Him glory.

The Fathers of the Church applied this allegory above all to Greek philosophy, which although born outside the Church, was born from the Logos, and is thus by right the property and patrimony of the Logos Incarnate and His Church. And so it is fitting that Catholic theology use classical philosophy as a handmaid or servant. The same can be said of other cultural treasures, such as classical literature, art and architecture, jurisprudence, the sciences and practical arts, and the noble cultural traditions of all peoples. For example, the early Christian basilicas and mosaics took their form of expression from classical culture and put it in the service of Christ, and this has continued throughout the centuries. Before the Church, ancient Israel had done likewise. King Solomon took wood and craftsmen from Tyre to work on the holy Temple in Jerusalem. The adorning of the Temple was entrusted to the sculptor Hiram-abi of Tyre, the son of an Israelite mother and a father from Tyre, educated in the then-famous Phoenician artistic tradition.¹⁵

It is part of the Catholic nature of the Church that all that is true, good, and beautiful should find a noble place in the Church: in her doctrine and in her worship. The Church is open to all that is true and capable of partaking of her “rich sap,”¹⁶ and thus she can receive, like an olive tree, the engrafting of different cultural patrimonies without losing her own identity and her own truth.

Leo XIII speaks of this allegorical interpretation of Exodus 12:35–36 in his great encyclical *Aeterni Patris* on the restoration of Christian philosophy, and particularly that of St. Thomas Aquinas. He writes:

But it is most fitting to turn these truths, which have been discovered by the pagan sages even, to the use and purposes of revealed doctrine, in order to show that both human wisdom and the very testimony of our adversaries serve to support the Christian faith—a method which is not of recent introduction, but of established use, and has often been adopted by the holy Fathers of the Church. What is more, those venerable men . . . recognize a certain form and

figure of this in the action of the Hebrews, who, when about to depart out of Egypt, were commanded to take with them the gold and silver vessels and precious robes of the Egyptians, that by a change of use the things might be dedicated to the service of the true God which had formerly been the instruments of ignoble and superstitious rites.¹⁷

Alluding to this allegorical interpretation of Exodus 12:35–36, St. Gregory of Nyssa says that Christ

commands someone who borrows from wealthy Egyptians to receive such things as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else is sought by those outside the Church, since these things will be useful when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason.

Those who treasured up for themselves such wealth handed it over to Moses as he was working on the tent of mystery, each one making his personal contribution to the construction. . . . It is possible to see this happening even now. For many bring to the Church of God their profane learning as a kind of gift: Such a man was the great Basil, who acquired the Egyptian wealth in every respect during his youth and dedicated this wealth to God for the adornment of the Church, the true tabernacle.¹⁸

St. Augustine likewise says:

Any statements by those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, which happen to be true and consistent with our faith should not cause alarm, but be claimed for our own use, as it were from owners who have no right to them. . . . Similarly all the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome studies . . . but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth, and some very useful moral instruction, as well as the various truths about monotheism to be found in their writers. . . .

We can see, can we not, the amount of gold, silver, and clothing with which Cyprian, that most attractive writer and most blessed martyr, was laden when he left Egypt; is not the same true of Lactantius, and Victorinus, of Optatus, and Hilary, to say nothing of people still alive, and countless Greek scholars? This is what had been done earlier by Moses himself, that most faithful servant of God, of whom it is written that he was trained in “all the wisdom of the Egyptians.”¹⁹

The “gold, silver, and clothing” are metaphors for the use that they made of Greek philosophy and literature.

By appropriating the treasures of non-Christian cultures, such as Greek philosophy, the Church realizes the prophecies according to which all nations would bring precious offerings to Jerusalem in the messianic period. All nations bring to the Church what they have that is noble and capable of being purified and put to holy use.

¹⁷ Leo XIII, encyclical *Aeterni Patris* 4 (1879).

¹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.112–16, *PG* 44:359, trans. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 81.

¹⁹ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 2.40.144–46, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 125–127.

¹⁴ This episode was also foretold in Moses’ vision of the burning bush in Ex 3:21–22.

¹⁵ See 1 Kgs 7:13–14; 2 Chr 2–4.

¹⁶ See Rom 11:17.

This use of what is noble in other cultures serves many purposes. On the one hand, it serves God by allowing those elements to be elevated so as to be used for His glory. Secondly, these foreign gifts serve theology, philosophy, and the arts themselves, because they help them to progress and be elevated through a harmony of faith and reason collaborating fruitfully. Third, these gifts help the Gospel to be profoundly accepted and incorporated as a formative element into other cultures, as happened in the Greek and Roman world of the Patristic period.

It has frequently been objected throughout the history of the Church that this “borrowing” of classical philosophy is an adulteration of the pure Gospel, a diluting of the wine of the Gospel with water (or poison). In effect, Luther held this position and raged against what he saw to be the excessive influence of Aristotle in Scholastic theology. Luther’s position, however, destroys the harmony between faith and reason that is one of the essential characteristics of the Catholic Church and the Catholic Tradition.

Nevertheless, elements from other cultural patrimonies must be critically evaluated before being incorporated. One can appropriate the riches of Egypt, but not their cultural poverty or religious or philosophical error! It has always been necessary to maintain a delicate balance in this appropriation and enculturation. The purpose of this appropriation is to elevate the elements that are adopted in the service of God by imbuing them with the faith of Israel, and not to lower the service of God to the level of other cultures.

It is also instructive to see what happened to much of that gold and silver that the Israelites took out of Egypt. Within the space of a few months, it was turned into the golden calf which the Israelites made while Moses was speaking with God on Mt. Sinai. However, the problem did not lie with the treasures themselves, but in the idolatrous use that was made of them.

A contemporary example of such an abuse would be to take Marxist philosophy as a handmaid of theology and put it at the service of the Gospel, as was attempted in Liberation Theology.²⁰ In reality, Marxism and the Gospel are incompatible, for Marxism is based on radical materialism and the postulate of the necessity of class warfare. What actually occurred in much Liberation Theology was not putting Marx in the service of God, but rather putting the resources of the Church in the service of Marxism, as the Israelites put their gold in the service of an idol.

St. Thomas Aquinas is perhaps the greatest example of this type of Catholicity. He imbued the riches of “Egypt” with the faith of Israel, and put them in the service of the Church. The Thomistic synthesis took the patrimony of

20 For an explanation and critique of Liberation Theology, see the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation,”* August 6, 1984.

Aristotelian philosophy, without taking its errors, and “baptized” it by putting it in the service of the greatest and most comprehensive synthesis of Catholic theology.

This Catholic attitude is summarized in one of the great principles of Thomism: grace does not destroy nature but elevates and perfects it.²¹ Faith, which comes from grace, does not destroy reason, or lie in opposition to it, but perfects our intellect, as grace perfects nature. Thus faith can collaborate with the perennial philosophy of mankind, as found among all nations, and use reason and man’s cultural patrimony in its service. Whereas the Protestant principle is generally *either/or*—faith or reason—the Catholic principle is inclusive: *both/and*—both faith and reason.

The Crossing of the Red Sea

Another fundamental part of the typology of Exodus is the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, which is a principal type of Baptism. In the Exodus, the Israelites cross in safety and tranquility through the waters, and once secure on the other side they look back exultingly to see their enemies covered by the waves, annihilated, and their corpses and weapons cast up on the shore.

The neophytes, likewise, emerging from the baptismal font, see through the eyes of faith that their sins which have tyrannized them, preventing them from being able to enter into the kingdom of heaven, have been wiped out through the waters of Baptism, whose salvific power comes from the Blood of Christ shed on the Cross on the very day that the Jews celebrated Passover.

Pharaoh pursued the Israelites but lost his dominion over them when they passed through the Red Sea. He was not allowed to pass with his chariots. Just as the charioteers of Pharaoh were washed away in the waters after the people had crossed, so the sins of those to be baptized are washed away and obliterated, and Satan, of whom Pharaoh is the type, loses his dominion over them. Tertullian, in a Homily on Baptism, gives this allegorical reading:

When the people [of Israel] are set free from bondage in Egypt and by passing through the water are escaping the violence of the Egyptian king, the king himself with all his forces is destroyed by water. This is a type made abundantly clear in the sacred act of baptism: I mean that the gentiles²² are set free from this present world by means of water, and leave behind, drowned in the water, their ancient tyrant the devil.²³

St. Augustine develops the same typology:

The people, according to the old testament, are liberated from Egypt; the people, according to the new testament, are

21 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STI*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2: “Since therefore grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason should minister to faith.”

22 Although Tertullian singles out the Gentiles, this is true both of Jews and Gentiles who are baptized.

23 Tertullian, *On Baptism* 9, in *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, trans. Ernest Evans (London: S.P.C.K., 1964), pp. 19-21.

liberated from the devil. . . . Just as the Egyptians pursue the Jews as far as the sea, so Christians are pursued by their sins as far as baptism. Observe, brothers, and see; through the sea the Jews are liberated, in the sea the Egyptians are overwhelmed. Through baptism Christians are liberated and quit of their sins, while their sins are destroyed. Those ones come out after the Red Sea and journey through the desert; so too Christians after baptism are not yet in the promised land, but live in hope. This age is the desert, and desert indeed it is for Christians after baptism, if they understand what they have received. . . . They will understand that they are living as wandering exiles, longing for their native land.²⁴

In a homily on Psalm 107 (106), St. Augustine writes:

This people of God, freed from a great and broad Egypt, is led, as through the Red Sea, that in Baptism it may make an end of its enemies. For by the sacrament as it were of the Red Sea, that is by Baptism consecrated with the Blood of Christ, the pursuing Egyptians, the sins, are washed away.²⁵

St. John Chrysostom explained to the catechumens:

The Israelites witnessed marvels; you also will witness marvels, greater and more splendid than those which accompanied them on their departure from Egypt. You did not see Pharaoh drowned with his armies, but you have seen the devil with his weapons overcome by the waters of baptism. The Israelites passed through the sea; you have passed from death to life. They were delivered from the Egyptians; you have been delivered from the powers of darkness. The Israelites were freed from slavery to a pagan people; you have been freed from the much greater slavery to sin.²⁶

For this reason, in the liturgy of the Easter Vigil, traditionally the most solemn and important liturgy of the year, Catholics hear this reading from Exodus on the Crossing of the Red Sea. It is perfectly fitted for the administration of Baptism, which was traditionally administered to adult converts in this night. St. Augustine, for example, received Baptism at the hands of St. Ambrose in the Easter Vigil.

There is a moral typology here as well. It is not enough that the sins of our past life be wiped clean through the sacrament of Baptism. Baptism is only the beginning of the Christian life: many temptations and obstacles remain before we will be able to attain our homeland and final destination. Thus, after triumphantly crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites wandered and were tempted in the desert for forty years. This is a very important figurative event as well. The Christian likewise must continue to do battle with the world, the devil, sin, and vice, during the period of this mortal life.

Melito on the Typology of the Passover

A very important early typological exegesis of the Passover is given by a liturgical homily of St. Melito, the second-century bishop of Sardis, entitled *On the Passover*, dated to around 170 AD.²⁷ Eusebius considers Melito to be one of the great luminaries of the Church in Asia in the second century.²⁸ The homily was read at the liturgy of the Easter vigil.

The Easter liturgy is a principal place for Biblical typology, for the ample readings of the Old Testament are carefully chosen for their typology, connecting Baptism and the Paschal mystery with the Exodus, the Passover, and the entire history of salvation, beginning with creation and the Fall. This shows us that Biblical typology is not simply a technique of exegesis, but is absolutely central to the Christian understanding of salvation history. For the event of Easter—the center and heart of the history of the world—is the realization of all the ancient types of Israel, her liturgy, her Law, and her history.

In Melito's time, the churches in many parts of Asia Minor still celebrated Easter on the evening of the 14th of Nisan, at the same time as the Jewish Passover. The liturgy thus encompassed the entire paschal mystery: the Last Supper, the Passion, and the Resurrection. We can see from the homily that Exodus 12, recounting the institution of the Passover, was read in the liturgy. The homily thus focuses on the typology of the Passover, beginning with a mention of that text:

The scripture of the Hebrew Exodus has been read, and the words of the mystery have been explained: how the sheep is slain, and how the people is saved.

Therefore understand, beloved, how new yet old, how temporal yet eternal, how corruptible yet incorruptible, how mortal yet immortal, is the mystery of the passover: old according to the law, but new according to the word; temporal through the type, eternal through grace; corruptible through the sheep's death, incorruptible through the Lord's life; mortal through burial in earth, immortal through resurrection from death.²⁹

The prefigurement of Christ in the Old Testament is summarized as follows:

It is he, led away as a lamb and sacrificed as a sheep,
who delivered us from bondage to the world as
from the land of Egypt,
and freed us from slavery to the devil as from
the hand of Pharaoh,

²⁷ The complete text of this previously unknown homily was discovered in the twentieth century.

²⁸ See Eusebius, *History of the Church* 5.24.5: "Melito, the eunuch [i.e. celibate], who lived entirely in the Holy Spirit, who lies in Sardis, waiting for the visitation from heaven when he will rise from the dead."

²⁹ Melito of Sardis, *Sermon "On the Passover,"* §§ 1-3, trans. Richard C. White (Lexington, KY: Lexington Theological Seminary Library, 1976), p. 16.

²⁴ See St. Augustine, Sermon IV on Jacob and Esau, n. 9, in *The Works of Saint Augustine. Sermons I (1-19) on the Old Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), 189. See also

²⁵ St. Augustine, *Ennaratio in Psalmum 107.3* in NPNF, first series, 8:533.

²⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Catecheses* 3.24 (Sch 50:165), included in the Office of Readings for Monday of the Second Week of Lent.

and sealed our souls by his own spirit and the members of our bodies with his own blood.

It is he who shamed death and bound the devil in torment as Moses had Pharaoh.

It is he who rescued us from slavery to liberty, from darkness to light,

from death to life, from tyranny to everlasting sovereignty,

and made us a new priesthood and a chosen people forever.

He is the passover of our salvation. It is he who suffered much in many men:

It is he who in Abel was slain, in Isaac was bound,

in Jacob was a wanderer, in Joseph was sold,

in Moses was cast out, in the lamb was sacrificed,

in David was persecuted, in the prophets was dishonored.³⁰

Melito explains the notion of typology using the image of an artist's model. The Greek word for model is *typos*. This is the origin of the word "typology." When an artist wants to make a precious statue or painting, he always begins with a model or sketch which guides the execution of the final work. The more important the work, the more care is spent on the model or sketch. The sketch is the fundamental reference point as long as the work is in progress. However, once the final work is completed, the sketch is no longer necessary, although it always remains important to show the genesis of the work, and it has a beauty of its own, precisely as a model. For example, after Michelangelo has finished a statue, the clay model and the sketches are no longer necessary for the construction of the marble statue. However, they still have great value in demonstrating the remarkable preparation that went into the finished work, and through their own intrinsic beauty they help to enrich our appreciation for the finished work.

Since the Paschal mystery of Christ is the center of human history, God made a kind of "model" or type of it in the world beforehand, to be a preparation for the Incarnation of God. This preparation was nothing less than the entire history of Israel, the Chosen People. Now God did not make a model of the Redemption as a guide for His own artistry but rather as a preparation for mankind—a preparation realized in one people gratuitously chosen to be the one in which God would become man.

Melito thought that the types of the Old Testament had entirely lost their value when their fulfillment was revealed, for they were a provisional preparation pointing to the New. We must disagree! On the contrary, the type

conserves its value even after the fulfillment, although in a different way, precisely by continuing to serve as a pointer or arrow to the finished work.

Biblical typology does not lessen the value of the mysteries of the Old Testament, but rather reveals their intrinsic connection with Christ and the Church, thus showing their transcendence and the beauty of God's plan, which exceeds what any human mind could have conceived. Biblical typology is crucial for understanding the structure of the Church's liturgy, which springs organically from the prayer of ancient Israel, but is yet entirely centered on the mystery of the Messiah, which is the key of all of salvation history.

³⁰ Ibid., §§ 67-69, pp. 36-37.