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“All Things Which Have Been Given of God . . . Are the Typifying of Him”: Typology in the Book of Mormon

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O'Neill, and Washington Irving; in addition he is general editor of Irving's complete works.

In this paper, he holds that the Book of Mormon fulfills its basic mission of testifying of Christ through a "pervasive typology" as well as by its direct statements, prophecies, and quotations. He defines typology, discusses Book of Mormon teachings regarding it, and then shows its application to Book of Mormon individuals, groups, and objects—with the golden book itself a type of Christ, the ultimate treasure.

From its title page to the last chapter, the Book of Mormon has Jesus Christ as its central theme and character. While he is presented mainly by direct statements and quotations, much is implied about Christ by a pervasive typology which is both aesthetically pleasing and religiously enlightening.

According to the Puritan minister Samuel Mather, "A Type is some outward or sensible thing ordained of God under the Old Testament, to represent and hold forth something of Christ in the New."¹ This common definition applies well enough to New Testament typology.² But typology as found in the Book of Mormon would certainly include postfigurings as well as prefigurings of Christ. Whether occurring B.C. or A.D., to be types the persons, events, or things must be real in themselves and at the same time point to qualities of Christ or his kingdom.

To see how a type works in the Book of Mormon, let us look at Alma's enlightenment of his son Helaman and then at Moroni's review of the prophecies of Ether. In the first instance, Alma talks about the Liahona or compass prepared by the Lord, reviews how the "fathers" forgot to exercise their faith and therefore "tarried in the wilderness or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions."

Alma continues:

And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual. For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land. And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise (Alma 37:42-45).

This is a textbook example of a type: It "exists in history and its meaning is factual";³ it is "a prophetic symbol . . . fixed at both of its poles of reference";⁴ it shows "evidence of the Divine *intention* in the correspondence between it and the Antitype [the person or thing which is figured]";⁵ and it "was instituted to perform a specific function in God's grand design."⁶ Further, it is beautifully clear and meaningful, and satisfies the belief of Jonathan Edwards that "the principles of human nature render TYPES a fit method of instruction. It tends to enlighten and illustrate, and to convey instruction with impression, conviction, and pleasure, and to help the memory. These things are confirmed by man's natural delight in the imitative arts, in painting, poetry, fables, metaphorical language and dramatic performances."⁷

In the second example of how a type works, Moroni in Ether 13:4-9 hearkens back to Nephite origins through the prophecies of Ether. In what Moroni initially thought was his last word (see Moro. 1:1), he gives in a few verses a sweeping view of the role of his people in divine history. In verse three he quotes Ether as declaring that the promised land is "the place of the New Jerusalem, which should come down out of heaven, and the holy

sanctuary of the Lord." In the next verse he cites Ether's reference to the type—the Jerusalem from whence Lehi should come and which would be built up again—and subsequently quotes Ether's declaration that

. . . a New Jersusalem should be built upon this land, unto the remnant of the seed of Joseph, for which things there has been a type. For as Joseph brought his father down into the land of Egypt, even so he died there; wherefore, the Lord brought a remnant of the seed of Joseph out of the land of Jerusalem, that he might be merciful unto the seed of Joseph that they should perish not, even as he was merciful unto the father of Joseph that he should perish not. Wherefore, the remnant of the house of Joseph shall be built upon this land. . . and they shall build up a holy city unto the Lord. . . . And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth; and they shall be like unto the old save the old have passed away, and all things have become new (Eth. 13:6-9).

Not only likes can be the paired type-antitype, but opposites as well: "We speak concerning the law," Nephi said, "that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, by knowing the *deadness* of the law, may look forward unto that *life* which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given" (2 Ne. 25:27; italics added).

While we today pay little attention to Book of Mormon typology,⁸ Book of Mormon prophets accepted it naturally and almost took it for granted. For them, types were significant, instructive, and persuasive. Indeed, Nephi affirms, "My soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and *all things* which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him" (2 Ne. 11:4; italics added.)⁹ In one way or another, all the major Book of Mormon prophets refer to types in focusing on Christ's earthly advent, his visit to the Nephites, and his second coming and heavenly kingdom. Nephi, for example, gives in 2 Nephi 25 a direct prophecy of Christ ("spoken plainly that ye cannot err"), and concludes by affirming that "as the Lord God liveth that brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, . . . there is none

other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ . . . whereby man can be saved" (2 Ne. 25:20). In other words, the temporal salvation of Israel from Egypt is a type of Christ's spiritual salvation and thereby gives credence to the latter. King Benjamin instructs his son in the typological meaning of the Liahona (see Mosiah 1:16-17); and while he preaches Christ directly, at the same time he says: "And many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them [the Israelites under Moses], concerning his coming" (Mosiah 3:15). Abinadi recalls for King Noah's court that "all these things [in the Mosaic law] were types of things to come" (Mosiah 13:31), and insists, "If ye teach the law of Moses, also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come" (Mosiah 16:14). Amulek taught that "this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice" (Alma 34:14). And Mormon says that the Anti-Nephi-Lehis "did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses was a type of his coming Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the law of Moses; but the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ" (Alma 25:15-16).

"All things . . . given of God" is not confined, however, to the perpetual system of Mosaic ceremonies, sacrifices, and festivals. As Samuel Mather shows, types can be found as well in occasional persons, things, and events. In the Old Testament, Joseph and Moses were notable types of Christ. The beloved son of his father, Joseph was stripped of his robe, thrown in a cistern for three days, betrayed and rejected by his brethren, and unjustly imprisoned. In addition to meaning "may God add," Joseph's name may also mean "sorrowing or suffering servant," and in that capacity he came out of "burial" in prison to preserve for his brethren "a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Gen. 45:7). Both Joseph the man and Joseph the people are considered types repeatedly in the Book of Mormon (see 2 Ne. 3; Alma 46:24; Eth. 13:7). For his part, Moses was told by God that he was a type of Christ (see Moses 1:6, 16, 41; 1 Ne. 22:20-21; Hel. 8:15; 3 Ne. 20:23). As just several of the many ways in which he thus served, Moses taught the word of God, brought water out of the rock

(both of which figure Christ), delivered the captive Israelites, and was a savior to his people, including lifting up the brazen serpent (see John 3:14-16; 2 Ne. 25:20; Alma 33:19).

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi combines many of the traits of Old Testament prophets in his typifying Christ. Desiring to "be strong like unto Moses," he several times likened his situation to Moses; his brothers dared not touch him because of the power of God within him; and like Moses he guided his people towards the promised land (see 1 Ne. 4:2, 3; 17:23-33; 18:22). A suffering servant like Joseph, Nephi was resisted by brothers who did not want him to be a ruler over them, yet in the end he was instrumental in saving them. Stilling the storm like Christ, Nephi was also directly like him in being an obedient son, a forgiving brother, a skillful carpenter, and a pilot.

Mosiah is like Moses and Lehi, both of whom figure Christ's leadership, in leading his people into the wilderness (see Omni 12). His son Benjamin also typifies Christ in shadowing the heavenly King (see Mosiah 2:19). This relationship is implied in Mormon's earlier editorial comment contrasting false Christs and holy prophets including King Benjamin (see Words of Mormon 15-17).

Abinadi figures Christ indirectly and directly: "His face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while in the mount of Sinai"; he was cast into prison for three days; his persecutors shed innocent blood; and at death, Abinadi cried, "O God, receive my soul" (Mosiah 13:5; 17:6; 18:19).

Alma the Elder led his flock into and then out of the wilderness like Moses, Lehi, and Mosiah. The conversion story of Alma the Younger in Mosiah 27 and in Alma 36 and 38 almost repeats that of Jonah — of whom Christ said: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). Alma says: "I was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul; and never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins"; "I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God" (Alma 38:8; see Jonah 1:17; 2; Mosiah 27:29). (To be technical, Christ was dead two nights

and less than two full days—but apparently Alma was “dead” for a shorter period as well, see Mosiah 27:23. Three days-three nights seems to be a formula.) Likewise, Lamoni “lay as if he were dead for the space of two days and two nights” and is followed in his trance by his queen who, upon recovery, declares she is “saved . . . from an awful hell” (Alma 18:43; 19:29).

Ammon is a type of Christ in saving many Lamanites who were “in darkness, yea, even in the darkest abyss, but behold, how many of them are brought to behold the marvelous light of God” (Alma 26:3); and like Moses, he leads his people through the wilderness to a promised land, giving the glory to Christ. In turn, General Moroni, who with his standard of liberty demonstrated a type of the remnant of Joseph, “was a man like unto Ammon, the son of Mosiah, yea, and even the other sons of Mosiah, yea, and also Alma and his sons” (Alma 46:24; 48:18).

Nephi and Lehi repeat the imprisonment-deliverance prefigurement (see Hel. 5), with the pillar of fire related both to the Israelites’ pillar of fire and to the encirclement of fire in 3 Nephi 17:24. Light overcomes the cloud of darkness when the people call on Christ after having heard an admonitory voice three times, an anticipation of 3 Nephi 9. Nephi prepares the people for the coming of Christ, compares his power to that of Moses, and sorrowfully points out that, like Moses, his prophecies of Christ are also denied by his people (see Hel. 8:11, 13).

Since *all* things given of God are types of Christ, we could expect to find figural elements in the account of each prophet in the Book of Mormon: Third Nephi is the spiritual leader, Mormon and Moroni through the Book of Mormon lead future generations of their kindred to the heavenly Jerusalem, etc. We also find groups of persons serving as types. Book of Mormon judges shadow forth Christ, the heavenly judge, whose role is affirmed by both Nephi and Moroni in their parting testimonies. High priests such as Alma and his posterity prefigure Christ, the great high priest. Alma clarifies this in his discourse on the Melchizedek Priesthood which was given that “the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order” (Alma 13:16).

Of typological objects, we have already discussed the

Liahona. Like the Liahona are the brother of Jared's sixteen stones which "shine forth in darkness" and remind us of the Lord's affirmation to Nephi, "I will also be your light in the wilderness," or of his later declaration, "I am the light of the world" (Eth. 3:4; 1 Ne. 17:13; John 8:12). With such a light, the travelers would never be in darkness.

Related to everlasting light is the pillar of fire seen by Lehi in an experience reminiscent of Moses and the burning bush (see 1 Ne. 1:6). This memorable and dramatic type is linked with the previously mentioned pillars of fire in Helaman 5:24 and 3 Nephi 17:24, all figuring the God who "is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Of course this fire can be either purifying or destroying. The righteous are baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, receive a remission of sins by fire, are visited by a divine person "like a refiner's fire," and as part of that experience are "encircled about as if it were by fire" (3 Ne. 9:20; 2 Ne. 31:17; 3 Ne. 24:2; 19:14). But if the righteous shall be saved, "even if it so be as by fire," Mormon testifies that at the last judgment the "holiness of Jesus Christ . . . will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire" upon the unbelievers (1 Ne. 22:17; Morm. 9:5). Fire and brimstone are frequently presented as figurative torments; literal fire destroys Zarahemla, Jacobugath, and Kishkumen—described as extremely "wicked" (3 Ne. 9:9-10)—figuring in turn the end of time when "the world shall be burned with fire" (Jac. 6:3).

Directed or lit by objects requiring faith for their operation, Nephi's ship and the Jaredite barges are connected with Noah's ark in being types of baptism (see 1 Pet. 3:20-21; notice also that the Jaredite vessels "were tight like unto the ark of Noah," Eth. 6:7). They all bring the occupants *through* the water into a new life, representing in the process the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (see Col. 2:12). Or like Jonah, the Jaredites in their vessels, like "a whale in the midst of the sea," are "buried in the depths of the sea" (Eth. 2:24; 6:6). This is part of a major pattern woven throughout the Book of Mormon: outcasts of the world—who always consider themselves strangers and pilgrims (see Jac. 7:26; Alma 13:23)—wander through the wilderness or through darkness to escape destruction and to find a promised

land (consider the Jaredites, Lehites, Zeniff, Limhi, Alma, and Ammon); they are miraculously brought through darkness and tribulation or are released from prison or servitude in a process that can also bring repentance; the darkness or death-in-life is several times described as lasting three days, notably the vapor of darkness following the great earthquake in 3 Nephi 8; there may be a voice out of heaven which calls for repentance and promises new life (see Hel. 5:29; 3 Ne. 9:1); then the "wanderers in a strange land," whether they have been on an actual journey or not, are delivered in an action involving light and fertility in a promised land. (See 1 Ne. 18:24 in which the Lehites plant seeds in the new land and bring forth the abundance of the earth.) The ultimate journey, of which this is a type, is to the heavenly promised land.

Although not a literal object or event, the whole tree of life complex contains the basic pattern of Book of Mormon typological events.¹⁰ Lehi finds himself in a dark and dreary wilderness; through prayer and faith, however, plus leadership by a man in a white robe (a Moses-Christ figure), he is led to the tree of life (akin to the heavenly destination). Many are drowned in the depths of the fountain or lost in the mists of darkness, connected for Nephi with the "mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise," which was part of the great destruction preceding the appearance of the Lamb of God (1 Ne. 12:4). The vision foretells the antitype of Christ's appearance, being in himself a fruit white and pure, upon which, Alma says in his version of the tree of life, "ye shall feast . . . even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst" (Alma 32:42; see John 6:35). The vision also projects figuratively the destruction of the Nephite people as a result of pride and temptations, but the full sweep of history on the promised land leads to the restoration of other scripture and to Christ manifesting himself to all nations (see 1 Ne. 12:17-19; 13:38-42).

As with the fruit of the tree of life, the Book of Mormon itself is considered of great worth. Indeed, as the word of God, it figures Christ the Word. It is also a treasure, typifying Christ "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). In the beginning of the book, Laman and Lemuel

represent the unbelievers who lament leaving “their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness” (or so they suppose), while Nephi is willing to give up the family’s material treasures to try to obtain the heavenly treasure represented by the contents of the brass plates (see 1 Ne. 2:11). When he is finally successful in obtaining the plates, he appropriately finds them in the treasury. Later, Nephi’s younger brother Jacob admonishes the rich whose hearts are set upon their treasures that “their treasure shall perish with them” (2 Ne. 9:30). The same lesson is preached by Samuel the Lamanite. Treasures hidden up not unto the Lord are lost; the riches are cursed, says Samuel, “because ye have set your hearts upon them, and have not hearkened unto the *words* of him who gave them unto you” (Hel. 13:21; italics added). The capstone instruction is given by Christ himself in 3 Nephi 13:19-21. The book ends with Moroni hiding up—unto the Lord—the words of life, an echo of the Lord’s instruction to the brother of Jared to “treasure up the things which ye have seen and heard” (Eth. 3:21). With an awareness that Christ is the ultimate treasure, Moroni admonishes his future readers to “come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift” (Moro. 10:30). Thus one framing element of the Book of Mormon is that of treasures of earth versus treasures of heaven. Joseph Smith first had to recognize the precious golden plates as spiritual treasure before being permitted to receive them. And as an ideal type themselves, the plates are firmly established as real (“We have seen and hefted [them],” testified the Eight Witnesses) and simultaneously of spiritual import (“It is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true,” affirmed the Three Witnesses). For us, as modern readers of the golden book, we would do well to see its pervasive typology in order to value more fully its treasure.

NOTES

1. Samuel Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (London, 1705), p. 52, reprinted in *Series in American Studies* (Johnson

Reprint Corporation, 1969), italics omitted; introduction and notes by Mason I. Lowance, Jr. Sacvan Bercovitch provides 152 pages of bibliography on typology in his "Selective Check-list on Typology," *Early American Literature* 5 (Spring 1970), and "Selective Check-list on Typology: Part II," *EAL* 6 (Fall 1971), paginated separately from journal.

2. Clear references to typology are found in the following New Testament scriptures: Matt. 12:40; 26:61; John 3:14; 6:26-58; 7:37-38; 8:12; 19:31-33; Rom. 1:20; 5:14; 1 Cor. 5:6-8; 10:1-4, 11; 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:12-14; Gal. 4:22-5:1; Col. 2:12, 16-17; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:5; 3:20-21; Heb., the entire book, esp. 8:2, 5; 9:6-14, 24; 10:1; 13:11-12; Rev. 2:17; 5:5-10.

3. Perry Miller, ed., "Introduction," *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* by Jonathan Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 6.

4. Ursula Brumm, *American Thought and Religious Typology* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1970), p. 24.

5. Van Mildert, *An Inquiry into the General Principles of Scripture-Interpretation* (Oxford, 1815), quoted in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, James Hastings ed., 12 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 12:500.

6. Mason I. Lowance, Jr., "Images or Shadows of Divine Things: The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," *Early American Literature* 5 (Spring 1970): 141. (This is a special typology issue of *EAL*.)

7. Jonathan Edwards, "Types of the Messiah," *The Works of President Edwards* (1847; reprint ed., New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 9:493.

8. The exceptions surely include Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), chs. 21-24; Hugh Nibley, especially *Since Cumorah, The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967); "The Expanding Gospel," *Brigham Young University Studies* 7 (1965-1966):3-27; and "Treasures in the Heavens: Some Early Christian Insights into the Organizing of Worlds," *Dialogue* 8 (Autumn/Winter 1974):76-98; Bruce W. Jorgensen and George S. Tate in this volume, and Lenet Hadley Read, "Symbols of the Harvest: Old Testament Holy Days and the Lord's Ministry," *Ensign*, Jan. 1975, pp. 32, 36; "The Ark of the Covenant: Symbol of Triumph," *Ensign*, June 1980, pp. 20-24.

9. This is somewhat akin to Mircea Eliade's point in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1949; reprint ed., New York: Pantheon Books for Bollingen Foundation, 1954); or *Cosmos and History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 34, that in primitive societies the importance of an object or an act is that it imitates or repeats an archetype.

10. See Bruce W. Jorgensen, "The Dark Way to the Tree: Typological Unity in the Book of Mormon," in this volume.