

# Typology in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

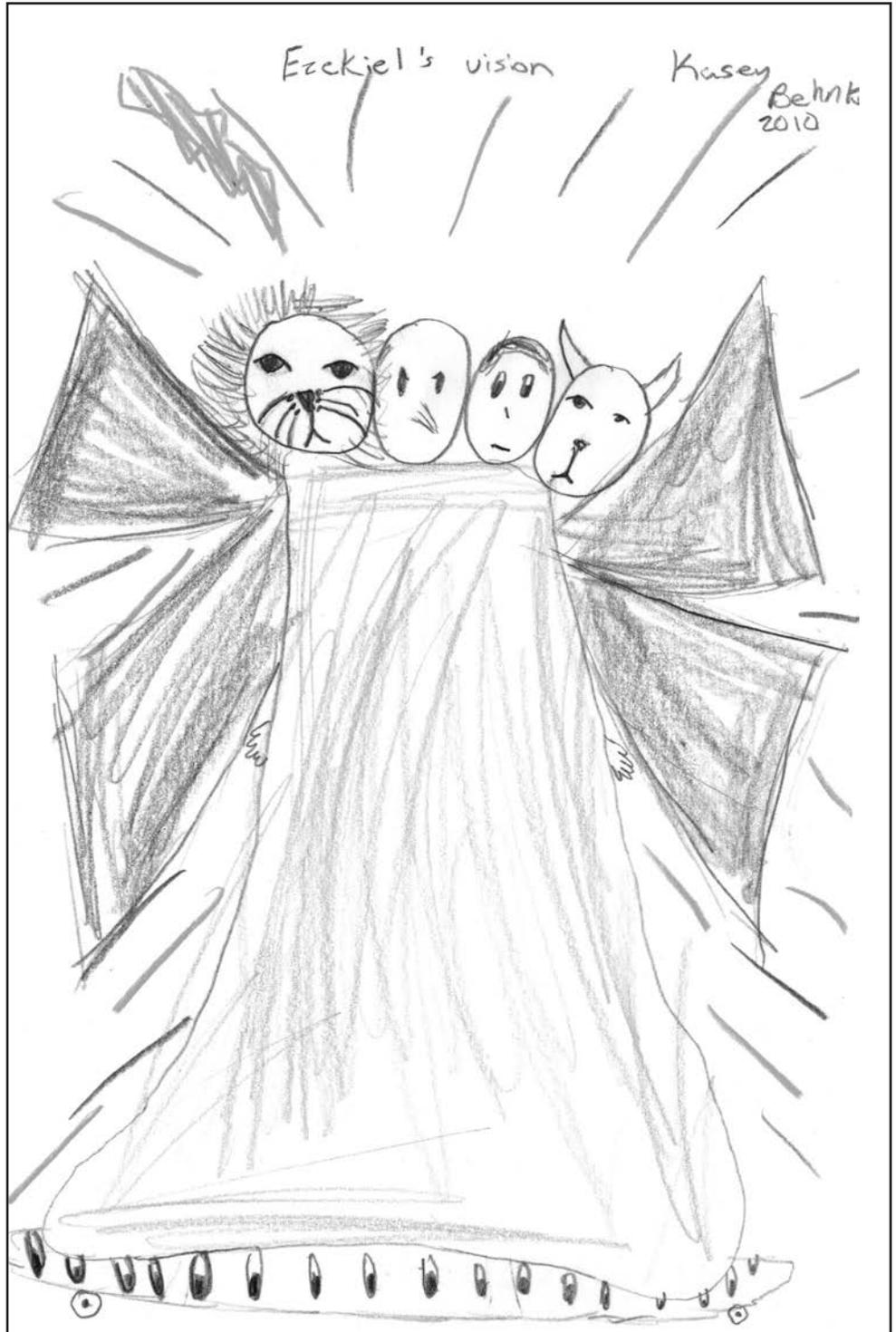
ANN GARRIDO

## *Introduction*

In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Sofia Cavalletti has long taught us that Scripture and liturgy are the two pillars of our work. In her recent writings, Sofia has portrayed these two seemingly separate pillars as a single braid, interwoven to such a degree that it is difficult to tell where one begins and the other ends. In Sofia's closing years, one of her deepest passions was pondering this relationship between Scripture and liturgy. Nowhere is this passion more evident than in her ongoing work on the Level III typology materials.

In this essay, I wish to situate Sofia's efforts in the field of typology within the context of typology in the Church, to better equip catechists in our work with children, and in explaining the Catechesis to our parish, diocese, or in formation. This is particularly relevant for catechists working at Level III, but it has import even for those serving in Level I.

*Kasey, age 9  
St. Timothy Catholic School  
Meza, Arizona  
(Ezekiel's vision: radiating from the central figure with the head of a lion, eagle, man, and ox, are gold and yellow rays. Wings are gold. Body is yellow.)*



## Typology in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

### *Typology in the Church*

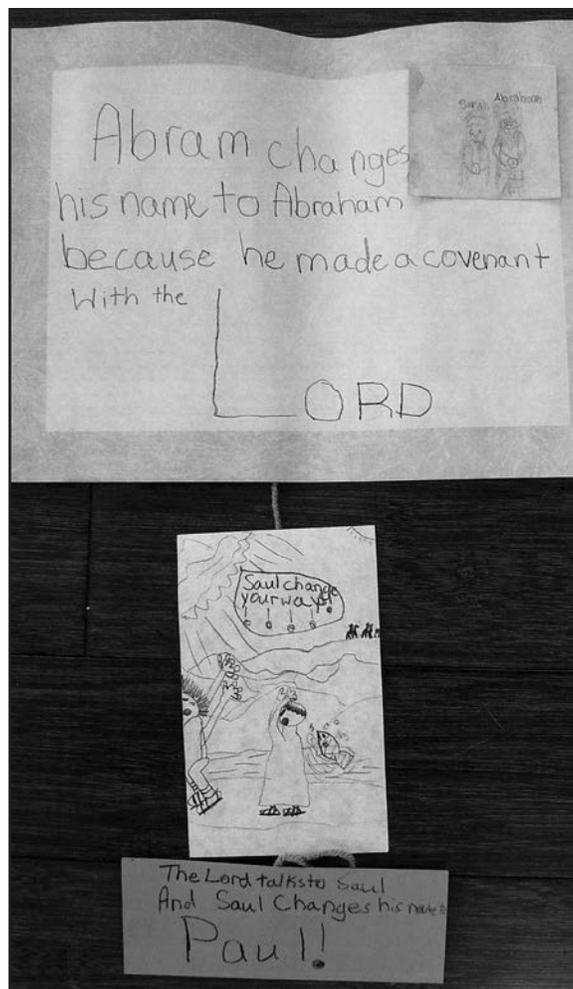
Sofia defines typology as:

that interpretive method which consists in comparing the moments of the history of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament with those in the New Testament, in order to observe the similarities and differences. . . . Such a comparison can be a revelation of the plan which the Lord of history has conceived and which He, together with his creatures, is fulfilling in history. It is a comparison that can help us know the mind of God.<sup>1</sup>

The basic typological method of looking for patterns in the work of God is not a Christian invention but is deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition of *midrash*, a method of biblical commentary. We catch glimpses of typology in the way Jewish worship, like Catholic worship, juxtaposes Scripture passages that share similar themes. Moreover, we find evidence of this tradition within the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. Sofia notes that the prophets “[i]n attempting to speak about the new works God would do in the future . . . reflected on what God had already done in the past.”<sup>2</sup>

Images from their history helped them to find language to describe what they saw in their future. For example, when talking about their hopes for the kingdom to come, they used images taken from the Genesis stories to speak of the new creation.

Thus, when Jesus spoke it was natural for him to use images from the Jews’ long history with God. For example, when he speaks of the Son of Man being lifted up that all who believe in him may have eternal life (John 3:14), the allusion would be understood by hearers already familiar



*Daniel, John, and Daniel, age 11  
College Church Atrium  
St. Louis, Missouri  
("Timeline of Abraham's life." Below the story of Abram's name change they have connected the changing of Saul's name to Paul.)*

with the story of Moses and the healing of snakebites in the desert (Numbers 21:8). Also, when asked for a sign, Jesus declares that no sign will be given but the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39–40); He presumes his hearers know the tale of Jonah's three days in the belly of the whale (Jonah 1:17).

The earliest Christians, who were Jews, continued to read Scripture in this way, placing the old stories next to the new ones of Jesus's ministry, Death, and Resurrection, in order to see what sparks of insight might fly. When they set their experience of Jesus next to the ancient stories they were able to grasp more fully who he was. Furthermore, juxtaposing the story of Jesus with the stories from the past illuminated patterns in the Scriptures that they had not seen before. Their enthusiasm is evident in, for example, Peter's homily on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, and many of the writings of Paul (Romans 5:12–15, 1 Corinthians 10:2–4, Galatians 4:21–31).

The golden age of typological interpretation in the Church was the third through the fifth centuries, during which the early church fathers continued to seek connections between the Old Testament

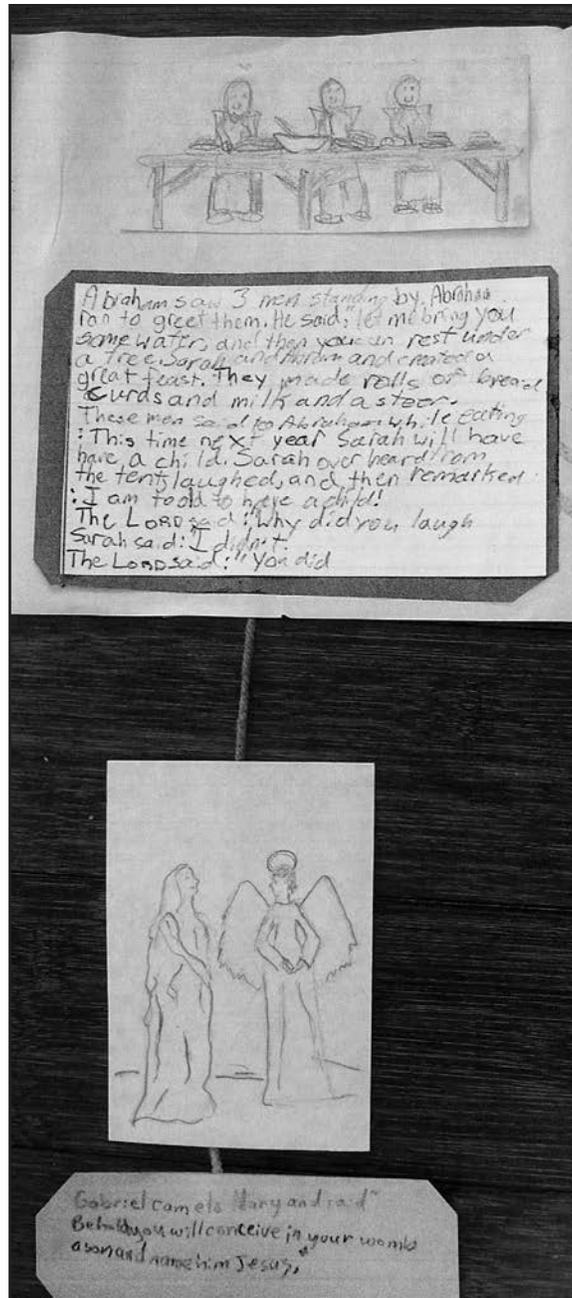
and the New. Superb examples of typology can be found in the writings and homilies of Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Gregory of Nyssa. Their profound reflections on the patterns in Scripture enabled the Church to see itself as the beneficiary of a long and beautiful history, not unlike a river that winds from an ancient past to their front door; a river in which they were still able to swim, and that would flow into the future.

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Nevertheless, just as light always casts a shadow, typology gave rise to the problem of substitution theology, a way of doing typology in which the new is presented as a replacement of the old. Some of the typology in the New Testament was written during a very painful period in the Christian community, when there was a split between Jews who did not see Jesus as the Messiah, and those who did. Substitution theology created tension between Christians and Jews for centuries, and even incited violence. Long after the Church moved on to other theology, Jewish-Christian relations continued to be strained by substitution theology.

Let us leap forward to the early 1900s, a very interesting period for typology. Marvelous archeological discoveries like the ruins of Qumran and the Dead Sea scrolls uncovered a wealth of new information about the time of Jesus and led to an effort to rediscover what the text originally meant, using a method of interpretation called historical-critical exegesis.<sup>3</sup> Sofia talks about how important it is to be aware of a text's genre. Did the author intend it to be read as a historical account, as a piece of poetry, or as a parable? We can see various layers of editing in Scripture; different editors stitched together stories from multiple sources into one text.

Liturgical renewal was another significant movement in the early 20th century, a central theme of which was "return to the sources."



Daniel, John, and Daniel, age 11  
College Church Atrium  
St. Louis, Missouri

("Timeline of Abraham's life." Below the drawing of the three visitors and a summary of Genesis 18:2-15 (the promise that Sarah will have a son) a picture of Gabriel, announcing to Mary that she will "conceive in your womb and bear a son, and name him Jesus.")

This quest naturally led to a resurgence of interest in the early fathers of the church and the way that they had employed typology to make connections between liturgy and Scripture. Finally, interreligious dialogue, especially between Jews and Christians, was a third significant movement during this time. In light of World War II and the Holocaust, Christians began to look more carefully at ways in which ancient theological concepts, including substitution theology, may have contributed to persecution of the Jews.

These movements can help us better understand what Sofia has written about typology and the new typology materials for the atrium.

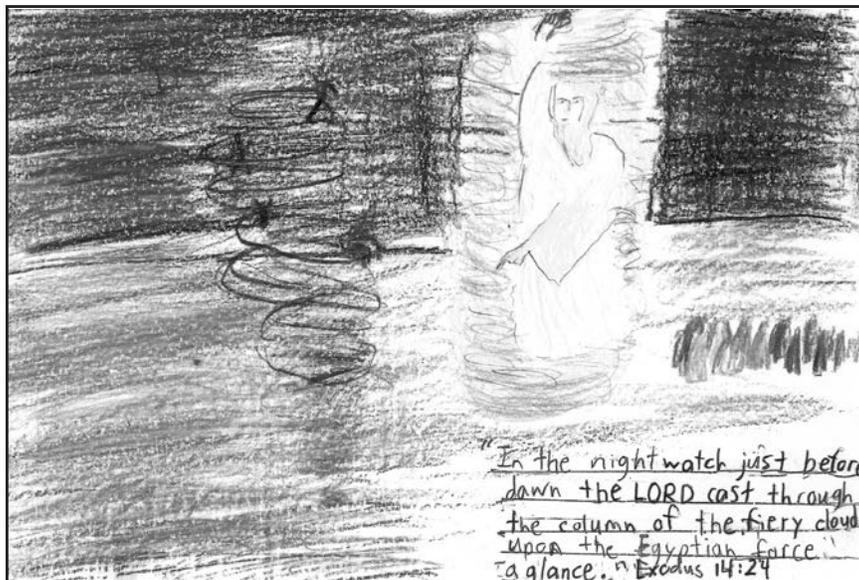
### *Typology in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*

Here are five points that the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd can contribute to the wider ecclesial conversation about typology:

1. Sofia emphasizes that typology is built into the very fabric of our faith. Typology is essential to the structure of both the Bible and the Christian liturgy.

2. Salvation history consists in three great moments: Creation, Redemption, and Parousia. The typology materials lift up the great events of salvation history, like the Exodus, connect them to the liturgy, and look forward to their fulfillment in the Parousia.

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Danny, age 11  
St. Timothy Catholic School  
Meza, Arizona  
(“God in a Column of Light Turns on the Egyptians”—Sky is black, ground is brown, column of light is yellow. Figures at right are red, blue, and green.)

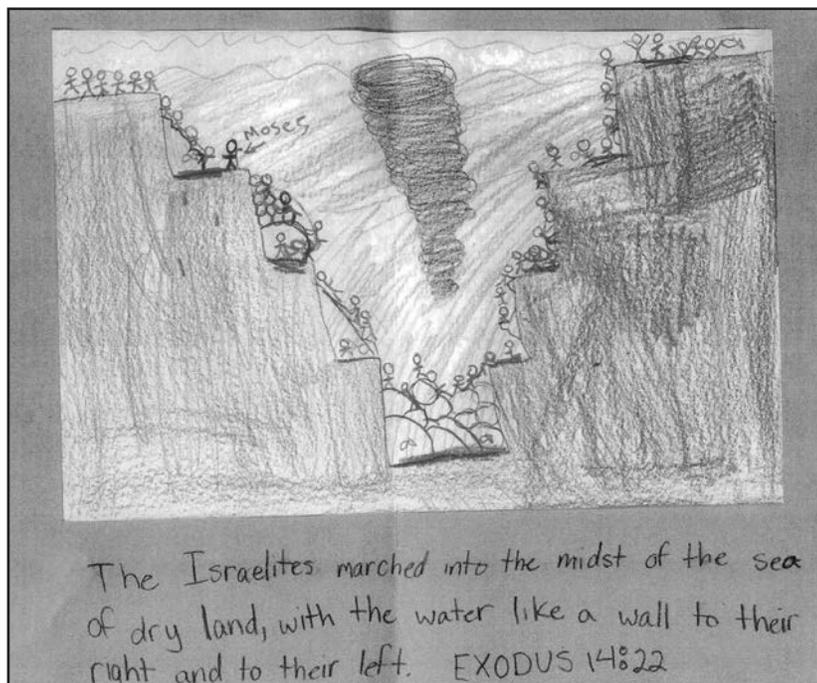
3. Sofia emphasizes the importance of looking at original intent when interpreting Scripture.

When dealing with events [in the Bible], it is necessary to study the experience of faith that a particular event signifies for Israel. . . . Only then can they be compared to analogous events in Christian religious experience, both to current realities and those of the end times.<sup>4</sup>

Serious study of the author’s original intent is important in honoring our relationship with our Jewish brothers and sisters. Too often we have taken texts central to Judaism and seen them only through the lens of Christianity, never acknowledging the meaning they have in the original tradition of the Jews. For example, when Christians read, “A young woman shall be with child and shall name him Emmanuel” (Isaiah 7:14), the passage has a powerful Christological meaning; on the other hand, we need also to acknowledge that Isaiah may have had something different in mind. We need to

investigate, to the best of our limited ability, what Isaiah might have meant.

4. In light of the indescribable experience of Redemption, we find that the words of the prophets and ancient stories such as Abraham, the Exodus, and the Flood, help us to describe our Christian experience. In the Catholic tradition, these interpretations can be said to fall under the *sensus plenior*, the fuller meaning of the text. The *sensus plenior* does not contradict the literal meaning but opens up further possibilities. After examining the original intent of the text, then moving into the *sensus plenior*, the catechist in the atrium can rightly ask, “This child named Emmanuel, I wonder if that reminds you of anyone we know? I wonder if it helps us understand better who Jesus is for us?”



Clarise, age 11  
St. Timothy Catholic School  
Meza, Arizona  
(“The Israelites marched into the midst of the sea on dry land, with the water like a wall to their right and to their left” [Exodus 14:22].)

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5. Sofia cautions that, if we end the story at the moment of Redemption, we will focus on the past only as it relates to our present realities and forget that the history of salvation is a history not yet complete.<sup>5</sup> True typology acknowledges that we will not know all the potential meaning of Scripture until the Parousia. Christ's coming was not the end of history in the sense that an eraser is the end of a pencil; Christ was the end of history in the same way that the end of a pencil is to write.

Christ is the climax and interpretive key through which Christians understand history. In the words of one of Sofia's favorite authors, Jean Daniélou:

Now in Christ the goal pursued by God reaches its fulfillment. . . . This does not mean that after the coming of Christ upon earth history does not still continue. But it does mean that history is not a "going-beyond" of Christ, in the sense of outstripping Him. . . . In this sense Christ, the end of history, is also the centre of history, in that everything that comes before Him prepared a way for Him, and everything that comes after Him issues from Him.<sup>6</sup>

Sofia writes,

Contemplating the history of salvation in a limited way—particularly in considering only its first two movements of past and present—has very serious consequences. We lose the dynamism of history, its power as a history that is constantly evolving. With the loss of this dynamism, our sense of joyful anticipation is lost as well. Thus, a fundamental Christian virtue is extinguished: the virtue of hope.<sup>7</sup>

Including the Parousia in all of our typological work gives us a way of being in relationship with our Jewish sisters and brothers with whom we share a common hope for the fullness of God's Kingdom. "Even if they are on a different path, they are still journeying with strong religious fervor and longing toward the eschatological times."<sup>8</sup> We are left, not standing still in the present moment, looking at each other in terms of

our differences, but rather, in acknowledging this "third moment," we turn our heads to face the same direction and walk side by side toward a common point.

Sofia's words speak to the ongoing work of the Church. Current Church documents recognize that the covenant that God entered into with the Jews has not passed away but is indeed eternal and salvific for them. The new covenant that God has initiated through Christ—a covenant in which we are

fortunate enough to be included—does not replace God's covenant with the Jews; rather, Christians and Jews, like two branches of a single tree, are nourished by the same roots.<sup>9</sup> As John Paul II repeated on several occasions, Judaism and Christianity are linked "at the level of their very identity."<sup>10</sup>

Although the language of fulfillment theology has now replaced substitution theology in Church documents, I am inclined to think Sofia might nudge us to speak in terms of a "fulfilling theology": in Jesus Christ, Christians believe that God has become all in all but we still await the day when that which has been established in Christ, the Head, will be completed in us, His Body. Alongside our Jewish sisters and brothers, we await that time when God will become all in all in humanity and in creation. God is still at work in history today.

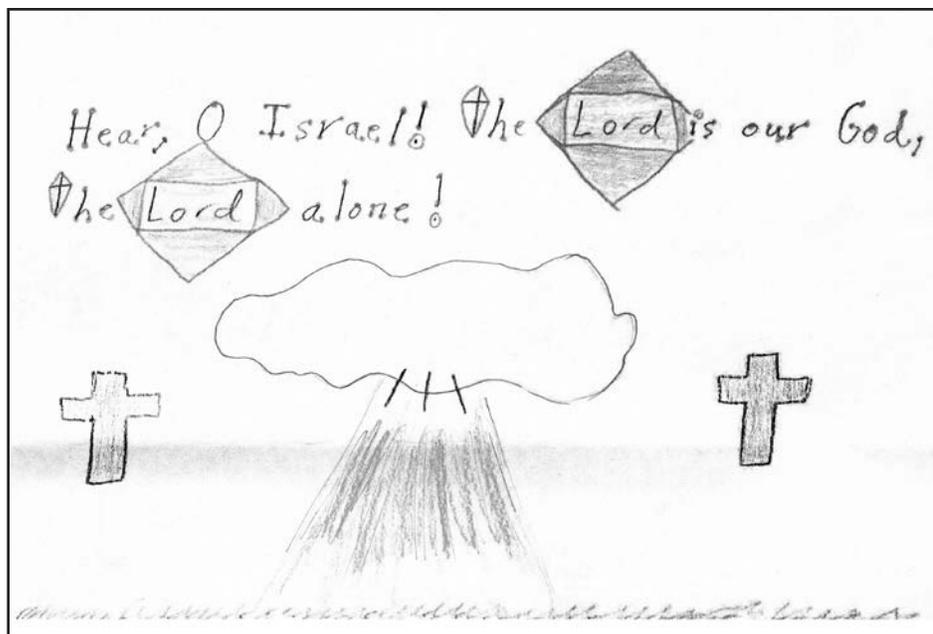
A six-year-old boy asked to choose a song for communal prayer. He held up "The People Who Walked in Darkness," saying, "I was going to choose this song but decided we would sing, "We Are Walking in the Light" instead because there is no darkness in God.

*Child, Level II atrium  
Church of Our Savior  
Charlottesville, Virginia*

#### *In Conclusion: The Children and Typology*

At the end of our Level III atrium year, after many weeks of studying the story of Exodus, a small group of 9- to-12-year-old children chose to create a timeline of the Exodus events. They drew a picture of each of the episodes we had read together and glued them on a long roll of paper. After engaging in a thorough study of the original text, I asked the children whether there were events in the story of Exodus that reminded them of moments they experience in their lives as Christians.

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Patrick, age 10  
 St. Timothy Catholic School  
 Meza, Arizona  
 (Picture is in blue; crosses are black; rays descending  
 from cloud are yellow.)

“The battle with the Amalekites,” one child volunteered. “God still holds up our hands today.”

After a long silence, I brought over a small chalice and paten and set it on the picture of manna. Almost immediately it seemed a light went on in another child’s head. He brought over our songbook and placed it atop the drawing of the Israelites leaving Egypt, “because they sang and prayed as they left slavery, and we do, too.” Another child took the candle from our prayer table and set it on the drawing of the burning bush. Finally, a child took the Good Shepherd statue and put it next to a picture of the plagues. “Tell me about this,” I requested. He replied, “Those who listen to and follow his voice are saved.” In this simple, solemn moment, thousands of years of history were bridged, the past and present knitted

together, and our Scriptures, our prayer, and our lives all became one.

As I listened to the children in the atrium, I could hear the words of Henri de Lubac, one of the great theologians of the Second Vatican Council and a close friend of Jean Daniélou:

Nothing is more wonderful, in the reality of things, than the way the two Testaments hinge on one another. But neither is there anything trickier than the accurate perception of such a fact. Christian Tradition has been meditating on this for two thousand years, and will go on doing so. It will go on, from one age to another, finding in it the mainspring of a solution for the most contemporary and seemingly unknown problems.<sup>11</sup>

In the atrium, as well as in the Church as a whole, there is a journey before us still, a longer road ahead that we walk in hope, hand in hand with the children.

<sup>1</sup> Sofia Cavalletti, *The Atrium of the Oldest Children*, DVD, (Oak Park: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Inc., 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Sofia Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2002), 45.

<sup>3</sup> Sofia describes some of the tools of historical-critical exegesis in *History’s Golden Thread* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), especially in chapters 12, 18, and 42. (Revised and published as *The History of the Kingdom of God, Part I, From Creation to Parousia* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Daniélou, *Christ and Us* (Chicago: Sheed & Ward, 1961), 76.

<sup>7</sup> Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> See especially, “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4), (January 1975) and John Paul II, “Seventh General Audience Talk” (May 31, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II (March 6, 1982) quoted in Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old*, 129.

<sup>11</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 145–146.