
The Typology of Church Bells

Introduction

Medieval theology was obsessed with typology, or the possibility of reading things on multiple levels of meaning, in which the nonliteral senses have characters, events, and objects serve as *types* prefiguring or referring to some spiritual *antitype*. The main object of such analyses was the Hebrew Bible, whose contents were held to prefigure events in the New Testament (Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son Isaac prefiguring the Crucifixion) while also encoding meaning for the individual believer (the crossing of the Red Sea corresponding to baptism) and events preceding and following the end of the world. Once you've started reading things in this way, however, you are hardly going to stop at the covers of Scripture; instead, the world becomes one big allegory. In the later Middle Ages, such theologians as Pseudo-Hrabanus would write whole **allegorical dictionaries** explaining the spiritual meaning of common words and concepts occurring in the Latin Bible. The allegorical reading of church bells printed below should be understood as an early medieval exponent of this analytical mode.

Manuscript

Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 44, fols. 1r-2r (s. xi¹)

Folio 1r is badly faded due to it having served as the manuscript's cover over an extended period of time.

Text

(1) Her ys mearcud be þam becnun þe we beoð to cyricean mid gesamnude.

(2) Belltacna gewuna ys of þære ealdan gecyðnyse genumen. (3) Þæt becn þe innan ure cyricean swegð ys of æroran geworht. (4) Nu ys se ærora heard and swegende, (5) and hæfð þæt ylce tacn yserne clipur wiðinnan, (6) mid þæm hit byð geslegen þæt seo tid beo gehyred. (7) Seo getacnað þyssere niwan cyðnyse bydelas, (8) þa heardiað and swegeað swyþor þænne þære ealdan cyðnyse byman; (9) ura Godes bydela muþas heardiað oð ende, (10) and hyra sweg ys feorr gehyred oð eorþan ende, (11) and nu gynd ealle eorðan.

(12) Þæs æroran fæt getacnað Godes bydela muþas, (13) and þæt isen þær wiðinnan getacnað hyra tungan. (14) Þurh þone rap we understandað ures lifes gemet oððe halig gewrit. (15) Se rap þe hæfð angynn of þam treowe, (16) þe ys þære bellan geoc, (17) getacnað halig gewrit þyssere niwan cyððnyse, (18) adunstigende of treowe þære drihtenlican rode.

(19) Þat treow swaþeah fram ealdum bocerum ys gereht (20) þæt hit is fram witegum and fram eald-fæderum drihtenlic gehæfd, (21) forþam þe se rap oð þæs sacerdes hand astrecð, (22) and þæt halige gewrit to þæra sacerda weorcum scyl becuman.

(23) Þas word gedafniað swyþe þæs mæssepreostes weorce, þe þæt becn styrað. (24) Þænne he fylið upp þam rape, þæt he deð þæt he geþence on him sylfum hu micclum he sy to godum weorcum upp

astreht. (26) þænne he eft nyþer tyht, þænne bisceawað he hu micclum he on þwyrnyssum lið.

(27) Nu na forhogie næfre se mæssepreost þiss weorc to donne, (28) se þe wat hyne sylfne gafulgyldan Godes bodunge; (29) ne hyne sylfne næfre ætbrede fram þam styrigendum becnun, (30) þa hwile þe he mæge of þam sylfum Godes folce bodian.

(31) Se bend þe se clipur ys mid gewriðen ys swylce hyt sy sum gemetegung, (32) þæt þære tungan clipur mæge styrian, (33) and þa lippan æthwega beatan.

(34) Soðlice mid þæs rapes æthrine se bend styrað þæne clipur, þænne þæs bydeles, þæt ys þæs mæssepreostes, tunge styrað oððe mid gemetegunge mynegað to ealdorscype oððe to geþincðe Godes lare.