

## **A Critical Analysis of the Approach to Intertextuality of E. Earle Ellis**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper will attempt to look at the approach to intertextuality of E. Earle Ellis by analyzing the major writings of this respected New Testament scholar. This will include an examination of three published books: *The Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (1957, reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978; 2d ed., 1993) and one article: "How the New Testament Uses the Old," in *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. I. Howard Marshall, 199-219 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).<sup>1</sup>

In regards to the three published books of Ellis, it becomes obvious even in the titles of these works that he has worked somewhat in reverse regarding the issue of intertextuality. Ellis' earliest book (*Paul's Use of OT*; 1957) deals with how the Old Testament was used by the New (Paul). His next book (*Prophecy and Hermeneutic*, 1978) deals with the relationship to what is done (hermeneutics) by whom (spiritual men) early on, while his last book (*The OT in Early Christianity*, 1992) deals with what New Testament writers (and others in 1st century) used as their sources for what they did. In other words, it was how New Testament writers used the Old Testament, what were the hermeneutics of the day, and finally, what they were using. Therefore at each stage of this analysis, issues such as textual sources, hermeneutical techniques, and actual use of the Old Testament by the New will find more emphasis in one particular work of Ellis

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<sup>1</sup> The article in *New Testament Interpretation* serves as the ninth chapter of his book, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

than another. While Ellis deals with many issues relating to intertextuality, the main focus of New Testament usage of the Old has been on Paul's use. Therefore much of what Ellis says about **text, technique, and theology** must be read in light of Pauline usage.

## **THE ARGUMENT AND METHOD OF ELLIS' APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF INTERTEXTUALITY**

### **A Summary of Ellis' Approach to Intertextuality**

Ellis belongs to what have been classified as "The Historical Progress of Revelation and Jewish Hermeneutic" school regarding the use of the Old Testament in the New.<sup>2</sup> This approach to intertextuality stresses historical factors/precedents in the Old Testament and finds continuity with the New. The focus is christocentric and redemptive in nature.

### **The Old Testament of the Early Church**

Ellis maintains that the Old Testament of the early church was for all practical purposes the received Old Testament canon of Judaism. He notes that in "regard to the Old Testament it appears to have remained in conscious and intentional accord with the Jewish community."<sup>3</sup> The irony however is that while they "received as its Old Testament a collection of twenty-two or, in the later masoretic count, twenty-four books,"<sup>4</sup> it also "used a Septuagint that differed in content from their professed canon."<sup>5</sup> The solution to this dilemma, for Ellis, is that the citing of such material even with introductory formulas "do not in themselves constitute evidence for the

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<sup>2</sup> cf. Darrell L. Bock, "Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Part 1," *Bib Sac* 142 (1985): 216-218. Included in this "school" are Richard N. Longenecker and Walter Dunnett.

<sup>3</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

canonical authority of the book cited.”<sup>6</sup> This dilemma exists for Ellis because he believes that New Testament writers, in citing other sources such as the LXX and the Targums<sup>7</sup>, have placed their stamp of approval on “‘rewritten’ interpretive renderings of these texts”<sup>8</sup> or in other words, midrash.<sup>9</sup>

### **Textual Sources of New Testament citations of the Old Testament**

Ellis makes the observation made by many regarding the priority of the LXX in New Testament citations, which is especially true in Paul’s use of the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup> However Ellis is quick to point out that the LXX alone cannot in any way account for what Paul (or others for that matter) is citing given so many variations. For instance, Ellis believes that Paul was so immersed with the Old Testament that he is quoting at times from other translations, Targums, and from memory.<sup>11</sup> An example of Paul citing a Targum for his purposes in Romans 12:19.<sup>12</sup>

Such variations in the citing of the Old Testament naturally beg the question, What is a quote? Ellis holds that the answer to this question is somewhat elusive,<sup>13</sup> though for him there

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>7</sup> cf. E. Earle Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 33-34.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 34. This thought regarding introductory formulas seems consistent with earlier statements; cf. *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, 148-50.

<sup>10</sup> *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 11-19. Ellis in this work (1957) rejected the idea that some of Paul’s citations are *ad hoc* translations, 19, 36. However, some twenty years later (“How the New Testament Uses the Old,” in *New Testament Interpretation*, 1977) we see him state regarding New Testament writers that “citations diverge from the LXX because of deliberate alteration, i.e. by *ad hoc* translation and elaboration or by the uses of a variant textual tradition, to serve the purpose of the New Testament writer. The variations, then, become an important clue to discover not only the writer’s interpretation of the individual Old Testament passage but also his perspective on the Old Testament as a whole” (199).

<sup>12</sup> *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 140.

are three criteria: “the presence of an introductory formula or conjunction, the degree of verbal affinity with the OT text, and the intention of the apostle as judged from the context.”<sup>14</sup> The last two of these three criteria are subjective.

Ellis, in dealing with how the New Testament writers had affinities with each other regarding some similar Old Testament themes which they gravitate towards (see below: *eclectic in scope*), discusses the possibility of a early church *testimonium* from which they all drew upon.<sup>15</sup> In the case of certain themes such as the “rejected stone” typology, he agrees with Dodd that such is the case.<sup>16</sup> Ellis tends to agree with Dodd that the theory of a pre-canonical Christian “Testimony Book” seems to “outrun the evidence.”<sup>17</sup> Paul and others picked up the motif from Jesus’ own teaching.<sup>18</sup>

Ellis also sees other sources playing a part in Paul’s use of the Old Testament. While the LXX and other textual sources were influential in supporting his assertions, Ellis argues that the authority of Christ, the Holy Spirit and his own apostolic authority played a major part in his approach to the Old Testament.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 11. He states, “The task of defining ‘quotation’ in the Pauline literature is rather difficult, and the decision in the end is somewhat arbitrary. The apostle probably did not have our concept of quotation marks; he certainly did not give to it the sanctity which characterizes our literary usage. Some references which are introduced with an explicit citation formula echo only the tenor of the passage; others, not given even the dignity of an introductory conjunction, follow the Old Testament *verbatim ac litteratim*. The graduation from quotation to allusion is so imperceptible that it is almost impossible to draw any certain line.”

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 11; 153-54.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 88-90; 98-107 for extended discussion; cf. also *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, 161-62; *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 100.

<sup>16</sup> *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 89.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>18</sup> *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, 194.

<sup>19</sup> *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 28-33.

## The Hermeneutics of the First Century: The precedent

The New Testament writers were products of their day, and in the first century, Jewish exegesis was heavily engaged in various techniques in their attempt to better understand the sacred writings. In order to understand contemporary Jewish exegesis one needs to familiarize oneself with three basic sources: rabbinic literature, writings of later Palestinian Judaism (i.e. 150 BC –AD 100) and works that originated in the Jewish community in Alexandria.<sup>20</sup>

While Ellis believes that New Testament writers were influenced by the exegetical techniques of their Jewish contemporaries, he does not take time to develop these techniques in detail on their own.<sup>21</sup> Rather, he assumes that they took place and incorporates their existence in discussion regarding the New Testament writers. Paul, for instance, was under no obligation to unlearn all he had been taught after he was saved. He simply used what was of benefit to him, often tweaking it for his own purposes. Ellis adds,

Some methods more peculiar to Jewish commentators are the use of Midrash, or running commentary; the practice of quoting from the Law, the Prophets and the Hagiographa; and the employment of Hillel's rules and emphasis on grammatical exegesis (although these too are found in general usage). In Rom. 9-11 and Gal. 3 Paul employs the ancient midrashic form of commentary; but his incisive manner and compact, integrated treatment is quite at odds with the rabbinic system. Often to support an opinion the rabbis quote the Law, Prophets and Hagiographa in succession and Paul also adopts this custom on occasion. It is not habitual with the apostle, however, and probably represents only an incidental reminiscence. Hillel's principles of *a fortiori* and analogy are implicit in many Pauline passages, but here too the rabbinic affinities can be too greatly stressed.<sup>22</sup>

Essentially, Ellis sees the exegesis of the first century Jewish community as centered on a handful of consistent themes. He lists them as messianic consciousness, imputed sin as a result of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>21</sup> In none of the four works of Ellis evaluated for this paper does he dedicate space solely to Jewish hermeneutics of the first century. This does not mean that he does not have anything to say about this issue, but one must glean it from his discussion of how New Testament writers are using them.

<sup>22</sup> *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 46.

the Fall, the culpability of Eve in that Fall, the priority of man over woman, the doctrine of the second Adam, the role of angels at Sinai, the motif of the following Rock in the Wilderness, the seed of Abraham, and various unimportant issues.<sup>23</sup> It is clear to any casual observer that many of these themes are picked up in the New Testament. It really is no surprise that New Testament writers would have similar themes of emphasis in their writings. Simply stated, the truths that the Old Testament contained were correctly observed by both Jewish exegetes and New Testament writers.

### **The Use of the Old Testament by the New Testament: The approach**

Ellis' approach to intertextuality centers on what might be stated as four governing principles. Ellis' writings argue first of all for a limitation in authoritative exegesis of the Old Testament, namely Spirit endowed men. Secondly, their exegesis was eclectic in nature. In other words, there is no one interpretive technique that they employed, but were influenced by the Old Testament writers, Christ's own exegetical method and teaching, and so forth. Thirdly, Ellis' argument suggests a redactional nature toward the Holy Scriptures, in that they were free, as officially sponsored interpreters, to alter texts to fit their own theological purposes. Lastly, we see that they were heavily influenced by certain presuppositions that guided their exegesis.

#### *Limited in participation*

Ellis works off the premise that what New Testament writers are doing with the Old Testament is reserved solely for spiritually endowed men. In other words, the ability to interpret the Old Testament is a prophetic activity. In his book *Prophecy and Hermeneutics in Early Christianity*, Ellis takes almost 150 pages to build his case for New Testament hermeneutics by

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 54-76.

demonstrating this premise. In the major section, “The Pneumatics and the Early Christian Mission,” Ellis weaves New Testament concepts together to show that a kind of prophetic school was at work in the early church. In this “school,” apostles among others are prophets<sup>24</sup> in the Old Testament sense of the term, able to carry on the work of Christ, both in teaching and manifestations of power. He states,

The prophet is the Lord’s instrument, one among several means by which Jesus leads his church. As one who makes known (ὑψωστος) the meaning of the Scriptures, exhorts and strengthens the congregation, and instructs the community by revelations of the future, the Christian prophet manifests in the power of the Spirit, the character of his Lord, who is the Prophet of the end time.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, these New Testament leaders in the church carry out a kind of “charismatic exegesis.”<sup>26</sup> This emphasis is reminiscent of Qumran exegesis where the illuminated exegetical community (peshar) explained the mystery (raz).<sup>27</sup> Ellis essentially makes this very point when he states of these charismatic exegetes that “Like the teachers at Qumran, they proceed from the conviction that the meaning of the Old Testament is a ‘mystery’ whose ‘interpretation’ can be given not by human reason but only by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the best illustration of what Ellis is talking about here can be found in Jesus’ confrontation with the Sadducees regarding the validity of the resurrection. Jesus rebukes them in Matt 22:29 for “not knowing the Scriptures.” Ellis points out that these were trained theologians who could cite the Old Testament but who did

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<sup>24</sup> *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, 141.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 172; *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 116-121; “How the New Testament Uses the Old,” in *New Testament Interpretation*, 214.

<sup>27</sup> cf. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> “How the New Testament Uses the Old,” 214.

not know its meaning. For Ellis this is crucial, for meaning often lies beyond the surface. He notes of this event,

Jesus is not ascribing their theological error to an ignorance of the words of the Bible but to a lack of understanding of its meaning. That is, the ‘word of God’ character of Scripture, its divine truth, is not to be found merely by quoting it but by discerning its true import.<sup>29</sup>

This is key, and only men like Jesus, Paul, and the like can go beyond the text and find the true meaning.

These Spirit-infused writers often authenticate their message with various introductory formulas as did their Old Testament counterparts.<sup>30</sup> One of these is the phrase, λέγει κύριος which is used nine times in the New Testament and was the “badge of prophetic pronouncement in the Old Testament.”<sup>31</sup> Ellis argues that these uses, four of which are by Paul, likely validates the prophetic ministry among the apostles.<sup>32</sup>

### *Eclectic in scope*

While New Testament writers were influenced by the Jewish hermeneutical practices of their day, Ellis argues that they were not dominated by it.<sup>33</sup> Their approach was somewhat eclectic, for lack of a better term. Ellis notes regarding their hermeneutic,

It follows exegetical methods very similar to other groups and is distinguished primarily in the emphasis given to some procedures and in the boldness with which they are applied. In its general conceptual frame of reference it is closest to apocalyptic Judaism and thus, in some respects, to the Qumran community, but here also it is not without affinities with the Pharisaic-rabbinic and Sadducean parties.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 127.

<sup>30</sup> *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, 148-49.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 184-87.

<sup>33</sup> *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 38-9.

<sup>34</sup> *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 77.



In the case of Paul, he took what he had learned, and coupled with the his understanding of the Old Testament, revelation from Christ and the Holy Spirit, and the teaching from Christ, carved out his own basis of authority for how he interpreted the Old Testament.<sup>35</sup> In the case of continuity with Jesus' teaching, Ellis points out that Paul's typological use of the Old Testament regarding the messianic "rock" or "stone" motif was first used by Jesus and picked up by Paul along with themes such as "seed," "righteousness," "and the "temple/body" motifs.<sup>36</sup> In addition, Ellis points out that other New Testament writers have parallels to Jesus. For instance, Habakkuk 2:4 is picked up by Paul and the author of Hebrews and Genesis 15:6 is used both by Paul and James where both examples deal in some degree to being right or just before God.

Typology is key in Ellis' approach to intertextuality, in that historical events and themes provide the necessary continuity to what is being repeated in the New Testament by God. Ellis sees in typology not the allegorical abuse to which the techniques have suffered over the centuries, but a form of exegesis that is grounded in historical significance.<sup>37</sup> For Ellis, this continuity is by divine intent. He writes,

For the NT writers a type has not merely the property of 'typicalness' or similarity; they view Israel's history as *Heilsgeschichte*, and the significance of an OT type lies in its particular *locus* in the Divine plan of redemption. When Paul speaks of the Exodus events happening  $\tau\upsilon\pi\iota\kappa\omega\varsigma$  and written 'for our admonition', there can be no doubt that, in the apostle's mind, Divine intent is of the essence both in their occurrence and in their inscription.<sup>38</sup>

Ellis sees Old Testament history as united with prophecy. In other words, the Old Testament is the soil out of which prophecy germinates. He states it this way: "The OT is *Heilsgeschichte*,

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<sup>35</sup> *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 28-33.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-92.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

pregnant in anticipation of future fulfillment.”<sup>39</sup> This is all part of what he calls New Covenant exegesis, an approach with two major principles: a union of Old Testament history and fulfillment; and corporate solidarity.<sup>40</sup>

[Note: There is some overlap with this principle of intertextuality of Ellis where typology places such a crucial element and the principle below of an approach *dominated by presuppositions*.]

### *Redactional in nature*

Ellis argues that what makes the hermeneutic of the New Testament writer unique, is their massive reinterpreting of the Old Testament. He adds, “Jesus and his apostles and prophets, as they are represented by the New Testament, make their unique contribution to first-century Jewish exposition by their thorough-going *reinterpretation of the biblical writings to the person, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah*.”<sup>41</sup>

The New Testament writers were editing the text to make it fit. This involves the use of midrash which was prevalent in first century Jewish exegesis. As they introduced Old Testament passages, New Testament writers would contemporize the text to fit their own historical circumstance. He notes,

Such contemporizing and interpretive glossing occurred not only in the employment of prior Scriptures by Old Testament (and later) writers but also in successive redactions of the Hebrew text, in the Greek Septuagint and in the Aramaic Targums. Thus, in Isa 9:12 (9:11 LXX) ‘Aramaeans and Philistines’ became in the Septuagint the contemporary ‘Syrians and Greeks.’ In Exod 4:24-26 ‘Lord’ became in the Septuagint and Targum Onkelos ‘angel of the Lord,’ and ‘the blood’ was given an explicit sacrificial merit. The contemporizing exegetical changes in these translations warranted calling both the Septuagint and the Targum a ‘rewriting of the Bible.’<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>40</sup> *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 135-36.

<sup>41</sup> *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 77. [italics his]

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 66.

Ellis distinguishes between “implicit midrash” and “explicit midrash.” Implicit midrash is the interpretive paraphrase of the Old Testament while explicit midrash is the biblical quotation followed by a commentary.<sup>43</sup> An example of implicit midrash in the Old Testament would be Leviticus 18:21 where the prohibition of child sacrifice “to the god Molech” becomes in Targum Neofoti “to an idol” while in the Septuagint it is simply a prohibition to idolatry.<sup>44</sup> An example of this same technique in the New Testament, according to Ellis, would be in the word-play in Matthew 2:23 that equates Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth with the Hebrew נצְרַת for the branch of Isaiah 11:1.<sup>45</sup>

Explicit midrash, according to Ellis appears frequently in the New Testament, having affinities both with the pesher midrash at Qumran and that found in rabbinical expositions. Such midrash in the first century followed a particular pattern.<sup>46</sup>

The (Pentateucal) text for the day.

A second text, the proem or ‘opening’ for the discourse.

Exposition containing additional Old Testament citations, parables or other commentary and linked to the initial texts by catch words.

A final text.

An example of this would be Hebrews 10:5-39:

5-7 - Initial text: Ps 40:7-9

8-36 - Exposition containing additional citations (16f., 30) and linked to the initial text by catchwords: **Θυμία** (8, 26), **προσφορά** (8, 10, 14, 18), **περὶ ἁμαρτίας** (8, 18, 26), **ἁμαρτία** (17).

37-39 - Final text and application alluding to the initial text with the verbs **ἤκειν** and **εὐδοκεῖν**: Is 26:20; Hab 2:3f.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 92-3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 93. cf. “How the New Testament Uses the Old,” 202.

<sup>46</sup> *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, 155. Both the form and the two subsequent examples are from this work.

Ellis sees the pattern as more pronounced in Romans 9:6-29:

- 6f. - Theme and initial text: Gen 21:12.
- 9 - A second, supplemental text: Gen 18:10.
- 10-28 - Exposition containing additional citations (13, 15, 17, 25-28) and linked to the initial texts by the catchwords *καλεῖν* and *υἱός* (12, 24ff., 27).
- 29 - A final text alluding to the initial text with the catchword *σπέρμα*.

Ellis notes that this kind of midrash is relatively benign compared to the unbridled use of taking minor details like word plays and turning them into “a fictional story.”<sup>47</sup> However, even rejecting such abuse as this, Ellis is still arguing for the altering of a text, through interpretive adaptation, biblical allusion, or interpretive alterations.<sup>48</sup> In essence, New Testament writers, and Paul in particular, are selecting certain versions or giving *ad hoc* renderings so that he is “more accurately expressing the true meaning of Scripture.”<sup>49</sup> He is giving the peshet and as we have discussed above, he has such authority to initiate such “an interpretive moulding of the text” since he is a Spirit endowed man of God.<sup>50</sup>

### *Dominated by presuppositions*

Ellis believes that in order to understand what the New Testament writers are doing with the Old Testament, it is important that one be aware of their presuppositions in approaching the Old Testament. Ellis believes that in general, the primary focus of New Testament writers toward the Old is christocentric. He writes,

The perspective from which the New Testament writers interpret the Old is sometimes stated explicitly, sometimes it can be inferred from their usage. It is derived in part from contemporary Jewish views and in part from the teaching of Jesus and the experience of the

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<sup>47</sup> *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 94. Ellis cites Gundry and his commentary on Matthew as an example of this sort of rabbinic midrashim run amok.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-96.

<sup>49</sup> *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 146.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

reality of his resurrection. Apart from its christological focus, it appears to be governed primarily by four factors: a particular understanding of history, of man, of Israel and of Scripture.<sup>51</sup>

This christocentric or Messianic emphasis is consistent with that of contemporary Jewish exegesis.<sup>52</sup>

Another major presupposition for Ellis is salvation as history.<sup>53</sup> Here Ellis argues that history is broken down into two parts: this current age and the age to come. Ellis sees in this presupposition continuity with the Old Testament prophets who spoke of the “last days” and “the day of the Lord.” A divinely ordained plan is at work in which the New Testament “relates current and future events to events, persons and institutions in the Old Testament.”<sup>54</sup> In essence, redemption is the dominating theological factor at work in the Scripture.

This naturally leads to another presupposition, namely, that of typology or typological correspondence.<sup>55</sup> Ellis sees in typological correspondence a most basic approach to the Old Testament. More than a system of interpretation, it is a “spiritual perspective.”<sup>56</sup>

### *Conclusion*

These four governing principles of Ellis are derived from his three major publications. The first principle that one sees coming out of his writing is that what the New Testament writers are doing with the Old Testament is reserved for members only; those New Testament pneumatics.

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<sup>51</sup> *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, 163; “How the New Testament Uses the Old,” 209.

<sup>52</sup> *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 56-58.

<sup>53</sup> *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, 163-165; “How the New Testament Uses the Old,” 209-210.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-169; “How the New Testament Uses the Old,” 210-212.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

In this sense, Ellis' approach is close to that of Richard Longenecker who argues that when it comes to particular exegetical techniques such as midrash and pesher, we cannot reproduce what they did. The second principle governing his approach to intertextuality is that it is eclectic in nature. Ellis has stated well that the New Testament writers were influenced by many factors, including their environment, their apostolic authority, and the exegesis of Jesus. Their status as spiritually endowed men allowed them to redact the text for their own purposes, stressing the third principle of his approach. And finally, the New Testament writers were operating under certain presuppositions, the dominant one being christocentric. Here they saw all of Old Testament history as prophetic to some degree, needing to be interpreted through the grid of the person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>57</sup>

#### **THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ELLIS' APPROACH TO INTERTEXTUALITY**

In Ellis' approach to intertextuality, there are several key theological implications. The first is that, given his presuppositions about the presuppositions of the New Testament writers, the church of Jesus Christ is the new Israel, the heir apparent to all her promises, though from a new spiritual point of view.<sup>58</sup> Ellis sees a great deal of continuity between the Testaments. While continuity between the Testaments is assumed on some points to various degrees, the presupposition that the Church is the new Israel can skew one's interpretation of the Old Testament (and the New for that matter). This presupposition has not been proven, but simply assumed.

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<sup>57</sup> For an excellent summary of Ellis' approach in his own words, cf. *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 121.

<sup>58</sup> *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 137.

A second implication from this writer's point of view is the danger of eisegesis. There is a need for Ellis to read back into the Old Testament what he sees in the New Testament in order to correctly interpret the Old Testament. In a sense, one wonders if true meaning could ever have been ascertained prior to the closing of the canon.

Ellis laments the limitations of the historical-grammatical approach to exegesis.<sup>59</sup> He states that in the case of Paul, his approach is "grammatical-historical plus," beginning where the "grammatical-historical ends."<sup>60</sup> In other words, Paul would state that "the OT Scripture has a wider meaning than its immediate historical application."<sup>61</sup> By this idea Ellis means "typological interpretation"<sup>62</sup> as distinguished from *sensus plenior*, for some 30 years later he wrote of *sensus plenior*, "it is doubtful *sensus plenior* provides an acceptable hermeneutical tool to explain the New Testament's interpretation of Scripture."<sup>63</sup>

#### AN EVALUATION OF ELLIS' APPROACH TO INTERTEXTUALITY

E. Earle Ellis is a fine New Testament scholar, whose writings over the past forty years have stood the test of time, continuing to be used in scholarly circles. I find myself agreeing with him in regards to much of what he writes. His writings on Jewish hermeneutical techniques of the first century are generally accepted as true, as are his teachings on the Canon of the New

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-48.

<sup>62</sup> *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, 165-169.

<sup>63</sup> *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, 73.

Testament era. However, issues of text and contemporary hermeneutical technique are not really the key issues.

The key point has to do with how New Testament writers use the Old Testament. I do not doubt that the New Testament writers were influenced by their times and yet not dominated by them, as Ellis has pointed out. I even agree that some of what New Testament writers are doing may look like what their contemporaries did. I do not doubt that the New Testament writers had a bit of a christological approach to the Old Testament (Luke 24:27). Jesus was a major shift in focus once He arrived! I even found Ellis' discussion of the issue of typology measured, insisting on historical grounding.

One difficult element of his approach to intertextuality is that his assumption regarding "charismatic exegesis" came across as what I can only describe as a kind of Gnosticism. True meaning of the Old Testament was reserved for these Holy Spirit endowed men. They alone could put the spin on the Old Testament and lead out the true, intended, fuller meaning. It had the scent of elitism.

While Christocentric approach to the Old Testament is laudable, can the tail be wagging the dog at times? What is so crucial in this approach is the ability to spot such typology, a task that Ellis admits at times can be "difficult to determine."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 134.



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