CHAPTER TWO
IMAGES AND CYRIL’S USE OF SCRIPTURE

As with the development of Cyril’s christology in general, his use of images does not occur in a vacuum; there are a variety of determinants which affect how they find their way into his christology and the role they are intended to play in such discussions. Earlier we addressed the context of his life and ministry; that is, those events and influences in his life which helped shape his christological thinking. It is important that one understands especially the Nestorian Controversy, as it was within the heat of such a debate that his vocabulary and imagery was refined and took a concrete form. We will now both hone and expand our previous discussion. In the next two chapters our interest lies in the sources of Cyril’s images and the influence they have on his use of them. This will mean an expansion of our discussions of his use of Scripture and philosophy, in particular. As we will see, he was able to find in both areas analogies which served his purpose, and he made use of them frequently. In this chapter our interest lies in the Bible as the source of Cyril’s imagery and the influence it had on his use of them. Our goal will be to discover why Cyril chooses the images he did, what force they are intended to possess, and what role their are meant to play in his christology. Our investigation will lead us to conclude that his images are analogical in nature and serve the purpose of illustrating his description of the Incarnation, rather than being descriptive tools themselves. In the end we will be better prepared to reconstruct his christology based on an examination and interpretation of his christological imagery.

That Cyril of Alexandria employs images from the Old Testament as illustrations of the Incarnation is quite obvious. He sets out in his Scholia de Incarnatione Unigeniti to “demonstrate the manner of union (τρόπος τῆς ἐνώσεως) using illustrations (παραδείγματα) from the divinely inspired Scripture as in types (ἐν τύποις”).1 How he concludes that these passages are examples and types of Christ, and the extent to which they “demonstrate” the manner of union are less clear. Interestingly enough, these illustrations have often been ignored by scholars in their interpretation of his christology. Perhaps this void of

1 Scholia (PG 75:1377D).
study into Cyril’s use of scriptural images is the result of a failure to take seriously his understanding and use of Scripture, as Wilken has aptly pointed out: “The discussion of Cyril’s theology has gone almost without reference to his interpretation of the Scriptures”.

The wealth of christological material contained in these analogies has been overlooked because of this lack of interest, which is an unfortunate consequence. We are, therefore, presented with a two-fold task. First, we must address the matter of Cyril's understanding of the Scripture, and then determine how that understanding affects his use of scriptural images in his christological discussions. This will develop for us a foundation upon which we can construct his picture of Christ as illustrated in scriptural analogies.

Little work has been done specifically in the area of Cyril’s hermeneutic. Kerrigan’s volume has been the standard for scholars since its publication, and has been complemented in recent years by Wilken’s insightful study of the influence of Judaism on Cyril’s exegesis of both the Old and New Testaments. Otherwise, most recent works join Koen and Welch, simply summarising and affirming Kerrigan’s fundamental conclusions. In a wider context, F. Young has added a great deal to the debate over the patristic understanding and use of the Bible, as has Thomas F. Torrance. The latter two works have called into question the traditional categories of “literal”, “typological”, and “allegorical” as descriptions of exegetical systems. Such clear distinctions were not known to the patristic writers, and, as Young contends, the matter of appropriation was most important, whereby the received text was applied to Christian discussions as though it was intended ultimately for the Christian community. Her observations question Kerrigan’s conclusions about Cyril’s understanding of the “senses” of Scripture, and a re-evaluation of Cyril’s hermeneutic considering such observations would be of significant value. Our intention is not to enter into the debate over exegesis,

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2 Wilken, Judaism and the Early Christian Mind, 3.
4 Wilken, Judaism.
7 Young, Biblical Exegesis and the Foundation of the Christian Church.