

THE 'ANALOGY OF FAITH' IN THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

In Search of Justification and Guide-lines

HENRI BLOCHER

Analogia fidei – the Reformers and their spiritual seed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries embroidered in gold thread upon their banners the apostle Paul's somewhat enigmatic phrase (Rom.12:6). These words signified for them the 'basic rule' of their hermeneutics, the '*principium seu fundamentum interpretationis*'.¹ The analogy of faith helped them to clothe the rather abstract maxim, 'Scripture, its own interpreter', with exegetical flesh; that is, it suggested what kind of procedures the maxim could entail; only thus could promoters of the '*sola Scriptura*' silence Roman Catholic controversialists. It has fallen, however, into remarkable neglect on the part of contemporary theologians, though they glory so candidly in their enlightened hermeneutical consciousness. In recent years, only a few Evangelicals have called attention back to the analogy of faith: Robert C. Sproul has given a quick but useful overview of the theme;² Walter C. Kaiser, with characteristic intrepidity, has offered some new insights;³ finally, his Trinity colleague Donald A. Carson, who knows how happily to combine scientific exegesis with dogmatic responsibility, has made a perceptive contribution, with systematic theology, *ex*

-
1. Max-Albrecht Landerer, 'Hermeneutik', in Herzog's *Real-Encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Stuttgart & Hamburg, 1856, V, 783.
 2. 'Biblical Interpretation and the Analogy of Faith', in Roger R. Nicole & J. Ramsay Michaels, ed., *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, Grand Rapids, 1980, pp. 119-135.
 3. *Toward an Exegetical Theology. Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*, Grand Rapids, 1981, esp. pp. 82ff, 94, 133ff, 145, 161. Kaiser quotes from John J. Johnson, '*Analogia fidei* as Hermeneutical Principle', *Springfielder*, 36, 1972-73, pp.249-259.

professo, in view.⁴ It is high time that those who labour in the systematic field should rally and consider re-appropriating a not insignificant part of their heritage.

Exploration

All church doctors who appealed to the 'analogy of faith' did not understand exactly the same thing, even among the Protestant orthodox. Lucidity requires that various conceptions be disentangled from each other, and their historical connections be brought to light.

The older, pre-Reformation, focus had been on the substance of revealed truth, as taught by the Church. This was the norm;⁵ it had been regarded *ex hypothesi* as the authentic content of Scripture, often summed up in the Apostles' Creed. The emphasis had shifted from the guarantee offered by the mother-churches of apostolic sees to the unanimous consent of the Fathers, the decrees of the ecumenical councils, and formal recognition by the magisterium. This first understanding did

-
4. 'Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology', in D.A. Carson & J.D. Woodbridge, ed., *Scripture and Truth*, Grand Rapids, 1983, pp. 65-95, esp. 90ff. Carson mentions Daniel P. Fuller, 'Biblical Theology and the Analogy of Faith', in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology*, Robert E. Guelich, ed., Grand Rapids, 1978, pp. 195-213, and Robert L. Thomas, 'A Hermeneutical Ambiguity of Eschatology: The Analogy of Faith', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, 1980, pp.45-53. We had no access either to Johnson's or to these articles.
 5. The phrase 'analogy of faith', is not at all usual in Patristic and medieval writings; rather the norm bears many names: the faith, the catholic faith, the rule of truth, the preaching, the (order of) tradition, the measure of faith (*mensura fidei*, Victorinus of Pettau), all of these 'apostolic' or 'ecclesiastical', and even 'the ancient institution of the Church'(*archaion tês ekklêsias sustêma*, Irenaeus). But Romans 12:6 was often interpreted in terms of conformity precisely with that norm (mostly among Latin Fathers).

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

not disappear from Protestant ranks. Reformed divines, especially, echo traditional statements and often consider the agreement with the Apostolicum as the basic meaning (*Inbegriff*) of the analogy of faith.⁶ Georg Sohnius, a Professor at Heidelberg c. 1585, could write:

The norm and rule of this interpretation is faith and love: faith is expounded in the symbol of the apostles, love in the Decalogue. Hence, the apostle prescribes that interpretation be analogous to faith (Rom.12:6), that is, that it should agree with the first axioms or principles, so to speak, of faith, as well as with the whole body of heavenly doctrine.⁷

Many others would adopt a similar stance.⁸ Peter Martyr even granted a second rank authority to 'the constant consent and verdict of the church'.⁹ We would call the first version of the *analogia fidei* the 'traditional' one.

Luther originated a second type. His explosive experience of liberation by the Word of God centred upon a limited number of particular verses: these *helle und kläre Worte*, 'clear, luminous, words', had conquered his soul, and almost became to him, as our venerated friend, the late Richard Stauffer, once said in a

6. Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus*, Leipzig, 1908, vol.I, p. 357.

7. 'Norma et regula hujus interpretationis est fides et caritas: quarum illa in symbolo apostolorum, haec in decalogo exponitur. Unde apostolus praecipit ut interpretatio sit analogia fidei, Rom. cap.12, hoc est, cum primis fidei axiomatis et quasi principiis totoque coelestis doctrinae corpore consentiat', *De Verbo Dei*, as quoted *ibid.*

8. Cf. Heinrich Heppe, *Die Dogmatik der evangelische-reformierten Kirche*, Ernst Bizer, ed., Neukirchen, 1935, p.13, quoting, e.g., Chamier: '*Analogia fidei* est argumentatio a generalibus, quae omnium in ecclesia docendorum normam continet'.

9. 'Consensus auctoritasque constans ecclesiae', *ibid.*, p. 29.

pleasant mood, his 'fetish texts'.¹⁰ Among these were Hannah's song of the Lord as bringing death and making alive (1 Sam.2:6), Isaiah's enigmatic oracle on the Lord's 'strange' work (Is.28:21), the institution of the Lord's Supper (so plain that the effort of the Swiss to find there some kind of figurative language passed his comprehension and showed a perverse mind, another Spirit), Paul's principle of every man a liar, in front of God the only truthful (Rom.3:4), and, of course, the paradox of justification by faith alone, without works.... Interpreting Scripture according to the analogy of faith meant following the lead and light of the clearer passages. Their power to illuminate conferred on them the regulative function. Here Luther's dramatic experience converged with a common-sense recommendation, and the emphasis on the privilege of clearer passages has remained strong among Lutherans and other Protestants. J. Gerhard can define the norm as the 'sum of heavenly doctrine gathered from the most 'open' places of Scripture'.¹¹ Chemnitz requires agreement with the points 'that have express, clear, sure, and firm witness in the Scripture'.¹² On the Reformed side, Herman Bavinck states that the original view (that of his theological forefathers) stressed the sense drawn from clear verses.¹³ Significantly, the treatment of the analogy of faith belongs to the section on the 'perspicuity' of Scripture.

10. In a private lecture to a small group, to which the present writer belonged, in Paris, 27 Oct. 1977. Otto Ritschl, *op.cit.*, has shown the decisive role which the *helle und klare Worte* played.

11. 'Summa quaedam coelestis doctrinae ex apertissimis scripturae locis collecta', quoted by Landerer, 783.

12. Quoted by Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism. A Study of Theological Prolegomena*, Saint Louis and London, 1970, p. 97.

13. 'Uit de duidelijke plaatsen', *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Kampen, 1906², I, p.511. On the same page he refers to Voetius and Turretin.

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

After the 'topically selective' version comes the 'thematically selective' one. The third understanding of the *analogia fidei* may also claim Luther as its father. Conformity prevails with a cardinal truth of revelation, with a central theological principle taken as the key to all the rest. In his major attack upon the views of the *Schwarmgeister* or sacramentarians of Zurich and Basel, *On the Supper of Christ. Confession* (1528), Luther complains that their exegesis of the words of institution spoils them of their usefulness, 'and this, all the more, since there is no *analogia fidei* here. For all the words of Christ must bear faith and love and be analogous to faith, Romans 12'.¹⁴ Luther probably means that the figurative interpretation suppresses the need for faith exercised against sight, does not set the truth of God against every man a liar, is not analogous to the justification of the wicked and to Christology, which turns upside down the judgement of the senses and of reason. Melancthon joins this view of the analogy with the traditional understanding when he asks for congruence 'with the foundation, that is the law, and the gospel, and the symbols'.¹⁵ Calvin's dedicatory epistle to King Francis I, with which he prefaced the *Institutes*, magnificently expounds the *solī Deo gloria* as the normative reference for the analogy of faith:

When Saint Paul decided that all prophecy should conform to the analogy and similitude of faith (Rom.12:6), he set a most certain rule to test every interpretation of Scripture. If our doctrine is examined by this rule of faith, victory is ours. What better agrees with faith than our acknowledging ourselves to be naked of all virtue, to be clothed upon by God? Void of all good, to be filled by him? Slaves of sin, to be freed by

14. After the French translation by Jean Bosc, *Martin Luther, Oeuvres*, vol.VI (Geneva, 1964) p. 93 = *Weimar Ausgabe* vol.26, p.390.

15. 'Et in primis teneamus regulam, ut prophetia sit analogia fidei, id est, ut enarrationes et iudicia congruant cum fundamento, id est cum lege et evangelio et symbolis', *Corpus Reform.* 15, col.1008, as quoted by Ritschl, p. 302.

him? Blind, to be given light of him? Lame, to be straightened by him? Feeble, to be of him sustained? To deprive ourselves of all matter of boasting that he alone may be glorified, and we in him?¹⁶

Amandus Polanus (1561-1610) offers a more scholastic but no less trenchant formulation of the same criterion:

This interpretation agrees with Holy Scripture which attributes to God all the praise of our eternal salvation, and, at the same time, takes it away entirely from man; that one does not truly agree with Holy Scripture which ascribes to man any, or the smallest, part of the glory of eternal salvation.¹⁷

Nothing could be more congenial to the Barthian mind: the Christological 'concentration', the triumph of grace, the 'Jesus is Victor' central proclamation, govern the whole Barthian enterprise. It is Barth who revives the memory of Polanus,

16. After the French original, *Institution de la Religion chrétienne* (Geneva, 1955) I, p. xxiv: 'Quand saint Paul a voulu que toute prophétie fût conforme à l'analogie et similitude de la foi (Rom.12:6), il a mis une très certaine règle pour éprouver toute interprétation de l'Écriture. Or si notre doctrine est examinée à cette règle de foi, nous avons la victoire en main. Car quelle chose convient mieux à la foi, que de nous reconnaître nus de toute vertu pour être vêtus de Dieu? vides de tout bien, pour être emplis de lui? serfs de péché, pour être délivrés de lui? aveugles, pour être de lui illuminés? boiteux, pour être de lui redressés? débiles, pour être de lui soutenus? de nous ôter toute matière de gloire, afin que lui seul soit glorifié, et nous en lui?' In the *Institutes* itself Calvin refers twice to the analogy as a theological principle, 4:16:4 and 4:17:32 (less clear).

17. 'Illa autem (interpretatio) consentit cum sacra scriptura, quae omnem laudem salutis nostrae aeternae in solidum Deo tribuit et homini prorsus adimit: illa vero non consentit cum sacra scriptura, quaecunque vel minimam partem gloriae salutis aeternae homini adscribit', *Syntagma Theologiae christianae*, as quoted by K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, sect. 21/2, under point 2.

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

although his own use of the phrase itself, *analogia fidei*, has more to do with the cognitive value of religious language, or 'God-talk'.¹⁸ It is Thomas F. Torrance who refers us back to Calvin's preface, with obvious pleasure and assurance.¹⁹

A majority of Protestants, over the centuries, have probably subscribed to a fourth version. We could describe it as the more 'formal' one, *analogia totius Scripturae*. The main application of the analogy is the comparison of all relevant passages on any topic, under the methodical duty to avoid substantial contradictions. It implies a systematic character in biblical interpretation, the totality of a coherent Scripture being the norm. One is not far from the older idea of the 'hermeneutical circle', the reciprocal determination of the whole and of the parts. Thus the *Second Helvetic Confession* ask that Scripture be expounded 'according to the comparison of similar or dissimilar passages'.²⁰ Hollaz defines the analogy of faith as 'the harmony of biblical statements'.²¹ For Abraham Kuyper, as the last essential hermeneutical rule, it amounts to taking seriously the oneness of the biblical corpus.²² Even Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893)

18. The *analogia fidei* is for Barth the alternative to the *analogia entis*, not a rule for hermeneutics, but the way to relate our words to Divine reality. The fullest discussion is found in the *Church Dogmatics* II, 1, sect. 27/2, point 3, where he also coins the phrase *analogia gratiae*, and agrees to define it as an *analogia attributionis extrinsecae*. In I, 12, section 1/2, the analogy of faith is nearer to functioning as a criterion of theological work.

19. *Theological Science*, Oxford, London, New York, 1969, pp. x, 244f.

20. Ch.II: 'pro ratione locorum vel similibus vel dissimilibus'. This is one element only in a mixed conception.

21. 'Harmonia dictorum biblicorum', in Landerer, 783.

22. *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, Amsterdam, 1894, vol.III, p. 106.

seems to use *analogia fidei* with regard to the non-contradictory character of Scripture.²³

We shall raise the question, first, of the meaning of the phrase in the verse from which it was extracted, and which was used to enhance the authority of the rule; then, of the logical mapping of the views we have sketched, whether they include, exclude, or complement one another. A theological justification should come afterwards, of the version, pure or mixed, which will attract our preference, and guide-lines for practice.

Confrontation

Modern commentators of Paul's injunction in Romans 12:6 often appear quite sure that the apostle means 'faith' in the subjective sense, *fides qua* (so F.F. Bruce, John Murray, C.E.B. Cranfield, to choose scholars worthy of the highest consideration); in that case, there is little connection between that verse and the theologians' *analogia fidei* throughout church history. Paul either encouraged would-be prophets in the church to exercise their gifts when they felt confident of having received a message, or he exhorted them to purify their motives or attitudes and only to speak in conformity with their subjective faith, that is, in sober recognition of their dependence on Christ. Unexpected help, however, has come to the Latin Fathers' and Calvin's side! Ernst Käsemann argues forcefully in favour of an objective sense of 'faith': 'It makes no sense at all to suggest that the prophet must judge himself by his own faith.... This would open the gates to every abuse and even false

23. It is reproduced in F. Vigouroux, ed., *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, vol.I, Paris, 1909, and reads on p. xxii: 'Analogia fidei sequenda est, et doctrina catholica ...', adding: 'ex quo apparet, eam interpretationem ut ineptam et falsam rejiciendam, quae, vel inspiratos auctores inter se quodammodo pugnantes faciat, vel doctrinae ecclesiae adversatur'. In the correspondence between the two sentences, to the *analogia fidei* answers the rejection of any interpretation which would create a conflict between inspired writers of the Bible.

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

teaching'.²⁴ Alphonse Maillot follows him.²⁵ Heinrich Schlier reaches a similar conclusion.²⁶ We may surely surmise that a subjective criterion would generate more problems than it would solve. 'Faith' in the objective sense occurs not so seldom in Paul's writings (in Gal.1:23; 3:23,25; 6:10, to take an early epistle, *pistis* refers to the message, or regime, or bond of fellowship; also probably in Eph.4:5,13; 1 Tim.2:7; 3:9; 4:1,6; 5:8; 6:10,12,21; 2 Tim.3:8 ;4:7; Tit.1:1; possibly in Rom.1:5; 10:8; 16:26; Col.2:7; 1 Tim.1:19; Tit.1:4, 13 ;3:15). Long before the Pastoral Epistles Paul expressed the idea of a 'model' or 'pattern' of doctrine (Rom.6:17), and if he meant the same under 'faith', he could easily combine the word *analogia* with it. When prophecy is the topic under discussion, the New Testament quite regularly stresses the need for discernment (1 Cor.14:29,37f; 1 Thes.5:20f; 1 Pet.4:11; 1 Jn.4:1-6), and whenever the criterion is explicitly stated or hinted at, it is conformity with apostolic teaching, with *fides quae creditur*. We dare even suggest that the 'measure of faith' of Romans 12:3 could be interpreted along the same lines. According to the primary meaning of the word, the 'measure' is the measuring measure, the standard;²⁷ may we not understand that God has allotted to each Christian his function in the body in harmony with (accusative of reference) the standard of the new regime of faith, otherwise called 'the measuring standard of the gift of Christ' (Eph.4:7)? Such an exegesis would confirm Käsemann's in verse 6: the apostle instructs his readers that prophecy should agree with the message and doctrine they have received. If New Testament church prophecy, as solid studies

24. *Commentary on Romans*, tr. by G.W. Bromiley, London, p. 341. Apart from Bultmann, he mentions E. Schweizer and W. Schrage on the same side.

25. *L'épître aux Romains, épître de l'oecuménisme et théologie de l'histoire*, Paris, et Geneva, 1984, pp. 306f.

26. *Der Römerbrief*, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna, Herder, 1977, p. 370.

27. As C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh, 1979, vol.II, p. 615, has well perceived and warranted. The Peshitta uses the same word for *metron* and *analogia* in verses 3 and 6.

indicate, covered a wide range of forms, and was closely bound with the exposition of Scripture,²⁸ later appeals to the analogy of faith may not be altogether foreign to the original meaning of Romans 12:6.

We are not, however, to put all conceptions on the same footing. The four main types briefly characterized above are neither equivalent nor mutually exclusive. If one seeks a consensus with every part of Scripture (version IV), he will *ipso facto* honour the central thrust of its message (version III) – provided the Bible *is* coherent – and find support in the clearest places (version II); the risks are not too frightening, then, of a denial of the Creed (version I). Yet, the converse is not true. Karl Barth can both claim conformity with the Word of God, to which Scripture witnesses, and reject Hollaz' rule, harmonization with all biblical statements. The Roman Catholic form of the 'traditional' conception is incompatible with the Reformation principle; while the Fathers and medieval doctors avoided making a decision. They confessed the supreme authority of Holy Scripture but never conceived of it as a tool for the critique of the Church. We cannot elude the choice. What are we to retain, and what are we to reject, if we wish helpfully to use the words *analogia fidei*, and so name a rule for our own Bible study and theologizing?

Courage sometimes requires a degree of bluntness. No church, we dare assert, can faithfully render to its Lord his due of honour and obedience which forbids the Lord's Word radically to question and redress all of its ways and all of its thoughts. We concur with the following admonition:

What happens when a corporate body lacking a clear external standard of truth and judgement grows in strength?... The corporate body strives to become a

28. Strongly asserted by E. Cothenet, 'Prophétisme dans le Nouveau Testament', in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, vol. VII, Paris, 1972, cols. 1280, 1299f.

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

standard to itself, a law to itself. In a word, it presses forward to the status of a Leviathan, that 'mortal god' which Hobbes described so accurately. (...) In sum: unless an infallible, inerrant Word stands above the church, judging it and proclaiming grace to it, magisterial authority is the greatest liability the church can have, for it will inevitably become the unprincipled tool and demonic reflection of sinful man.²⁹

In principle, therefore, no ecclesiastical interpretation or summary of the faith may be allowed to govern the reading of Scripture, and thus to encroach on the free exercise of the Lord's sovereignty over his own through the Word. The privilege of the clearer passages may appear, in the second version, as harmless enough. But who will tell which verses are clear and which are not? Who shall declare the 'obvious' meaning? Historical experience warns against naïve optimism here. Luther's own example, on the eucharistic words of Jesus, will to many appear more repulsive than attractive. Subjectivism inevitably attaches itself to the selection of some elements in a class, to be made the key to all the rest, if it is the first step in a method. The same defect mars, and even more seriously, the other 'selective' version of the analogy of faith. Elevating to a superior normative status one particular doctrine cannot be done without facing the charge of arbitrariness: lack of control makes it too easy for personal preference or philosophical influence to interfere. If one claims that the Spirit so leads (or that the object of the witness imposes himself), he

29. John Warwick Montgomery, *Ecumenicity, Evangelicals, and Rome*, Grand Rapids, 1969, pp. 40f. The Chapter was previously published as an article in the *Springfielder*.

falls back into the old illuministic trap.³⁰ Karl Barth himself was never able to show how to resist the temptation. Only with the formal-universal analogy of faith and Scripture do we stand on less slippery ground. Like every other rule, it may be misapplied, but, within its frame, constitutional provision is made for correction by an objective standard. This is unique. In principle, no Scriptural evidence, in whatsoever way it may bear upon an issue, will be denied the right to overthrow preconceived ideas and slanted approaches. Once it is accepted, adequate room can be made for the interests represented in the other views. Under the safeguard of a prior commitment to comply with all inspired pronouncements, one can happily look for the axis of revelation, as Calvin did, and gather light from *helle und klare Worte* as they appear to shine, and pay due respect to the ministerial authority of the church, with its *normae normatae*. These prove themselves to be precious heuristic procedures. We would recommend a complex notion of the *analogia fidei*, with the formal-universal version as the basis, and secondary features added from the other three.

The apostle, when dictating Romans 12:6, barely thought of the technical 'comparing Scripture with Scripture'; yet, he concerned himself with the agreement of Christian discourse with the whole body of teaching given by inspiration of God, in its main emphases and overall balance (*analogia*), all parts included. Substantially, his point was not far removed from our suggested conception of the analogy of faith. We may recall this nearness to accredit the rule, but, in order to confirm it, a broader theological justification would not be superfluous.

30. James I. Packer, 'Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics', in *Scripture and Truth, op. cit.*, p. 347, uses exceptionally strong language for 'the regular neoorthodox appeal to the Spirit as interpreter': 'an appeal that appears on analysis to be an illuminist fig leaf donned to conceal disfiguring incoherence and arbitrariness in handling the text'. At p.350, he commends the Reformers' *analogia Scripturae*, which he himself calls the principle of harmony.

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

Justification

The analogy of faith, as we understand it, rests first and foremost on the ground of *biblical coherence*. It retains its normative force if, and only if, Scripture is consistent with itself, that is, if all its affirmations are consonant with one another in their original, authentic meaning. Not all scholars wish to grant the truth of this proposition. Many, even before negating the doctrinal consistency of Scripture *in fact*, deny that Scripture *claims* such an attribute, or that formal coherence better suits its function and is more congruous with divinity than the blissful inconsistencies of life.³¹ Ever-changing life! Cannot the God of life and of paradoxical *kenosis*, the God who writes straight on crooked lines and takes pleasure in always surprising us, speak through contradictions? The opposite, traditional, opinion is charged with Western, or Greek, or Cartesian, 'rationalism'!

On the rock unmoved, he who coolly examines the data sees through contemporary rhetoric. At all stages of biblical history, coherence is highly valued, and ascribed to whatever teaching is believed to have come from God. Truth, *emeth*, rhymes with eternity, immutable permanence (Ps.119:160, etc.).³² The law of the Lord is pure, that is, perfectly homogeneous, more thoroughly purged of dross than refined silver and gold; all his ordinances go together as one in their rightness (Ps.19:9). No miracle may authorize unorthodox prophecies (Dt.13:1ff). In

31. For a forceful plea of that kind, see Louis Simon, 'Le Scandale et l'unité' in *Parole et dogmatique. Hommage à Jean Bosc*, 1971, pp. 226-231, and the special issue of the Dominican review *Lumière et Vie*, Lyons, 20/103, June-July 1971, 'Unity and Conflicts in the Church', especially the contributions by E. Trocme and L. Dewart.

32. Cf. Roger Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth', In *Scripture and Truth*, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-298, notes 410f. One may consult our study, 'Qu'est-ce que la vérité? Orientations bibliques dans le débat', *Hokhma* 12, 1979, pp.2-13 and 13, 1980, pp.38-49.

spite of God's freedom to display new things in history, failure to harmonize with the dominant tone of earlier revelations raises doubts on the authenticity of a message (Je.28:7ff). Paul exhorts his readers to be of one mind (Phil.2:2, etc.); they are to grow into the unity of faith (Eph.3:13), since there is only, under one Lord, one faith and one baptism (v.5). His preaching is not 'Yes' and 'No' (2 Cor. 1:18), an echo of Jesus' famous words. In contrast, Friedrich Engels once commented that saying 'Yes, yes, and no, no', is doing 'metaphysics', a capital sin, indeed, in his eyes!³³ Paul insists that his message is identical with that of the other apostles (1 Cor.15:11); their approval and recognition gave him the assurance that he was not running in vain (Gal.2:2). In the face of misinterpretations, 2 Peter 3:16 reaffirms this accord. John highlights the three witnesses' agreement (1 Jn.5:8), and the Fourth Gospel puts forward the theme of 'repetition', not parrot-like indeed, but meeting a concern for identity of substance (Jn.8:26,28; 16:13). Discord is a symptom of untruth, as it was in the case of the false witnesses of Jesus' trial (Mk.14:56,59). Contradictors are to be refuted (Rom.16:17; Tit.1:9): it could never be done if the standard itself embraced several conflicting theologies. As a matter of fact, the whole logic of our Lord's appeal to Scripture in argument (and similarly of his apostles') would instantly collapse if the presupposition of scriptural coherence were taken away. Even against the Tempter, Jesus relies on the internal consistency of his Father's Word, quoting Scripture to rebuff a twisted use of Scripture. 'It is written' would no longer settle an issue if it were conceded that several contradictory views compete with each other on the pages of the Book. The authority of the Word of God would no longer function as it does in Scripture in that case (how could it function at all as supreme?). The men of God who had a part in writing the

33. According to the great marxist thinker Lucien Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché*, Paris, 1955, p. 187.

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

Bible prized consistency;³⁴ they ascribed it axiomatically to divine revelation; it belonged to the collection of sacred texts which had been handed down to them and was enlarged through their own ministry.

Was the latter conviction well-founded? This is another matter. It is possible to imagine that they were actually deluded, and our Lord with them, the victims of their cultural assumptions, and could not see the real inconsistencies in the texts. The size of this paper forbids that we should try to give any proof, even minimal, of our conclusion to the contrary. We shall take shelter behind the refutation of Bauer's and Käsemann's views by D.A. Carson or I. Howard Marshall,³⁵ and limit ourselves to a couple of remarks. Scholarly research on the phenomena, first, provided it is not swayed by presuppositions alien from the Christian faith or hostile to it, provided it is oriented by the Christian worldview, does see and show the harmony of biblical statements. Difficulties which have plagued former generations of readers have been solved wonderfully; those that remain are seldom very acute and are fewer in number than we could reasonably expect – when we think of the *lacunae* in what we know about context and circumstances, about language and literary conventions. Likewise, theological reflection does perceive, with awesome delight, the symphonic beauty of revealed truth. Without becoming masters of God's mysteries, still seeing in part, *en ainigmati*, we do catch a glimpse of a

34. The opposite is so unnatural that those modern critics who deny ancient Israelites 'our' sense of coherence and so explain that they were able to sew together contradictory doublets, etc., still divide among sources in view of supposed inconsistencies incompatible with oneness of source: the original writer (a Cartesian mind indeed!) cannot have written both *a* and *b*, hence they must come from two different documents *A* and *B* ...

35. D.A. Carson, *op.cit.*, and I.H. Marshall, 'Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earlier Christianity', *Themelios*, 2/1, 1976-77, p.5-14. Cf. also Harald Riesenfeld, *Unité et diversité dans le Nouveau Testament*, tr. into French by L-M. Dewailly, *Lectio divina* 98, Paris, Cerf, 1979.

glorious coherence, we do enjoy the earnest of vision. The second remark recalls the status and modality of our profession: it is *of faith*. If we walked by sight, if we followed exclusively our apprehension of the phenomena, problems still on our hands would prevent us from affirming a *perfect* consistency of all the parts of Scripture. But we rather believe our Lord than our eyes. We follow him in his attitude towards the Word of God written – are there other ways of *consistent* discipleship? Whatever be the depths of God's condescension and accommodation to our weakness, we have his word that human agency did not mix alien opinions with the purity of divine truth: we may, therefore, resort with full assurance of faith to the *analogia fidei*.

While scriptural coherence is the foundational justification of the analogy of faith, it requires a second condition to be truly functional: the validity of *canonical enclosure*. The discipline of harmony needs a well-defined corpus within the bounds of which it can operate. Such a prerequisite is implicit in the first one, since, without it, 'Scripture' and 'scriptural' would lose their precise reference; but it is better to spell it out, although more than a mere mention is hardly possible here. Suffice it to say that biblical evidence does warrant the principle of canon. Our Lord endorsed the canonical discernment (well-nigh achieved at that time) of official Judaism. In spite of his critical bent, a major scholar like Hans von Campenhausen acknowledges in the apostle Paul 'the first theologian of a new Canon, based on the history of Christ', what we call the New Testament.³⁶ The rise and flourishing of 'canonical criticism' in the last fifteen years, shows a new and welcome sensitivity to the blessing of canon, despite shortcomings as regards the *locus* of authority. Brevard S. Childs, the gifted leader who launched the movement in 1970, will not submit to a strict analogy of faith; in actual practice, Child's (hypothetical)

36. *La Formation de la Bible Chrétienne*, tr. into French by Denise Appia & Max Dominicé, Neuchâtel-Paris, 1971, p. 113. He has in mind especially 1 Cor. 11 and 15.

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

reconstruction of editorial selection and changes, redactional work and re-casting of material by so-called 'canonizers', has more import than the final form of the text;³⁷ nevertheless, his partial re-discovery of biblical unity has opened the way to unusually wholesome interpretation, at least in several cases.³⁸ From the standpoint of biblical theology, Meredith G. Kline's original and convincing work has unearthed the foundation of the canonical institution, a development of the covenant treaty document.³⁹ We may also comment that the neat canonical boundary which sets apart the Word of God among human writings is a sign of God's real involvement in history: his Word comes down to earth without ceasing to be his Word.

The analogy of faith also depends, at least for its usefulness, on the *organic and natural character* of biblical discourse. This condition has been somewhat ignored, except one takes it as implicit in the *external perspicuity* of orthodox divines.⁴⁰ Yet, it fully deserves our attention. If Scripture were a collection of independent sayings, all of them right but simply juxtaposed, on topics unconnected with one another, how could the analogy come into play? In the case of a systematic treatise, with each point dealt with once, in logical order, comparison of passages would be of secondary interest. But Scripture, like ordinary speech and even more so, shows much repetition and redundancy, it mixes freely general and particular statements, it incorporates dialogue and much figurative language, it multiplies cross-references: the very situation in which analogical interpretation is most needed and most fruitful. It

37. On the canonical approach, we recommend the special issue of the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 16, 1980. James Barr's critique is just as fierce as could be expected; yet, from the opposite pole, we would agree with many of his strictures on Childs' equivocations or compromises.

38. E.g., his treatment of Ps. 8 in his first 'canonical' work, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, Philadelphia, 1970, pp. 151-163.

39. *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, Grand Rapids, 1972; first articles in the *Westminster Theological Journal*.

40. Landerer, 783.

justifies the search for the clearer words. Furthermore, biblical diversity resembles that of a living organism: some truths are more vital than others (Mt.23:23), a supreme common aim determines the general direction, that God be glorified (cf. Jn.7:18), Jesus Christ himself being the head of that body of truth (2 Cor.1:20, etc.). This is proper ground for giving a major (not exclusive) role to major doctrinal themes and patterns. Interpretation according to the analogy of faith, with its various components, espouses Scripture as it is!

A *caveat*, however, comes from the ardent Old Testament scholar, Walter C. Kaiser: if the analogy of faith were to rule interpretation, he fears, with later doctrines used as exegetical keys, 'all revelation would then be levelled out'.⁴¹ The analogy of *antecedent* Scripture alone has legitimacy in the study of Scripture.⁴² Kaiser's praiseworthy concern focuses on the human author's mind, which we ought not to by-pass, as God was pleased to bind himself to it: the mystery of inspiration is the creation of God of his own meaning *as* the meaning of the man, and we would destroy the mystery if we were to read into the words another meaning than the man's.⁴³ Now, obviously, a given sacred writer could only know what was revealed prior to his own ministry, 'antecedent Scripture'. This is the only context we may take into account. Carson's cautious reply - 'that would mean no really new revelation could ever be admitted'⁴⁴ - seems to hit beyond the mark; for, on Kaiser's premises, an entirely new item of revelation *may* be introduced: simply, the analogy of antecedent Scripture will

41. *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, p. 161.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

43. James I. Packer, 'Preaching as Biblical Interpretation', in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, *op. cit.*, p. 198, stresses: 'The whole point of the doctrine of inspiration' amounts to this, 'the way into God's mind is via the human authors' expressed meaning'; and he adds, p. 199: 'The basic theological significance in calling Scripture "inerrant" is as an avowal of this identity'.

44. 'Unity and Diversity ...', p. 92.

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

afford no help for its interpretation,⁴⁵ and only the other (philological) rules will then govern exegesis. However, we also demur at Kaiser's exclusion of the analogy of faith; we would not lightheartedly relinquish assistance from posterior Scripture! Kaiser apparently overlooks an interesting fact: the identity of the prophet's (or psalmist's, etc.) mind and of the mind of the Spirit cuts both ways. With any one human writer, we do admit that later statements clarify earlier ones; if we can trust, at least, the continuity of his thought, later expressions shed hermeneutical light on preceding ones, and they dispel misunderstandings. Why should not later expressions of the unchanging mind of the Spirit, spoken through holy men of God, clarify the meaning of older inspired words? If the meaning of the prophet and that of the Spirit coincide, better to ascertain the mind of the Spirit *is* better to ascertain the mind of the prophet. This involves no forcing of additional *content*, drawn, e.g., from the Gospels, into Isaiah's words; later revelation provides us with *contextual* information in the widest sense, a significant hermeneutical help in correcting mistakes. Critics who do not acknowledge the role of the Spirit as *auctor primarius* may look down on our procedures as 'unscientific', but we have not received a spirit of timidity! We are also aware of the pitfalls: an accurate evaluation of the bearing of later statements on a given debate of interpretation demands much skill, caution and tactfulness. But, in consequence, let us not renounce the *analogia fidei*: let us make a better use of it!

Directions

Examining Walter C. Kaiser's objections and proposals has already led us into our last area of study, on the practical level of actual use. *How* should we apply the analogy of faith? Are there guide-lines to follow? Abraham Kuyper, while fervently

45. It will still exercise a negative control: absence of contradiction with prior revelation will allow the acceptance of a new item, if the new revelation can show the proper credentials (signs, etc.).

upholding the principle, voices concerns not so far from Kaiser's:

The whole of Scripture was considered too much as a text-book written *aus einem Guss* (at a stretch), and the *historia revelationis* constituted too little the complement of serious study. By so doing one would confuse analogy and identity. (...) One would thus pay too little attention to the distinction between the essence and the form of revelation, and not understand how, also apart from the historical process, the same essence can reveal itself in a plurality of forms, just as a shaft of light is broken into a plurality of colours through a prism. Finally, one would overlook that the content of revelation as proceeding from God was too rich to be enclosed in one form only.⁴⁶

He complains that the *analogia fidei* was reduced to 'mechanical stiffness and rigidity'; it is 'no identical repetition', but should be 'governed by the organic process of revelation which also requires it'.⁴⁷ We might question Kuyper's antithesis between analogy and identity as somewhat facile (since neither in Romans 12:6 nor with the Reformers is the concept thus

46. 'Geheel de Schrift werd te zeer als een *aus einem Guss* geschreven. Tekstboek beschouwd, en de *historia revelationis* vormde te weinig voorwerp van ernstige studie. Analogie werd zodoende verward met identiteit. (...) Evenzoo had men te weinig oog voor de distinctie tusschen wezen en vorm der Openbaring, en begreep niet, hoe, ook buiten het historisch proces, hetzelfde wezen zich in veelheid van vormen kon openbaren, gelijk de lichtstraal door de lijnen van het prisma zich in een veelheid van kleuren oplost. En eindelijk zag men voorbij, dat hetgeen te openbaren was uit God kwam, en daarom te rijk aan inhoud was, om zich in één enkelen vorm op te sluiten', *Encyclopaedie* III, pp. 106f.

47. 'Mechanische stijheid en starheid'; '*geen* identieke repetitie'; 'door het organische proces der Openbaring te gelijk geëischt en beheerscht'; *ibid.*, p. 107.

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

oriented), his duality of essence and form, and his assumptions about form as a kind of prison for content. Yet, the need for flexibility is well-taken, and the warning against the tendency to level down the diversity of Scripture, historical and otherwise, hits target indeed. As methodical measures to ward off such a danger, we venture to propose the careful distinction of stages in biblical research. Let progress be step by step, with an eye for the specific contribution of each epoch, of each writer, and for the nuances in the use of words, viewpoints and conceptual schemes. Interchange with critical scholarship, which ordinarily overrates differences and evolutions, will also serve as a protection.

D.A. Carson comes out with a precise suggestion. 'The *analogia fidei* should be used cautiously as an outer limit and as a final consideration rather than as the determining device.'⁴⁸ We would hesitate to restrict application of the analogy of faith to the *end* of the process of study; it also yields precious benefits in shaping our expectations, in stimulating our scientific imagination, in balancing our horizons. (Epistemology has grown more and more sensitive to the complexity of the factors at play in scientific work.) Yet, in practice, Carson's advice does show the same safer path we also try to beacon (and to follow).

Most thrilling and rewarding, especially for a systematic theologian, is the search for, and appeal to, a central truth or doctrine or structure. Yet, this aspect of the application of the *analogia fidei* is also fraught with the most serious risks. The slightest deviation of the compass needle, and the interpreter may land in a far country! The very love of the central theme, since our apprehension of it can never claim to be perfect, may hinder further progress, and block correction by Scripture. How could we escape unwitting arbitrariness and deformation? Our help comes from the general control of scriptural teachings, if we care diligently to enquire about it, and, especially, from

48. 'Unity and Diversity ...', p. 92.

hermeneutical lessons and hints offered by the biblical books themselves: 'meta-language' in Scripture and preliminary syntheses taught by divine inspiration provide us with invaluable aid. The New Testament writers' use and handling of the Old Testament, if we know how properly to assess it, is part of their authoritative teaching, and best educates our exegetical mind.⁴⁹ The *sedes doctrinae* should be the starting-points and basic guides for the study of corresponding topics: Galatians 4 and the Epistle to the Hebrews, for instance, on the relationship between Testaments.

Resorting to the analogy of faith, in the ways thus outlined, does not guarantee invulnerable rightness! Abuses and misuses threaten us still. But it will be the concrete expression of our stance as disciples: at the Master's feet, obeying and trusting his Word, trusting his Word regarding his Word. It will echo our confession: We have one Teacher ... (Mt.23:10).

49. The trustworthiness of their inspired teaching involves: (a) the validity of their judgement if they ascribe a definite meaning to an Old Testament passage, and (b), the validity of any reason they adduce in support of their claim. In many baffling cases, closer analysis has shown us that a modern believer *can* discern and appreciate this twofold validity, and find useful hermeneutical models under unfamiliar forms. We have strong reservations, therefore, about some of the theses of Richard N. Longenecker, 'Can We Reproduce the Exegesis of the New Testament?', *Tyndale Bulletin* 21, 1970, pp.3-38.