A HERMENEUTICAL AMBIGUITY OF ESCHATOLOGY: THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

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Hermeneutically, "analogy of faith" is defined as the "general harmony of fundamental doctrine that pervades the entire Scriptures."[1] Two degrees of analogy are acknowledged: (1) the positive, something so plainly stated and based on so many passages that there can be no question as to the meaning (e. g., sin, redemption, omnipotence, etc.), and (2) the general, something not based on explicit declarations but on the obvious scope and import of Scriptural teachings as a whole.[2] Two more degrees of analogy are worth mention but are usually judged unworthy of being genuine principles of interpretation. These are deduced analogy, which is based purely on logic, and imposed analogy, which is based on a creedal position.[3] Deduced and imposed analogy are in practice not easily distinguished from general analogy.

Authorities on the science of interpretation will usually allow limitations in the use of the analogy of faith. In discussing "comparison of parallel passages," a principle closely akin to the positive analogy of faith, Terry cautions against the danger of trying to make passages parallel that are not parallel and the pitfall of mistaking likeness of sentiment for real parallelism.[4] He also warns that general analogy of faith cannot govern in places that have no real parallel and that stand unopposed by other parts.[5] Single revelations of divine truth without elaborations must be allowed. General analogy is of little help in such cases.

Ramm defines analogy of faith in terms of one system of doctrine taught by the Bible and only one.[6] This, he says, forbids pitting one author against another or finding doctrinal contradictions within the Bible.[7] Yet he sees misuse of this principle by the Roman Catholic Church when scholars of that persuasion find compulsion to interpret all Scripture in harmony with the Romanist system of doctrine.[8]

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[1]M. S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d.) 579.

[2]Ibid., 580.

[3]Ibid., 581.

[4]Ibid., 222-223.

[5]Ibid., 581.

[6]B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Wilde, 1950) 90.

[7]Ibid., 90-91.

[8]Ibid., 26.

Traina calls the analogy of faith the principle of organic unity. If comparable materials are used, the practice of using Scripture to expound Scripture is valid.[9] Yet he foresees two dangers in this principle: (1) that of relating unlike and disconnected passages, and (2) that of disregarding progressive revelation.[10] Stemming from such abuses are the erroneous procedures of the dogmatic (or dialectical) method and the systematized method. The former misleading practice seeks support in Scripture for a previously embraced dogma.[11] The latter interprets Scripture by imposing on it a humanly devised system.[12] Similar to these is the cross-reference method which results in erroneous associations because of an inadequate examination of each separate unit.

Abuses of the analogy of faith have been quite numerous in all phases of Biblical interpretation but are perhaps more numerous in eschatological passages than anywhere else. It is the purpose here to look at a number of abuses with a view to proposing a possible remedy to at least some of them.

I. GRAMMATICO-HISTORICO-THEOLOGICAL METHOD

The first group of illustrations chosen may be grouped under this title because seemingly a theological orientation is responsible for such misuses of the analogy of faith. This category of abuse is a long-standing one but is also a current trend because some contemporary scholars continue to operate thus.

Emanuel Swedenborg is by no means contemporary, but he furnishes a good starting point. He presents a classic example of imposed analogy of faith in his statement regarding Rev 3:21: "The one who overcomes, I will give to him to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne." He concludes that "my throne," the throne of Christ, cannot be David's throne. His reason for this conclusion is simple: Christ's throne is in heaven.[13] This is a clear instance of begging the question, for a preconceived creedal position has determined in advance the very thing to be proven. The terminology of Rev 3:21 assumes the existence of two thrones, only one of which has a fixed heavenly location. A purpose of the quest in Rev 3:21 is to discover where the other is.[14]

Louis Berkhof advocates a grammatical, historical and theological approach to hermeneutics. In telling how to handle eschatological passages he observes, "The prophets clothed their thoughts in forms derived from the dispensation to which they belonged, i. e., from the life, constitution, and history of their own people." He later adds, "In fact, the New Testament clearly proves that a literal

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[9]R. A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study* (1952) 159.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid., 168.

[12]Ibid., 179.

[13]E. Swedenborg, *The Apocalypse Explained* (New York: American Swedenborg Printing and Publishing, 1905), 1. 409-410.

[14]E. W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or "The Day of the Lord"* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, n. d.) 209.

fulfilment is not to be expected in all cases, and that in some important prophecies the dispensational form must be stripped off."[15] The significance of this "stripping off" comes out still later: "When a doctrine is supported by an obscure passage of Scripture only and finds no support in the analogy of faith, it can only be accepted with great reserve. Possibly, not to say probably, the passage requires a different interpretation than the one put on it. Cf. Rev. 20:1-4."[16] This affords a good example of misusing the general analogy of faith. The "obvious scope and import of Scripture teachings as a whole" allows no place for a thousand-year kingdom, so it is automatically written off without due consideration of what Rev 20:1-4 says. Other arguments lodged against a literal thousand-year kingdom on earth partake of the same subjectivity: The OT and the NT portray an everlasting kingdom, the kingdom began with Christ's first coming, one thousand is merely ten raised to the third power, and *chilia etē* is figurative in 2 Pet 3:8. Ladd is more objective at this point in concurring with the classic statement of Henry Alford regarding the resurrections before and after the millennium: "If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain *psychai ezēsan* at the first, and the rest of the *nekroi ezēsan* only at the end of a specified period after that first,—if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave;—then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything."[17]

Rev 7:4 provides a further illustration of the misuse of analogy of faith, in one instance positive analogy and in the other general analogy. Positive analogy is followed by Leon Morris in proving that the 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel are the Church. He simply lists Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; Gal 6:16; 1 Pet 2:9-10; Titus 2:14; Gal 3:29; Phil 3:3; and 1 Cor 10:18 as his proof. No space is devoted to these proof texts.[18] The best that can be said of them in favor of Morris' position is that one of several alternatives in each of the other passages is favorable to what he is trying to prove. But if that alternative happens to be wrong in each case, the support for his interpretation vanishes.

G. B. Caird uses general analogy to prove the same thing in the same passage: "In the Revelation John has already applied to the church so many descriptions of old Israel that it would be perverse to treat the present case as an exception to the general rule."[19] Yet Caird furnishes no instance where this can be verified.

Ladd, in reaching the same conclusion about Rev 7:4, arrives there by a different route: "No satisfactory explanation of this irregular list of names has been offered, unless it be this: John intends to say that the twelve tribes of Israel are not really literal Israel, but the true, spiritual Israel—the church."[20] He also rejects a

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[15]L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950) 151-152.

[16]Ibid., 166.

[17]G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 267.

[18]L. Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 114.

[19]G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper, 1966) 95.

[20]Ladd, *Commentary*, 115.

reference to literal Israel because he has found no evidence that the Church will be raptured before the tribulation.[21]

So the battle rages as to whether the Church has replaced Israel in God's eschatological program. An interesting word was added recently by a Church historian, however. Peter Richardson writes: "The word 'Israel' is applied to the Christian Church for the first time by Justin Martyr c. A. D. 160."[22] This implies strongly that the earliest fathers did not find this equation of peoples in the NT.

An example of deduced analogy of faith comes to the fore in recent discussions of eschatological pessimism. Throughout this century the alleged pessimism of premillennialism has been repeatedly criticized. Walter Rauschenbusch commends the spiritual zeal of chiliasts for devotional and missionary purposes, but blames them for their neutralizing effect on efforts to mobilize Christian moral forces.[23] Shirley Jackson Case despises those who distort Scriptural phrases from their original meaning (e. g., "there shall be wars and rumors of wars") but also indicts "modern premillennialism" for "its inherent pessimism."[24] More recently the same theme has been taken up by Richard Quebedeaux, who writes: "There is in the New Evangelicalism a marked aversion to Dispensationalism and its inherent apocalyptic speculations. This firm repudiation, of course, frees the scholars in question to deal more constructively with the present ills of society and thus develop a positive Evangelical social ethic, unhindered by Dispensational pessimism concerning the human situation."[25]

Vernon Grounds defends premillennialism against charges of inherent pessimism by pointing out the conditional nature of prophecy: "Its fulfilment may be modified or accelerated or delayed according to human response."[26] Yet it seems that a more straightforward answer comes from Germany. Peter Beyerhaus opines that if the Bible presents a socially pessimistic message we must accept it, not fashion it according to our own ideas. He asserts that the final purpose of evangelism is not social unification but polarization. This is part of his clarification of the Biblical concept of evangelism and elimination of various present-day distortions.[27]

II. GRAMMATICO-HISTORICO-MYTHOLOGICAL METHOD

Other examples of mishandling the analogy of faith among conservatives could be cited, but some space should be devoted to a related trend among those of more liberal persuasion. "New hermeneutic" as distinct from "hermeneutics" is the name chosen to describe this approach.[28] While hermeneutics is "the study

[21]Ibid., 114.

[22]P. Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 1.

[23]W. Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and Social Crisis* (London: Macmillan, 1912) 202-203.

[24]S. J. Case, *The Millennial Hope* (Chicago: University Press, 1918) 216, 235-241.

[25]R. Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals* (New York: Harper, 1973) 38.

[26]V. C. Grounds in *Christian Heritage* (September 1974) 26.

[27]P. Beyerhaus in *Christianity Today* (April 26, 1974) 8; ibid. (May 10, 1974) 15-16.

[28]J. Robinson, *The New Hermeneutic* (New York: Harper, 1964) ix-x, 3-4, 6-7, 23-24.

of the methodological principles of interpretation" (*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*), the new hermeneutic injects a dominating subjectivism into the process of interpretation. This subjectivism is termed by H. M. Kuitert a "Pro-Me Covenant Theology."[29] Werner Kummel writes: "I intend, by scientific exegesis, to discover the objective meaning of the text, i. e. to learn from the text what it says about the subject matter discussed in it, *and what this means for me personally.*"[30] According to Kuitert the task of the new hermeneutic is to "distinguish between the real intention of God's communication with man expressed in Scripture, and the language of the culture in which this content comes to us. . . . This process of distinguishing between the content of revelation and its packaging is a sort of demythologizing. But of course, all demythologizing is carried on in the interest of drawing out of Scripture the true, existential interpretation needed by twentieth century man."[31]

Bultmann did this by utilizing what A. D. R. Polman calls the "transcendental method of Kant, Schleiermacher and Ritschl."[32] The whole procedure involves "the eschatologizing of the history of Scripture."[33] "The supposed claims of a self-existing God are shown to be hollow. We have now eschatologized history completely; there will now be no God and no Christ standing at the top of the escalator of our lives."[34] The Reformers missed the point of Paul's and John's God of universal love, and we did not have the equipment to get at the truth until Kant's Copernican revolution.[35] The new quest for the historical Jesus recognizes an overemphasis on the subjective by Barth and Bultmann and seeks to do away with the dualism between history and eschatology by finding "history in eschatology," which is based on the improved understanding of self suggested by Martin Heidegger and R. G. Collingwood.[36]

In the words of Ramm the new hermeneutic has added a new step between the apostles and the NT: "Church materials," which include additions, interpretations, revisions of original materials and unintentional accretions that came into the oral traditions and documents between the time of the apostles and the writing of the NT.[37]

The new hermeneutic performs the traditional process of exegesis as did the Reformers but adds the additional step of stripping away the "Church materials," the "packaging," the local cultural limitations of the passage, the *Geschichte*, or whatever it may be called. This "stripping away" falls very easily

[29]Cited by C. Van Til, *The New Hermeneutic* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 137.

[30]O. Kaiser and W. G. Kummel, *Exegetical Method* (New York: Seabury, 1967) 136 (italics mine).

[31]Van Til, *New*, 121.

[32]Ibid., 70-71.

[33]Ibid., 71.

[34]Ibid., 72-73.

[35]Ibid., 72.

[36]Ibid., 77-78.

[37]B. Ramm in *Christianity Today* (August 11, 1972) 11.

into the category of deduced analogy of faith.

What does this do to eschatology? Perhaps no better illustration can be found than in Ernest Best's recent commentary on the Thessalonian epistles. After giving the "packaging" in the body of his commentary, Best gets to the "contents" of the message in a closing chapter, "The Return of Christ."[38] He admits that Paul's conception of Christ's return is "a public and cosmic event taking place at a definite date in history."[39] He concludes, however, that early Christians "erred in respect of the date of the parousia." Then he suggests that they may have erred in identifying it as "a public, cosmic and dateable event."[40] He justifies this suggestion by comparing the parousia with creation, as did early Hebrew and Christian thought (e. g., creation of new heavens and new earth). He describes first-century Christians as those who accepted cosmology that viewed God as creating the universe during a dated period a few thousand years before Christ. For this culture both the beginning and the end were public cosmic events belonging to the same order of reality. But now this concept of beginning has disappeared, says Best. Instead of being a few thousand years old the world is billions of years old. By transference the end also is pushed so far away that there is no need to reckon with it.

Also, since scientists conceive of the world as either winding down or having no end at all, it is just as wrong to think of a real physical end that God achieves in some public way as it is to think of a real physical beginning. "We must therefore exclude the conception of the End in a physical sense."[41]

Having excluded the "End" in a physical sense, Best searches for what the real meaning of the "End" is. W. Neil, an advocate of realized eschatology, contributes: "Thus the Parousia is, like Creation, in a real sense timeless; not an historical event, but the underlying purpose of history and the summing up of all things in Christ."[42]

R. Bultmann proposes: "The true solution to the problem lies in the thought of Paul and John, namely in the idea that Christ is the ever present or ever becoming present eschatological event." He becomes that event when preached, and a man moves from inauthentic to authentic existence in response to that preaching.[43]

After a fruitless examination of others' solutions, Best concludes, "All this means that the parousia was an integral part of an existing framework which thought of the world as created a few thousand years earlier and ending in at least a comparable, if not a much shorter, period in the future. If we jettison this framework, as jettison it we must today, does any place remain for the parousia? As such there is no place."[44] After offering his own conclusion of what the end en-

[38]E. Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (New York: Harper, 1972) 359 ff.

[39]Ibid., 360.

[40]Ibid., 362.

[41]Ibid., 363.

[42]Ibid., 364.

[43]Ibid., 364-365.

[44]Ibid., 367.

tails (cf. Col 1:20; Eph 1:10; Rom 8:19-21; Phil 2:9-11), he says further, "The End then is not to be conceived as the End of history, as a public event which can be seen as an intervention of God into the world process. Christ bears a similar relation to the End as to the Beginning: he is creator and consummator. But in neither case is he to be tied to the universe in any way science would find recognizable or which the historian could record. The End is not an event in history but outside it."[45]

Reflecting on Best's approach raises a number of questions: By jettisoning the framework, does one not jettison a part of the inspired package containing cultural conditions as well as the written message? Has science proven conclusively the Genesis account of creation to be nonhistorical? Has the NT Church committed the error of assigning a date to the parousia? Does not the fact that Jesus' first appearance was public, cosmic and dateable indicate that his reappearance will be the same? Is it not Best's personally contrived analogy of faith that has led him to divest the plain teaching about Jesus' return of any lasting meaning? Is it not a onesided view of the overall teaching of Scripture that has relegated the parousia to the category of a passing superstition? Is it wise for any uninspired twentieth-century scholar to second-guess an inspired writer working in unique and divinely produced historical circumstances?

III. A HERMENEUTICAL ALTERNATIVE

Does not analogy of faith at times become a scapegoat for cramped schedules that prohibit examination of passages in the detail necessary to arrive at the grammatico-historical meaning? We are so prone to fall back on our own systems for the answer and thereby short-change the investigative process. In so doing we rob ourselves of valuable discoveries that could greatly enhance the meaning of Scripture.

May we propose a sample where literary and grammatical research, instead of jumping to conclusions, might have yielded a more accurate understanding of an eschatological passage? In 2 Thess 2:3 the apodosis of a conditional sentence is suppressed. Suggestions as to what this "understood" apodosis is have varied.

Giblin, cited by Best, says that "the Lord will not have come in judgment to end definitely the deception that is the work of Satan." Milligan says that "the Parousia of the Lord will not take place." Best and the *NIV* read that "that day will not come." Hiebert and the *NASB* state that "it will not come." Almost unanimously the inserted portion is thrust into the future. One voice, however, suggests carrying over the sense of *henestēken hē hēmera tou kyriou* from v 2.[46]

Why carry a future tense in 2:3 if the clause in 2:2 to be refuted is past—"the day of the Lord has already come"—or more probably a present intensive sense—"the day of the Lord is present"? It seems to be the foregone conclusion of most that the two events in the *ean* clause will precede the day of the Lord. It is true that this type of condition most often carries a future tense in the apodosis, but frequently the apodosis of the *ean*-subjunctive condition carries a present

[45]Ibid., 370.

[46]G. Lunemann, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, in *Commentary on the New Testament* (ed. H. A. W. Meyer; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1880) 208.

tense or even an intensive perfect. If the context warrants, as this one certainly does, a present idea is legitimate and even preferable: "The day of the Lord is not present unless the apostasy has come first and (then) the man of lawlessness has been revealed." In testing this present apodosis, one finds that it makes very good sense. Vv 3-4 tell what is not happening at present and vv 5-7 tell what is happening during the present epoch.

So much for a simple literary analysis of the context. A grammatical analysis is a little more complex, but quite revealing. One grammatical parallel to the present conditional clause is found, introduced by *ean mē*, having a compound predicate with aorist subjunctive verbs and utilizing *prōton* in the former part of the predicate. But in this parallel usage the apodosis is unsuppressed and therefore supplies helpful data for interpreting 2 Thess 2:3. The parallel construction is in John 7:51: "Our law does not judge a man unless it hears from him first and so knows what he is doing, does it?" Several things are learned from this statement: (1) Action in the apodosis is in the present time, as has been proposed for 2 Thess 2:3 from its context. (2) Both actions of the conditional clause are included within the scope of action in the apodosis. They do not precede the judgmental process but are a part of it. (3) *Prōton* indicates priority of the former member of the compound predicate to the latter. It does not indicate priority to the apodosis. In 2 Thess 2:3 this would mean that the apostasy comes prior to the revelation of the man of lawlessness but not prior to the day of the Lord.

Another passage has the *ean mē . . . prōton* combination, Matt 12:29 = Mark 3:27: "How can anyone enter the house of a strong man and seize his goods unless he first bind the strong man?" Three significant features emerge here: (1) Again the action of the apodosis is present time. (2) The action of the conditional clause is part of the chronological sequence of the apodosis. It does not precede it. (3) The *prōton* marks priority to part of the apodosis but not all of it.

One other passage has an *ean . . . prōton* combination without the *mē*, Rom 15:24: "I hope while passing through to see you and to be sent forth by you there (i. e., to Spain) if I have first enjoyed your company in part (or, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while)." Three features obtain here also: (1) Once again the action of the apodosis is present time. (2) The action of the conditional clause is included in the sequence of the apodosis. It does not precede it. (3) The *prōton* marks priority to part of the apodosis but not all of it. In this case it is barely possible that Paul would have finished the statement with a second predicate in the conditional part if he had not broken the statement off so as to get to a discussion of his collection visit to Jerusalem.

Transferring these grammatical findings back to 2 Thess 2:3, we arrive at the following sense: "The day of the Lord is not present unless first in sequence within that day there has come the apostasy and following this apostasy's beginning the revealing of the man of lawlessness." Rather than the two events preceding the day of the Lord as has so often been suggested, these are happenings that compose the early stages of that day after it has begun. By observing the nonoccurrence of these, the readers could rest assured that the day whose early stages are so characterized had not yet begun.

This approach is more satisfactory than a quick resort to an evasive analogy of faith that so often degenerates into circular reasoning. Such a lexical study as K. W. Clark has done of *phthanō* in the disputed passage, "The kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt 12:28 = Luke 11:20), is far more helpful than a foregone

conclusion such as "this is the way the kingdom is, so we must interpret Matt 12:28 in light of it."[47] The same may be said regarding Reginald H. Fuller's analysis of the aorist tense of that verb.[48]

Are we then suggesting a doing away with the analogy of faith? No. We are rather proposing a conscious effort to postpone its part in the interpretive process until a very late stage. In fact, we may even suggest that it not be a part of the exegetical process at all but that it be utilized as a double-check on completed exegesis. Its removal from among the hermeneutical principles could be a safeguard against abuses such as those mentioned earlier. Its value would thereby become of a negative type: Is there any reason why the meaning of the text reached by a more restricted exegesis cannot be accepted? Or, is there any reason why this interpretation cannot be harmonized with previous impressions as to the unified teaching of Scripture? This has much advantage over the approach that asks, "How can I find this meaning in my text?" This proposed course could reduce to a minimum the danger of imposing on a passage a meaning that God or the human writer never intended to be there. When a passage is allowed to speak for itself, our understanding of Scripture will be much richer through each part's being allowed to speak for itself. The limitations imposed by personal considerations will have been drastically reduced. But of perhaps even more immediate practical significance is the fact that differences between our interpretations will also be fewer. And of course unanimity within the body of Christ must be considered a worthy objective.

[47]K. W. Clark, "Realised Eschatology," *JBL* 59 (1940) 367-383.

[48]R. H. Fuller, *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* (Chicago: Allenson, 1954) 26.