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The Unity of Scripture

Robert D. Preus

Few theological concepts have been more confused, unclear, and undeveloped throughout the course of the church's history than the concept of the unity of Scripture. The term was not used in the early church, nor by the reformers, nor even in the post-Reformation era. The terms most closely approximating the idea to be found during that vast span of church history were *kanōn pisteōs* and *regula fidei*, *hē pistis* (a common term for creeds in the early church), and *analogia pisteōs*, or *analogia fidei*, terms with different meanings derived from Romans 12:7 and sometimes 2 Timothy 1:13. Whether the idea expressed by these terms constitutes simply a summation of Scripture or a hermeneutical norm as well is not always clear, but it usually includes both. And the actual meaning of these terms as to what they affirm about the nature of Scripture is not uniform and not even always clear. What do these phrases say in reference to the nature of biblical unity? Usually they simply assume an organic doctrinal unity within the entire Scriptures and offer a summation of that body of doctrine. The authority and truthfulness of the Bible and its doctrine are clearly presupposed, since such divine properties underlie the divine doctrinal content of Scripture. Also the unity between the two testaments in simple terms of prophecy and fulfillment is explicitly affirmed, and emphatically so, by the church fathers, although not explicitly always by the aforementioned terms.¹

During the Reformation and during the period of orthodoxy almost to the eighteenth century the idea of the unity of Scripture was expressed in many ways. And the aforementioned terms prevalent in the early and medieval church suggestive of the unity of Scripture were used freely in contexts much the same as in the early church. Thus, commentaries on the earlier creeds and new creeds and symbols were written as summaries of the biblical *corpus doctrinae* and adhered to, often with avidity by subscription to such documents. That the theology (doctrine) of Scripture was an organic unity (so Luther; the following terms connoting an organic unity of biblical theology were commonly used: *corpus doctrinae*, *articuli fidei*, *caput*, *pars*, *locus*, etc.) or a coherent system (so perhaps Calvinism) of doctrine was assumed and affirmed in the dogmatic and exegetical writers of the day. Furthermore, all the reformers believed and asserted in their writings a unity

of the Old and New Testaments in terms of prophecy and fulfillment; that is to say, verbal and cognitive predictive assertions of the Old Testament had a corresponding fulfillment in the words and deeds of Christ and other events recorded accurately in the New Testament. Coupled with this basic idea of unity was the conviction, held by all the reformers (and even Socinians and Roman Catholics with certain modifications) in one form or another that all of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, was Christocentric; that is, the main theme running through all of Scripture and cognitively set forth there is the person *and work* of Christ.

Thus, in the Reformation and post-Reformation era, as in the early church, there are many complementary ideas and convictions, all or any of which might give rise to a total integrated concept of the unity of Scripture. And yet the term "unity of Scripture" was not yet in vogue, nor was there any attempt to bring together the various convictions and ideas into a coordinated synthesis expressing the concept of biblical unity. Nor, I might add, was it always clear whether these firmly held views concerning (a) the divine origin and authority of all Scripture (the one God is the *autor primarius*), (b) the agreement between the testaments in terms of prophecy and fulfillment, (c) the Christocentricity of all of Scripture, and (d) the total doctrinal agreement of all Scripture were considered to be simply conclusions drawn from Scripture and thus part of the *corpus doctrinae*, or in addition hermeneutical principles drawn from Scripture and necessary for the correct and evangelical explication and application of Scripture. Of course, all the four principles mentioned above were held by the reformers and to varying degrees became underlying working principles of hermeneutics as they plied their exegetical trade, as it were. Luther might have employed the principle of Christocentricity with more consistency and vigor, Calvin the principle of doctrinal unity, although I am not sure about this.² We must remember, of course, that in the early years of the Reformation no thorough studies on hermeneutics were written until the *Clavis Scripturae* of Matthias Flacius in 1567, although Andrew Hyperius as early as 1556, after Luther's death, had taken up many hermeneutical concerns (spiritual, academic and theological) in his *De Theolgo, seu de Ratione Studii Theologici Libri IIII*. Even so, a full-blown and conscious treatment of the unity of Scripture incorporating the

four basic principles enunciated above just did not appear, and it is only in recent times that the term "unity of Scripture" has been employed and that one or more of the above principles have been included in the definition of the term.³

It is my contention that the concept of unity adumbrated clearly by Luther and the reformers and structured on the four pillars of (a) divine authorship of Scripture, (b) agreement between prophecy in the Old Testament and fulfillment in the New, (c) Christocentricity, and (d) doctrinal agreement throughout Scripture is biblical; that is, each pillar of the construct is based squarely upon the exegesis of Scripture. Since the time of the Enlightenment and the advent of the historical-critical method initiated by Semler, this Reformation view of the unity of Scripture has not been considered viable as a doctrine or hermeneutical principle. However, the theologians of the Enlightenment, the higher critics, the Romantics, the mythophiles, the classical Liberals, and even the Deists all conjectured some principle of unity pertaining to Scripture. Ironically, what seemed to be a much greater *conscious* interest in the notion of the unity of Scripture becomes apparent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and in our own day among just those theologians who abandoned every one of the four pillars of the Reformation doctrine, except in some cases a vague notion of biblical Christocentricity. Ironic too although understandable is the fact that throughout the course of church history those theologians who believed in (and took for granted) an intrinsic unity of Scripture never bothered to articulate the notion of the unity of Scripture as a unified principle of interpretation, whereas those theologians arriving later on the scene who could find no essential and objective unity in Scripture struggled with great effort and conviction to find some spiritual truth or religious principle which would give meaning to Scripture in spite of the fact that its historical references and factual claims could not be accepted and its theology was contradictory and often inane or irrelevant.

A tracing of the history of the concept of the unity of Scripture since the time of the Enlightenment yields some interesting conclusions. Having abandoned the four pillars underlying the Reformation concept, but persuaded that there was abiding spiritual truth or value in the Scriptures, the

theological progeny of the Enlightenment, using the historical-critical method, and with the all the developing historical scholarship and shifting philosophical insight of their day at their disposal, worked out a veritable welter of theories of biblical unity. Usually the unity was found to apply to the *res* referred to by the Scriptures rather than the *verba*, or Scripture itself; and this seemed consistent enough, since Scripture itself was not God's Word or revelation, but only a human and primitive account of revelation (Semler), if that. And the unity of Scripture, its principle of coordination, was its meaningfulness which consisted usually in a coordinating motif or spiritual truth. To Semler this principle was the Bible's witness to the growing movement of man's spirit toward God according to universal moral and religious principles. To Zachariä the principle was a unity of concepts or religious ideas (but not explicit doctrine). To von Hofmann it was *Heilsgeschichte*. To Herder unity was the historical continuity of spirit and "content" between the two testaments. Even Strauss, the mythophile, found in Scripture a unifying theme, unrelated to its historical reference or fact claims; namely, the (philosophical) idea of reconciliation, or the uniting of the finite and infinite in man in his history.

Passing to our day and the theories of unity being propounded of late, we find that our modern theological pundits are not so original as their eighteenth and nineteenth century theological forebears. Roughly speaking, modern liberal exegetes—and for convenience and with no pejorative implication I call everyone who admittedly or latently follows the lead of historical criticism, Romanticism, *Heilsgeschichte* (Beck, von Hofmann, Neo-orthodoxy), Idealism, or demythologization a liberal exegete—are equally disagreed among themselves as to just what constitutes the unity of Scripture. I shall offer some random, disparate examples. Herman Diam, a Lutheran Existentialist, sees the unity of Scripture to be a "proclamatory unity" (in contrast to a "doctrinal unity") in that in the witness of Scripture Jesus Christ is heard to be proclaiming Himself.⁴ J. Stanley Glen, a Reformed theologian, after stating that there are "many [conflicting?] unities in the Bible," sets forth a thesis similar to Diem's, suggesting that the unity of Scripture is in its *kerygma* (proclamation) rather than in its *didache*, although he has his doubts whether there is any unity in the *kerygma* itself, except for the fact that it

points to Jesus.⁵ Ernst Käsemann,⁶ a Lutheran and post-Bultmannian, who, like his mentor, rejects the facticity of the resurrection and therefore of the atonement of Christ, finds the doctrine of justification the unifying center of Scripture and a "canon within the canon" which is able to test the spirits within the canon itself. Edward Schroeder, a Lutheran who believes in the historicity and the resurrection of Christ and in the atonement, agrees with Käsemann.⁷ Roy L. Honeycutt, Jr., a Baptist, offers us one of the more ingenious and artless theories of unity. Finding theological aberrations and misunderstandings and poor rabbinic exegesis throughout the New Testament, and finding the New Testament notion of God incompatible with the Old, and finding no unitary Christology in the New Testament at all, he opts for a unity within both testaments in that they witness to the "mighty acts of God."⁸ Honeycutt's theory (which could apply to the Koran) is similar to that of the hard-headed critic, G. Ernest Wright, who, rejecting the doctrine of the incarnation because it is "unbiblical," nevertheless yields to the mystique so common among liberal theologians, that there must be some unifying theme running through the Scriptures, and he offers in a magnificent *tour de force* the "rule of God" (but not in any ontological or historical sense) as constituting the unity of Scripture.⁹ H. H. Rowley opts for a number of theological motifs, such as monotheism, election, and the cross, to be the "unity in diversity" of Scripture.¹⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, rejecting the orthodox Protestant doctrine of doctrinal unity and moving behind the *kerygma*, sees in the "Christ-event itself," that is, "the public ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Himself" the "standard by means of which to judge the Scriptures and their witness to Christ."¹¹ Foster R. McCurley sees the "Gospel" as the nucleus or unity of Scripture, but only in the formal sense (the Old Testament knows nothing of Christ).¹² S. Fernon McCasland, a committed and condescending higher critic, in a desperate *testimonium paupertatis* concludes that in the experience of faith (formal faith, *fides qua creditur*) "lies the deepest and most abiding unity of the Scriptures."¹³

Two comments on what has just been said may be useful. First, among those theologians since the Enlightenment who have rejected the traditional orthodox and classical notion of the unity of Scripture there seems to be no common under-

standing concerning a formal definition of such unity or to what the term refers. Does the unity of Scripture refer to the "wholeness" of Scripture, to a theme running through the Scripture (e.g., reconciliation, justification), to a historical continuity, to a person, or what?

Second, those who break with the orthodox Reformation doctrine of unity do not in any case derive their notion of the unity of Scripture from the explicative sense of Scripture, but rather from its applicative meaning. Like the Alexandrians (Clement and Origen) they are often unable to find abiding meaning in the literal explication of the biblical text. And yet they believe that there is some kind of unity (spiritual value, theme, insight, historical truth) underlying the Scriptures (although not necessarily exegetically derived from the Scriptures) which is both important in itself and useful and even indispensable for interpreting the biblical text. But whereas for the Alexandrians and medieval allegorists the "rule of faith" pointed to an inherent doctrinal unity of Scripture, as well as a consensus entering into the life of the church, and was employed to shed light and enhance the literal sense of Scripture, for liberal exegetes since the Enlightenment the principle of unity, or central meaning, of Scripture has taken on a more radical and critical function. Subjecting the Scriptures to critical historical scrutiny, these theologians not only saw the intended sense of Scripture to be irrelevant and of no spiritual value, but also concluded it was patently false on historical or religious grounds. In this way they went beyond the Alexandrians and medieval allegorists.

I will devote the remainder of this study to making a number of comments which hopefully will be relevant and even helpful to a discussion of the unity of Scripture.

1. Davis is correct when he agrees that the basis for the unity of Scripture must lie in the fact that it has one single, divine author.¹⁴ This was the basic argument of the reformers and post-Reformation theologians who inferred from the divine authorship of Scripture the truthfulness and inner unity of its doctrinal content. It was a common contention among them that the Holy Spirit as the author of all of Scripture is the best interpreter of it and that since He inspired the Scripture in words the sense can never be separated from the *verba*.¹⁵ In this view the doctrine of the unity of Scripture has the same

sedes as the doctrine of the divine origin of Scripture, namely, 2 Timothy 3:16. Here Paul says that on the basis of its divine inspiration every single Scripture is profitable *pros didaskalian* (singular; true doctrine, of which Paul has spoken previously) and is unequivocal and noncontradictory. Paul goes on to say that the Scriptures will render the theologian *artios*. . . *exērtismenos*.

2. The denial that the Old Testament predicts Christ and therefore preaches and promises Him destroys the unity of Scripture, at least in respect to the unity of the two testaments.¹⁶ This view, so common today, finds Christ in the Old Testament, but only virtually or implicitly. Thus, there is no idea that the prophets spoke of Him directly in the sense that their immediate audience could believe in a Savior to come; but Christ can be found only by the utilization of a *sensus plenior* or extended typology. And so the New Testament merely *fills in* (Herder's *Einfüllung*) the Old Testament prophetic word; it in no way cognitively refers to a corresponding fulfillment (*Erfüllung*) in the person and work of Christ. Meanwhile the Israelites were saved by God's "grace" apart from any faith in Christ, or perhaps by a different covenant, that of works. And so the unity of biblical soteriology is denied. The unity of Scripture is *eo ipso* undermined if there is no correspondence between prophecy and fulfillment, between type and antitype, between the meaning of a text and its referent. The New Testament writers are correct in their understanding and interpretation of the Old Testament, that is, they actually represent the *sensus literalis* and intention of the Old Testament, not a distorted interpretation, or *ex eventu* explanation of typology, or religious insight as they witness to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. We must distinguish between predictive prophecy and typology at this point. In the case of predictive prophecy we have a rectilinear correspondence between an Old Testament descriptive and cognitive prediction and a thing, person, or event described in the New Testament. In typology there is also a straight correspondence, but between a thing or person or event in the Old Testament and a person, thing, or event in the New Testament. In the case of predictive prophecy the *words* of the Old Testament predict; in the case of typology the *reference* of the words predict. The correspondence, or unity, between type and antitype in the case of biblical typology is therefore

only a unity of two references, type from the Old and antitype from the New Testament. Except in cases where the New Testament itself clearly marks out an Old Testament type, the practice of typological exegesis can become open-ended and precariously arbitrary as a hermeneutical principle, since it is an application not of the unity of Scripture, but of the unity of the references of Scripture. It is thus no more based on the explicative meaning of the biblical narrative than the application of the unitary principles of Semler and his followers who believed that there was no unity of Scripture except that which was applicatively derived. This is the reason that Hans Frei accuses Johannes Cocceius, a strict Calvinist, with his emphasis upon typology and the difference between the two testaments, of unwittingly helping to cause the dissolution of the traditional unity of literal explicative sense and historical reference.¹⁷

3. The terms "Christocentricity" and "Christological unity" need clarification. Theologians as different from each other as Luther and Socinus, Karl Barth and Paul Tillich speak of Christ being the center of the Scriptures. For Socinus the metaphor meant merely that Christ is the subject matter of Scripture, just as Caesar is the subject matter of Caesar's *Gallic Wars*. To Luther Christocentricity was always affirmed in a doctrinal and realistic soteriological context, in the context of justification through faith *propter Christum*, that is, on account of His redemptive work, and this is particularly the case when he urges Christology as a hermeneutical aid against legalism.¹⁸ To Karl Barth the principle of Christocentricity is a doctrinal principle, but also a historical thematic continuity.¹⁹ To Tillich all Christological terms are religious symbols without historical or ontological referents having anything to do with Christ. If biblical Christology is restricted to Christ's person (as by the nineteenth century German positive theologians) without reference to His work of atonement, or if biblical Christology is presented as representing mere general spiritual truths, religious ideas, symbolic language, eternal truths, experience, myth, or anthropology, then the very term Christocentricity of Scripture is a piece of deceptive theological blather. The Christological language of Scripture refers to reality, whether it refers to God's grace, forgiveness, and salvation in Christ, or whether it refers to Christ's eternal deity and attributes, His historic virgin birth,

life, miracles, preaching, death, resurrection, ascension, and future return to judgment. And the effects of Christ's life and death and resurrection are real: God has been reconciled, the world has been redeemed, the sinner will be saved forever through faith in Christ—really and truly. All this must be included in the affirmation, "Christ is the unity of Scripture." Otherwise the phrase is deceptive, unbiblical, and without meaning.

The importance of maintaining the reality of biblical referents cannot be overemphasized, especially in our day of radical historicism. Of course, we must read the biblical text in its historical context, but that context must be determined by the biblical text, not *vice versa*. And the actuality of the historical references of the text must be maintained. Otherwise the religious truth of Scripture and of its Gospel center and Christology is severed from its roots in history and fact, and the meaning of the biblical text is reduced to mere application (Strauss, Bultmann, Priebe²⁰). Hans Frei in his very helpful and informative book, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*,²¹ mentions that the English Latitudinarians and the Neologists (Semler and others) in Germany also believed that "the religious [emphasis his; note that he does not say "theological"] content of the Bible [was] dependent on the historical factuality of the occurrences narrated in it" —but only "in muffled and ambiguous tones." This is a charitable and gratuitous comment; for after the anti-supernaturalist or liberal critic has finished his surgery very little real history remains as a basis of biblical religion or theology, to say nothing of Christology. Thus, the historical or theologico-ontological matrix (e.g., divine revelation, theophanies, miracles) of cognitive and meaningful biblical theology—and every text of the Bible is cognitive and meaningful theology—is reduced to almost zero, so that real referents in effect do not underlie biblical assertions at all.

What is to be done in such a situation, if any hermeneutical principle of Christological or biblical unity is to obtain? Some religious idea or motif, not explicatively, but only applicatively "derived" from Scripture, must be brought to bear as a unifying principle of hermeneutics, if Scripture or its content is to make any religious sense. But surely no mere applicatively derived principle of hermeneutics is valid, any more than a principle

utterly foisted upon Scripture from the outside, especially since every such applicatively derived principle of biblical unity conjured up since the Enlightenment has been in opposition to clear teachings explicatively derived from Scripture. And surely a valid principle of interpretation cannot be in conflict with the explicative meaning, or intention, of Scripture. In other words, because modern liberal theologians since the Enlightenment cannot accept the historical or in many cases the theologico-ontological (incarnation, Trinity, etc.) referents of biblical assertions—and it seems always for this reason—they impose upon Scripture an alien interpretative principle of unity which amounts to little more than an uncertain cipher which conflicts with Scripture and renders a theology or ideology which must be heretical, sub-Christian or even anti-Christian, but which ironically is the goal at which the exegete probably intended to arrive all the time. And all this expense of labor and life occurs because the exegete has abandoned a first principle of hermeneutics, namely, that when a biblical assertion in its intended sense has a referent, it is a real referent, whether the referent is a historical occurrence (Christ's resurrection), a state of being (the personal union), an act of God in history (personal justification through faith in Christ), or whatever.²² There can be no Christological unity of Scripture or biblical and Christian Christology at all where the historicity and reality of biblical referents are not accepted with utmost seriousness as part of the intention of the biblical text. The same must be said if the biblical witness to Christ (the center of Scripture) is erroneous, truncated, or contradictory.²³

4. If the phrase "Christ is the unity of Scripture" is not a satisfactory description of the unity of Scripture, neither is the theory that the Christ event is the unity of Scripture. To Pannenberg²⁴ the "Christ event" within the nexus of historical events and having "its meaning in itself" and divorced from any Christological dogma gives unity to the Bible. In this view the unity of Scripture is not Christological, but the unity of history is Christological, and that unity of history is imposed upon Scripture, giving meaning to it.

5. The idea of the unity of Scripture which was adumbrated in the early church and by the reformers always involved doctrinal unity. If there is not doctrinal unity throughout

Scripture, the other three pillars on which the orthodox view rests collapse, and there is no unity at all. For instance, to say that Christ is the unity of Scripture but to maintain that there are conflicting or erroneous Christologies within or between the testaments is only possible if one makes the principle of Christocentricity purely ontological. But such a view is nonsense, a *metabasis eis allo genos*, like using the category of color to measure density. Scripture, like other writings, is cognitive discourse; it is our *principium cognoscendi*, the source of our knowledge of God. Thus, its unity must be cognitive (theological) in nature, or it has no unity appropriate to its nature. In fact, the other three aspects to the orthodox doctrine of the unity of Scripture involve doctrinal unity, and all the pillars of the doctrine are implicatively and inextricably related; if one pillar falls, they all fall. And when the unity, the doctrinal unity, of Scripture is abandoned, so is the entire structure of biblical bibliology—the entire structure! The history of hermeneutics since the Enlightenment has illustrated this point with clarity and even pathos.

6. There can be no cleavage between the doctrinal unity of Scripture and the unity of the Gospel. Paul makes it very clear that there is only one Gospel (Galatians 1:7-8). And this Gospel is doctrine (what Melancthon felicitously called the *doctrina evangelii*); it renders information; it is a cognitive *kerygma* to Paul, a message with a specific material content. This fact is made clear throughout his entire epistle to the Galatians. And Paul sees his teaching of the Gospel as identical to the *epaggeliaz* of the Old Testament (Galatians 4:18; Romans 1:2; 4:14). And his one Gospel entails the total framework of the entire Old Testament doctrine. Thus, the singleness and unity of Paul's Gospel is consistent with the doctrinal unity of all Scripture. It is interesting that the New Testament uses the term "doctrine" in the singular, except when speaking of doctrines of devils. And so it was in general among the reformers and post-Reformation theologians; in this way they indicated their belief in the singleness and unity of biblical doctrine, just as of the biblical Gospel.²⁵ In what I have just said I am opposing all modern theologians who would find some kind of unity in the Gospel which is not found in the Scriptures and then substitute this so-called (unity of the) Gospel or *kerygma* (which they may think in some way drawn from Scripture) for the unity of Scripture.²⁶

7. A word about the biblical basis for the unity of Scripture. Any concept of biblical unity which is to operate as a presupposition or principle of hermeneutics lies (like the doctrine of the divine origin of Scripture, the divine authority, internal clarity, and inerrancy of Scripture, prayer, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit) within the discipline of *hermeneutica sacra*, which is peculiar to the interpretation of the Bible (in contrast to *hermeneutica profana*, which employs canons of interpretation common to any and all writings) and must be drawn from Scripture itself. A solid principle of profane hermeneutics (and also surely of *hermeneutica sacra*) is that the application of a given text or piece of literature cannot contradict, correct, mitigate, or take precedence over the explication of the text, lest the seriousness of the text and the explication of the *sensus literalis*, which is the basic goal of both sacred and profane hermeneutics, be undermined and all exegesis erode to the level of fanciful and arbitrary interpretation based upon some abstract principle of biblical unity without any connection to the biblical text and its intended meaning. In such a case there would be no need for the text itself.

8. In the history of the church through the time of the Reformation the unity of Scripture was employed by the application of the *analogia fidei* or *regula fidei* to the explication of biblical texts. What was this analogy of faith? On what biblical basis was it founded? How did it work? The answer to these questions is quite vague, if attainable at all, in the early church and even in the Reformation era. So I shall repair to some post-Reformation Lutherans for answers, again not always very complete, to our questions.

The notion of the analogy of faith, or Scripture, was discussed only in sections of dogmatics books dealing with the interpretation of Scripture or in treatises on hermeneutics. I do not recall reference every being made to it as a principle in any exegetical work of the sixteenth or seventeenth century. A clear and typical definition of the analogy of faith is offered by John Adam Osiander: "The analogy of faith is the harmony of Bible passages, or the pattern of doctrine (*typus doctrinae*), structured according to clear and perspicuous statements of Scripture."²⁷ We notice that there are two aspects to this hermeneutical principle. First, it is a harmony of what is

taught throughout Scripture, a harmony between the two testaments and between Christ and the Old Testament,²⁸ a beautiful congruence, like a symphony.²⁹ Secondly, the analogy of faith is a pattern (*hupotupōsis*, 2 Timothy 1:13) of doctrine, a summation of the doctrine of Scripture. Olearius does not shrink from calling the ecumenical creeds or the Augsburg Confession such a summation or analogy of faith. Abraham Calov defines the analogy of faith as follows: "The analogy of faith is the inner conformity (*conformitas*) of the doctrine of faith, set forth clearly in the Sacred Scripture, but especially in those passages where each doctrine has its own *sedes*."³⁰ John Conrad Dannhower calls it a "harmony of the truth."³¹ Commenting on these words of Calov, Hollaz states, "Now if, therefore, the doctrine of faith is drawn and extracted from clear passages of Scripture, certainly every interpretation, consistent with the faith, ought to rest on the foundation of Sacred Scripture." Hollaz believes that the interpreter of Scripture does his work according to the analogy of faith when his interpretation agrees with the fundamental articles of faith drawn, as they are, from Scripture. At just this point the principle of the unity of Scripture takes on a hermeneutical force. But only in a ministerial sense, in the sense that Scripture interprets Scripture. The very question to which Hollaz is addressing himself in this discussion is "whether Scripture must be explained through Scripture." The analogy of faith helps the exegete in a twofold sense: First, as a harmonious pattern (Hollaz uses the words *complexio* [summary], *consensus* [agreement], and *concentus* [harmony]) of sound words it enables him to arrange and coordinate the great *loci*, or themes, of Scripture with the doctrine of Christ as the center and to see them in their organic relationship (*proportio*) with each other. Second, as a summation of the articles of faith, it assists the exegete in applying the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, that is, the clear passages dealing with a given article of faith will throw light on less clear and obscure passages dealing with the same article. As far as I can discern, this is *all* the freight that Hollaz or any of the orthodox Lutheran theologians ever put on the analogy of faith as a hermeneutical principle. He avers that the principle is no different from a principle of analogy used in interpreting any human piece of literature which has inner connection and coherence. In the case of human writings we

may well discover incoherence and incongruity. "But God is always the same, never inconsistent, and totally without change and free from error." Thus, the unity of Scripture, hermeneutically operative by employing the principle of the analogy of faith, is a part of *hermeneutica sacra*, based upon the unity and trustworthiness and truthfulness of God. And so Hollaz concludes confidently, reverently, and almost doxologically, "Therefore it can never happen that the true meaning of even one divine passage will not beautifully agree with the chief parts of the divinely revealed doctrine."

The unity of Scripture presupposes, in contrast to post-Enlightenment exegesis, especially the New Hermeneutic, that there is an inextricable union between the meaning (*sensus internus*) of Scripture and the words (*externa littera*): the meaning, or intention, of Scripture is always expressed by the words. It was not the Enlightenment with its sophisticated contempt of orthodoxy which first rejected this identification of meaning with the *sensus literalis* of the biblical text, but Roman Catholic theologians, especially the Jesuits, who insisted that unwritten tradition was the Word of God along with Scripture and could authenticate and illicit the meaning from the external word of Scripture. Robert Bellarmine³² distinguished between the literal, or historical, sense of Scripture, the obvious meaning of the words (which was often unclear), and the spiritual, or mystical, meaning, "which refers to something other than what the words immediately signify." The plain words of Scripture he likened to a sheath, and the meaning (*sensus*) of Scripture—bear in mind, not the *sensus literalis*—to the sword of the Spirit; the meaning can only be provided by tradition. Thus, the meaning of the text was wrenched from the intention of the words, from the text itself.³³ The unity of Scripture was destroyed as something intrinsic, as it came under the dogmatic domination of unwritten tradition.³⁴ But really the same thing takes place today when modern theologians, finding no meaning in the *sensus literalis* of Scripture in its original setting, or unable to believe the text, seek and find a *sensus plenior* or existential meaning or whatever different from the clear explicative meaning of the text under consideration!

How does the exegete use the analogy of faith as he carries out his work? John Gerhard offers five important steps to be

applied in the proper use of the principle.³⁵ (1.) The interpretation of a given text of Scripture ought to consist of the search for the intended *sensus literalis* which is appropriate to the given text. (2.) The exegete must not depart from the plain, literal sense of the text, especially when it pertains to the articles of faith, unless Scripture itself elsewhere ostensibly compels us to depart from that seeming literal sense. (3.) Nothing should be affirmed as dogma or an article of faith which is not clearly based upon Scripture. (4.) The rule of faith is consistent (*integra*) in all its parts; everything having to do with the rule of faith is from the Spirit of God and cannot contradict itself. This means that one article of faith cannot militate against another article of faith which is clearly taught in Scripture. For instance, passages teaching the unity of God cannot be used to mitigate the intention of passages which clearly teach the plurality of persons in the deity; rather the two biblical truths must be held in tension, even though they seem to conflict with each other. To Gerhard the unwillingness of human reason to allow the articles of faith to remain unimpaired according to the integrity of the rule of faith, insisting on seeming contradictions between them, is "the source of all heresy." (5.) We must never depart from the rule of faith when interpreting passages which are not clear because of context, reference, or grammar.

The *regula fidei* actually aids the exegete in solving apparent contradictions and other difficulties in Scripture—never, however, by denying or mitigating the *sensus literalis* of a text, but by getting at the given text's intention and referents (time, situation, person, etc.) and thus, in the optimistic conviction that Scripture is in harmony with itself, solving some of the difficulties which arise between passages and *loci*, rather than just giving up on the undertaking. Never is the *regula fidei* imposed upon a text to deny its *sensus literalis*. Obviously the enterprise of harmonization will not always succeed. Above all the integrity of the text must be upheld. If Gerhard's position is correct, the theologian can summarize in a *regula fidei* a piece of cognitive discourse which transcends reason at various points and presents paradoxes; but one cannot summarize into any *analogia fidei* a piece of literature which is incoherent and self-contradictory.³⁶

The analogy of Scripture as understood and applied by orthodoxy, based as it is on the divine origin and authority of

Scripture, means that Scripture is analogous with itself (*scriptura scripturam interpretatur*). It is not an analogy of Scripture with science (*scientia*), or philosophy (Thomas Aquinas), or mathematics (Descartes), or reason (Ritzschl), or an existentialist anthropology (Bultmann), or the "Gospel" (Schlink), or historical coherence, facts, and reality (Troeltsch, historical-critical method). Biblical unity cannot be forced to correspond in analogy to some extra-biblical subject-matter, norm, criterion, motif, or interpretation of reality.

9. The unity of Scripture, or *regula fidei*, as a principle of hermeneutics is *never*, as in Romanism, above the text of Scripture. The serious and devout search for the intended sense of the biblical text must remain inviolate and unimpaired as the first principle of interpretation, in the sphere of sacred and profane hermeneutics. No concept of biblical unity, no doctrinal synthesis, *regula fidei*, or ecclesiastical symbol can fault, mitigate, or falsify the intention of the biblical text in any case whatsoever. Neither can the unity of Scripture be used as a cipher to transcend or cut through the serious, fundamental search of the exegete for the *sensus literalis*, so that the exegete need not abide by that *sensus literalis* in every case. Nor can the unity of Scripture or a *regula fidei* impose a forced meaning on any passage of Scripture. It can only be used to correct false or hasty exegesis, to amplify the meaning of passages, and to complete the pattern (*hupotupōsis*) of biblical *loci* and articles of faith. Essentially the hermeneutical use of the principle of the unity of Scripture is summed up in the principle, *scriptura scripturam interpretatur*; that is, the clear passages of Scripture clarify the less clear passages which deal with the same article of faith or subject-matter of the biblical text by a principle of unity. If two passages or pericopes of Scripture seem to conflict with each other, the exegete, believing in the unity of Scripture and believing that Scripture does not contradict itself, will make every legitimate attempt to reconcile the seeming conflict. But any attempt at such harmonization which mitigates the *sensus literalis* of the biblical text or imposes a forced meaning on the text violates the integrity of the text and denies the divine authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*). This means that seeming contradictions between passages of Scripture which cannot be reconciled without doing violence to the biblical text must be allowed to stand; and the exegete, as Luther said, must simply tip his

hat to the Holy Spirit and concede that the difficulty may never be solved in this life.

10. If the unity of scripture, or analogy of faith, cannot force or mitigate the meaning of the intended sense of any Scripture passage, then the same principle is true *a fortiori* in the case of the articles of faith which are based upon clear *sedes doctrinae*. Some articles of faith, based upon solid *sedes*, seem *prima facie* to be at odds with other clearly derived articles of faith or clear biblical data. For instance, Christ's vicarious atonement, in which He endures the punitive wrath of God against the sins of the world, seems to be in conflict with God's love toward all sinners (Ritzschl). So also the doctrine of hell seems to conflict with God's universal love. Particular election and predestination seem quite out of harmony with a doctrine of universal grace. Law ("This do and thou shalt live," Luke 10:28) and Gospel ("Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," Acts 16:31) seem to teach different ways of salvation. In no case may the exegete, using a Cartesian mathematical model or a Lockian rational model of coherence, discount or attempt to mitigate the seeming paradox to be found between the articles of faith. In other words, in such cases the unity of Scripture, which is an organic unity, can only be held in (sometimes paradoxical) tension with such seeming conflict between articles of faith.

Even more vexing for the exegete is the fact that there seem to be inconsistencies or conflicts within certain articles, or mysteries, of faith. The personal union, or incarnation, is an article of faith clearly taught in the Scriptures (John 1:14; Luke 1:32,35; Galatians 4:4; 1 Timothy 3:16), but it is a union of disparates, something quite beyond human understanding. So too with the article of the Trinity, based as it is on a large number of passages and pericopes which directly or in passing refer to the unity of the Godhead and to the plurality and deity of the persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Such articles, or mysteries, which transcend our comprehension and are revealed in Scripture to be believed by us can be clarified as we apply the analogy of faith in the sense of accumulating all the biblical data pertaining to the article of faith. *But* no principle of unity or analogy can be used to mitigate the plain meaning of texts and *sedes* or to force biblical data in order to make one aspect or element of the doctrine compatible with

another. The disastrous results of employing such a principle can be seen in the welter of ancient and modern heresies concerning the doctrines of Christ and the Trinity.

Neither can the doctrinal unity of Scripture be used hermeneutically to discount what have lately been called the phenomena of Scripture. The fact clearly taught in Scripture that Jesus became tired, that He learned things, that He became very angry cannot be used to discount His deity. The fact that Scripture affirms things which seem to conflict with each other or with generally accepted scientific, historical, or geographical data and that we cannot harmonize these seeming discrepancies ought not be used to discount the divine origin and utter truthfulness of Scripture.

If passages are left according to their ostensive meaning and then seem to contradict each other, or if the articles of faith, based solidly upon clear *sedes doctrinae*, are left to conflict seemingly with each other, this in no way undermines the inerrancy of Scripture. Rather, it is an instance of upholding in faith the unity of Scripture and its utter inerrancy, even though one cannot demonstrate in every case Scripture's agreement with itself or the total (logical) coherence of all Scripture. To force reconciliation between Bible texts which seem to conflict or to force agreement between articles of faith which transcend reason by ever so subtle a violation of the *sensus literalis* of clear texts and pericopes from Scripture is rather an inappropriate, if not arrogant, admission that Scripture according to ostensive meanings of clear texts contradicts itself. To read something into another's words which is contrary to what that person says constitutes a criticism of that person's words or content. This is the case even if we are graciously and reverently attempting to harmonize what that person says. When we cease to read something into another's words, even if these words seem absurd or contradictory to what he has said elsewhere, but simply accept the clear words and ostensive meaning of that person in every case, then we consciously or unconsciously concede that that person's thinking and expression is higher than our understanding or critical judgment. This simply is our posture toward Scripture, and toward Scripture alone, because Scripture differs from all other books in that it is the Word of God.³⁷

ENDNOTES

1. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1958), pp. 64-69.
2. Luther's Christological principle, "was Christum treibet," is based upon the conviction that Scripture agrees doctrinally with itself. James must agree with Paul if the book is to be considered apostolic, i.e., Scripture.
3. In his fine discussion of the "Unity of the Bible" John J. Davis lists four "kinds," or aspects, of biblical unity which correspond to the four principles mentioned above: thematic unity (doctrinal unity), historical unity, prophecy and fulfillment, and Christocentricity. He assumes throughout his study the divine origin of Scripture. The best definition of the traditional doctrine of the unity of Scripture I have found is by Ralph Bohlmann, "Confessional Biblical Interpretation: Some Basic Principles," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, ed. John Reumann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 205: "Because the same God speaks the same message of Christ and his salvation throughout the Scriptures present an organic unity of doctrine both within and between the Old and New Testaments. The unity of authorship, content, and purpose is reflected in the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, whether applied to individual passages or articles of faith."
4. Hermann Diem, *Dogmatics*, translated by Harold Knight (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), p. 234, *passim*.
5. "Jesus Christ and the Unity of the Bible," *Interpretation*, V:1 (1951), pp. 260ff.
6. "Is the Gospel Objective?" in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, tr. W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 58, *passim*.
7. Edward Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XLIII:4 (April 1972), pp. 232-251. See also Paul Bretscher, *After the Purifying* (River Forest, Illinois: Lutheran Education Association, 1975).
8. "The Unity and Witness of Scripture," *Foundations*, VIII:4 (1965), pp. 292ff., 298, *passim*.
9. "The Unity of Scripture," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, VIII:4 (1955), pp. 341, 348, 350.

10. *The Unity of the Bible* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1953).
11. *Basic Questions in Theology*, translated by George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 197, *passim*.
12. "Confessional Propria as Hermeneutic—Old Testament," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, pp. 249-250.
13. "The Unity of the Scripture," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXIII (1954), p. 10.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
15. See John Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* (Tübingen: John Georg Cotta, 1763), I, pp. 43, 45. See also Horace Hummel, "The Influence of Confessional Themes on Biblical Exegesis," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, p. 220. Hummel understands the unity of Scripture to mean that it contains "one theology because it has only one author."
16. See Foster R. McCurley, *ibid.*, pp. 233-235. McCurley, like many others, particularly Lutherans, maintains that there is Gospel in the Old Testament, but not predictions of Christ. Thus there is only a purely formal gospel in the Old Testament.
17. See Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 46ff.
18. WA 2, 73; 2, 334; 3, 63, 1; 3, 620; 4, 153, 27; 9, 560, 1; 14, 97, 2; 18, 606, 29; 40 III, 652, 15; 52, 509; 54, 29, 3; 54, 414, 13; 56, 59.
19. *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), IV: 2, p. 193, *passim*; cf. also IV: 3: 1, pp. 53-55.
20. Duane A. Priebe, "Theology and Hermeneutics," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, pp. 295-311. As an eager and enthusiastic devotee of the New Hermeneutic Priebe really is more radical than Strauss or Bultmann, for he sees no constant or abiding meaning even in the application of the biblical text. Priebe is an advocate of what E. D. Hirsch, Jr., in his excellent book, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), calls "semantic autonomy," the notion advanced by Heidegger and a host of modern literary critics that the text's meaning is not dependent upon the author's intention, a notion which to Hirsch leaves no principle for the judging of the validity of any interpretation.
21. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, p. 118.

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22. For an excellent discussion of the necessary relationship between the historicity of the biblical narrative and Christology see Kurt Marquart, "The Incompatibility between Historical-Critical Theology and the Confessions," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, pp. 323-330.
 23. Honeycutt, p. 298.
 24. Pannenberg, pp. 196-198.
 25. See *Formula of Concord*, Solid Declaration, IX, 31.
 26. Warren Quanbeck believes in the truth and centrality of the Gospel and its unity, but maintains that Scripture presents a number of contradictory theologies concerning God's work in Christ. "The Confessions and Their Influence upon Biblical Interpretation," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, pp. 174-187. See also J. Stanley Glen (footnote above), who substitutes the unity of the *kerygma* for the unity of Scripture.
 27. See David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (Leipzig, 1750), Prol. III, q. 48, obs. 4, prob. a3, p. 161.
 28. Hollaz, Prol. III, q. 30, prob. d, p. 112.
 29. John Olearius, *Theologia Exegetica* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1674).
 30. *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata* (Frankfurt, 1676), II, p. 207. We find the same understanding of what the analogy of faith is in the Reformed theologians of the era. See John Henry Heidegger, *Corpus Theologiae* (Zürich, 1700). For a brief, very useful summation of the Reformed position on the analogy of faith see Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), pp. 579-581.
 31. *Hermeneutica Sacra* (Strassbourg, 1669), p. 366.
 32. *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei* (Milan, 1721), *De Verbo Dei*, III, III, col. 141.
 33. Bellarmine, IV, IV, col. 178.
 34. Bellarmine said (*De Verbo Dei*, Lib. III, c. 9), "Scripture cannot tell us what its true sense is." The result of such an opinion according to Gerhard (I, p. 50) is that the church must give us the *sensus* (meaning), which does not come from the words of Scripture. Gerhard claims that this is against the very nature of knowledge. For knowledge is a relationship (*adaequatio*, correspondence) "between the thing to be known and the knowing intellect." "Knowing something in the intellect (*intellectio*) is a receiving in the intellect a kind of abstract

picture of the object to be known." The Roman view would impose a view whereby knowledge of something would not necessarily have any relation to the thing to be known, but would be provided by something else (church, pope, authority, etc.).

35. Gerhard, I, p. 72ff. Gerhard speaks of the *regula fidei*, but he means by the term the same as the *analogia fidei*. He defines the rule of faith as follows: "We understand the rule of faith to be the clear passages (*loci*) in which the articles of faith are set forth in clear and distinct words."
36. See John Andrew Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica, sive Systema Theologicum* (Leipzig, 1715), C. IV, S. II, q. 6, ekth. 3-5, I, 119-120.
37. The finest treatment of the pitfalls of applying the analogy of faith, or unity of Scripture, illegitimately is provided by John P. Koehler in "The Analogy of Faith" first appearing in *Theologische Quartalschrift* and later translated in *Faith-Life*, XXIV:10 (October 1951) — XXV:5 (May 1952). I do not think I shall burden the reader if I quote him at length on the point just mentioned above (emphasis his):

If it is obvious that the Holy Ghost has expressed a *definite* line of thought or a *definite* thought, is it permissible to change [*umgestalten*] this according to *other* lines of thought so that it is deprived of its characteristic content for the reason that we think it contradicts what the Holy Spirit has said elsewhere in Scripture?

I believe every one will agree with me when I say that every *reasonable* conception of interpretation will *deny* that because we are dealing with *infallible* statements of God.

The thought that the words of the Holy Spirit form a harmonious whole cannot alter this judgment. By the way, this is a later objection which we do not meet with in the youthful, fresh days of theology. The harmony of Scriptures is not the starting-point of our understanding; we arrive at it when we cease learning piecemeal.

Nevertheless I admit at the outset: the Scriptures are a harmonious whole. But suppose that is not evident to me in a certain case? Then I effect [*vermitteln*] a harmony by means of the analogy of faith. But who vouches for this harmonizing if it is not contained in Scripture in the very same form?

All *reliability* of exegesis would collapse by this method. A *criticism* of the connections of thought of the Holy Ghost would be granted to the interpreter. He would be permitted to find on the basis of *his own judgment* a reconciliation with the other statements of Scripture. In spite of his holding fast to other statements of the Bible this method would bring at least so many *purely human elements* into the results of the exegesis that anything which God has revealed would be omitted or given a different turn.

This sort of exegesis cannot be accepted by sound reason, for our human faculty of conception self-evidently cannot cast light upon the background of apparent contradictions of the Holy Ghost unless this explanation is given by God himself. Why, then, such attempts?

We shall, therefore, always find in the history of exegesis along these lines all sorts of *attempts* which do not wish to *exclude* one another mutually. Even the proponents of the analogy of faith often say this.

But why is it done? It only disturbs our *trust* in the reliability of the divine word. In such a case it is always the correct procedure simply to register our *inability* which is not capable of following the line of thought of our great God in all its ramifications and then to *be satisfied with what is clearly stated*.

See also my discussion of the same topic in "The Hermeneutics of the Formula of Concord," in *No Other Gospel*, ed. Arnold J. Koelpin (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980), pp. 309-336.