

July 21, 2013

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The Analogy of Faith

Essential to a Christian understanding of Sacred Scripture is the principle of analogia. That is to say, a perception of proportion and measurement is at the heart of the exegetical and theological enterprise because of the unity, coherence, and integrity of God's Word through Creation and Salvation History.

In Jesus' declaration, "All things have been delivered to me by my Father," it is important to observe the plural sense of the subject: "all things," panta. This usage corresponds to the plurality indicated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2; these panta are identical to "the things of God" (ta tou Theou), "the things freely given us by God" (ta hypo tou Theou charisthenta hemin). These "things" are real; God shares with us the realities of Salvation.

Since the task of Sacred Theology is to reflect on those realities in an intelligible way—to feed the souls of God's People—it is imperative that the Holy Spirit endows the Christian thinker with the capacity to discern the analogia that unites the components of Divine Revelation to each other in the single message called the "Gospel." The "things of God" are revealed—are given—in a proportioned fashion; they are measured by a coherence the grace-filled mind can discern.

Saint Paul introduced the word analogia into Christian theological terminology when he wrote of the gift of prophecy: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to everyone of you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think wisely, according as God has measured (emerisen) to everyone the measure of faith (metron pisteos). Thus we, being many, are one body in Christ, and each of us members one of another. Having then gifts (charisthenta) differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, according to the proportion of the faith (kata ten analogian tes pisteos); or ministering, in the ministry; or the teacher, in instruction . . ." (Romans 12:3-6).

The sense of analogia here is determined by the context: Paul is speaking of various ministerial gifts conferred on certain members (mele) of the Church. This context rules out the interpretation that "the measure of the faith" is a

creedal norm, something identical to what second century Christians called “the rule of faith” (kanon tes pisteos, regula fidei).

On the contrary, Paul’s analogia here refers to a particular ministerial gift. It is a special kind of interpretive discernment the Holy Spirit confers on particular believers. It pertains to the gift of prophecy as a quality; it is the way in which faith is measured—proportioned—in the discernment given to certain members of the Church. This analogia is not the “measure of the faith” itself; it is the perception of measure in the things pertaining to the faith.

This sense of the word is clear from the context in Romans 12, including the parallelism between “God has measured to everyone the measure of faith” (hekasto ho Theos emerisen metron pisteos) and “according to the grace that is given to us” (kata ten charin ten dotheisan hemin) (Romans 12: 3 and 6). In short, Paul’s concern in this context is not the objective content of the Christian faith (fides quae creditur) but to faith-filled discernment in the gift of prophecy.

My own use of the term, analogia, is an extension of this sense. As an exegetical and theological term, it can have several meanings. For example, analogia can refer to the many correspondences the New Testament mentions between the events in Old Testament history and the experiences of living Christians. When Paul wrote of the Israelites in the desert, “these things were our examples” (1 Corinthians 11:6), he discerned an analogia uniting different stages in the history of Salvation.

Theology also recognizes an analogia between the revelation given in the structure of Creation and the mysteries of the Kingdom. Indeed, this “measurement” is the necessary presupposition of many of Jesus’ parables.

Indeed, to the extent that Sacred Theology uses human language at all---as required by Sacred Scripture!---it implies an analogical potential already at work in human consciousness as we know it in the history of philosophy. This measure inherent within Revelation shines light on what Von Balthasar calls the “obedient disponibility” native to the human mind as the necessary presupposition for hearing God’s Word as God’s Word. If this were not the case, it is unclear how God’s Word could---as we know it did---find expression in human thought.

All Saints Orthodox Church
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641

Church Office: (773) 777-0749

<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor

phrii@touchstonemag.com

Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:

www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html

Pastoral Ponderings:

http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php