

# THE ANALOGY OF FAITH AS IT PERTAINS TO TRADITION, INTERPRETATION, AND THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE

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What is the “analogy of faith” and how does it fit in with hermeneutics? Before I answer these questions, the reader must understand that I will be using the phrases “analogy of faith,” “rule of faith,” and “rule of Scripture” interchangeably.

According to Berkhof, we derive the term “analogy of faith” from Romans 12:6 where we read: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith” (*kata ten analogian tes pisteos*).<sup>1</sup> It is here that some commentators misconstrue the meaning. They mistakenly interpret “faith” objectively when it comes to doctrine, because they look upon *analogia* as though it were an external standard. However, were they to correctly interpret it, it simply means, “according to the measure of your subjective faith.” Thus, as it is derived from the Romans 6 passage, it is misunderstood. Kaiser maintains that Paul is simply making the point that the gift of prophecy must be “in agreement with” or “in proportion to” faith.<sup>2</sup>

The early church fathers, when they spoke of the *analogia*, simply meant the general principles of faith. Ultimately, they applied the name to the creeds accepted by the Church, e.g., the Nicene Creed. The Roman Catholic Church, however, went a step further and mistakenly designated its tradition as the rule of faith. Berkhof declares:

It is perfectly ridiculous to raise the confessions of the Church to the dignity of *Regulae Veritatus*, for it makes that which is derived from Scripture a test of the truth of Scripture. This cannot be so for the Analogy of Faith, if it were rightly understood, is found in the Bible

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search For Meaning*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, 194.

itself. To posit otherwise obviously leads to circular reasoning and gross error.<sup>3</sup>

Lenski claims that Paul reiterates Christ's own command given in Matthew 28:20, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" according to Luke 10:16, "He who hears you hears me, he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects Him who sent me." "There is indeed," he states, "that which has been called 'the analogy of faith,' by which norm all prophecy or what is put forth as exposition and teaching of Scripture, is to be judged by the Church. Whatever disagrees with 'the faith' or doctrine is mistaken, erroneous, or false."

Although "the analogy of faith" has many advocates, few of them pause long enough to define or interpret it carefully. There are three main ways of interpreting Romans 12:6 but I shall deal only with the third way here. The third view maintains that Paul requires the prophet to speak according to previously revealed truths found in God's word. This definition supports the often-used rule that a true prophet was never to contradict existing revelation (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22; Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Jn. 4:1-6).<sup>4</sup> This view, as with the others, presents a standard against which to judge the prophecy regardless of its theme. It is in this sense that Paul is close to the way many have used it throughout the history of interpretation. Kaiser quotes Henri Blocher as summarizing the situation nicely:

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 conception of the analogy of faith.<sup>5</sup>

But when does the analogy of faith come into play in our study as far as hermeneutics is concerned? It comes into play in the interpretative process only after we establish the meaning of a particular passage of Scripture based on its immediate context. The analogy of faith does not follow in sequence but spans the entirety of Scripture according to the principle outlined in Isaiah 28:10, 13: "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little." Thus, it is not wise to use it other than in summary at the conclusion of each paragraph or basic unit of exegesis. If we can rely on Isaiah 28, we see that the analogy of faith gathers verses throughout the Bible into a body of work that is truly biblical in derivation. It logically follows, then, that the doctrines and support claimed from assembling these verses are no more valid than the exegesis that supports them.

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<sup>3</sup> Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*.

<sup>4</sup> Kaiser, 194.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The phrase “analogy of faith” was not common to the patristic and Medieval writers. However, it did appear under a variety of names, such as faith, the rule of faith, the measure of faith, the catholic faith, or the apostolic institution of the Church. The all-pervading theme attached to these terms was the unity of Scripture, which, according to Kaiser, was based on four pillars:

(1) The fact that Scripture has one single, divine Author; (2) the fact that Christ is present in the Old Testament, not only virtually or implicitly, but directly, since the prophets speak of him; (3) the fact that Christ is the center of the Scriptures; and (4) the fact that the doctrines within the Scripture are linked together throughout the text and tend to build one upon another.<sup>6</sup>

However, many within the Church, due to the Enlightenment and the coming of higher criticism, have rejected the unity of the Scripture as not useable within the science of hermeneutics. The result is bewilderment because of the lack of an organizing principle or method in putting the whole story of the Bible together as a unit.

The reformers, contrary to higher criticism, believed that the Scriptures were unified because it is the inspired Word of God. Though their interpretation was strict, they believed the Bible was an organic whole (a living, breathing entity built on continual revelation) rather than a cold, dead mechanical body of work. To them, the Bible was the highest authority and the final court of appeal in theological disputes. Unlike the Roman Catholics who espoused the infallibility of the Church, the Protestant Reformers believed not that the Church was infallible, but God’s word. They steadfastly maintained that the Church does not determine what the Scriptures teach, but the Scriptures determine what the Church ought to teach.

Their exegesis resulted from two fundamental principles. (1) *Scriptura Scripturae interpres*: Scripture interprets Scripture. (2) *Omnis intellectus ac expositio Scripturae sit analogia fidei*, i.e., let all understanding and exposition of Scripture be in conformity with the analogy of faith. And from these two principles the *analogia fidei* = *Analogia Scripturae*, i.e., the uniform teaching of the Scripture.

Concerning the interpretation of Scripture, Berkhof says that there are two types of analogy — positive and general. The first and most important of the two is positive analogy. Positive analogy consists of the Scriptures that are perspicuous (clearly and positively stated), and supported by so many passages that there can be no doubt as to their meaning. The general analogy of faith, according to Berkhof, does not rest on the explicit statements of the Bible. They do, however, rest on the obvious scope and significance of its teachings as a whole. Thus these constitute a standard of interpretation.

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<sup>6</sup> Kaiser, 198.

As a further standard of interpretation, because the analogy of faith will not always have the same degree of evidential value and authority, Berkhof submits the following factors affecting the outcome of exegesis. The degree of evidential value and authority will depend on (1) the number of passages that contain the same doctrine. The analogy is stronger when it is founded on twelve, than when it is based on six. (2) The unanimity or correspondence of the different passages. The value of the analogy will be in proportion to the agreement of the passages on which it is founded. (3) The clearness of the passage. Naturally, an analogy that rests wholly, or, to a great extent, on obscure passages, is of dubious value. (4) The distribution of the passage. If the analogy is founded on passages derived from a single book or from a few writings, it will not be as valuable as when it is based on passages of both the Old and the New Testaments, dating from various times, and coming from different authors.

In addition, Berkhof asks us to bear the following rules in mind: (1) A doctrine that is clearly supported by the analogy of faith cannot be contradicted by a contrary and obscure passage. (2) A passage that is neither supported nor contradicted by the analogy of faith may serve as the positive foundation for a doctrine, provided it is clear in its teaching. Yet, the doctrine so established will not have the same force as one that is founded on the analogy of faith. (3) 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. (4) In cases where the analogy of Scripture leads to the establishment of two doctrines that appear contradictory, both doctrines should be accepted as scriptural in the confident belief that they resolve themselves into a higher unity.

Arthur W. Pink concurs: "The exposition made of any verse in Holy Writ must be in entire agreement with the Analogy of Faith, or that system of truth which God has made known unto His people."<sup>7</sup> How then does one come into entire agreement with the Analogy of Faith when expositing Scripture? According to Pink one must have a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible's contents. This, largely, rules out the qualifications of a novice to teach and preach the Scriptures to others. This comprehensive knowledge can only be obtained through a constant, diligent, and systematic study of God's Word. He echoes Berkhof's first rule when he says that because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, there are no contradictions. The obvious follow-up, then, is that any explanation given of a passage, which clashes with the plain teaching of other verses, is erroneous. If an interpretation is to be valid it must agree perfectly with the scheme of the divine truth.

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<sup>7</sup> *Interpretation of the Scriptures*, ch. 4.

**The Rule of Faith**

A.A. Hodge asks two questions concerning the rule of faith. First, he asks, “What is meant by saying that the Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice?”<sup>8</sup> Every believer must understand the sovereignty of God. If God is sovereign, His every teaching or commandment carries sovereign authority. This being true, every teaching and command constitutes an infallible rule or standard by which we are to live. Thus, the Old and New Testaments convey to us the knowledge of His will concerning our beliefs and the duties He requires of us.

The second question Hodge asks is, “What does the Romish Church declare to be the infallible rule of faith and practice?” He answers that the Roman Church’s complete rule of faith and practice includes both Scripture and tradition, i.e., the oral teaching of Christ and the Apostles, handed down to them through the Church. Their theory is that tradition is necessary, first, to teach additional truth not contained in Scripture, and second, to interpret Scripture. The Church, then, can be nothing less than the divinely appointed depository and judge of both the Scriptures and tradition.<sup>9</sup>

Although the rule of faith has a historical immediacy to the apostolic era, it resisted innovation until the middle of the second century. It is surprising that it became widespread at this time but it was logical in light of the extant writings of the period. Such writers as Aristides, Polycrates, Justin, and Irenaeus refer to it during this period familiarly and do not even bother to recite its contents. On into the third century it is universally recognized. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, and others recite it often. What, then, was the reason for this sudden recognition of the rule of faith? William DiPuccio says that it was the Marcion controversy and the teachings of the Gnostics. The Gnostics espoused secret oral traditions for which they claimed apostolic origin. Not to be outdone, the Church developed its own rule of faith, which was “the lens or reference grid through which the Scriptures were interpreted.”<sup>10</sup> Clement of Alexandria points to this distinction between the Gnostic’s rule and the Church’s rule when he “declares that the first principle of his system is the Scriptures as they are rightly interpreted through the Church’s Rule of Faith.”<sup>11</sup> In addition, Tertullian indicates that all questions of exegesis and exposition are permitted so long as they are referred to the Rule (the first principle of which is faith, not skill in exegesis). Clement, Irenaeus, and Tertullian all affirmed that

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<sup>8</sup> A.A. Hodge, *The Outlines of Theology*, 1860, [www.the-highway.com/Scripture\\_Hodge.html](http://www.the-highway.com/Scripture_Hodge.html)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> “Scripture and Tradition in the Early Church,” <http://www.probe.org/content/view/911/77>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

where the Rule is held and believed, there you will find the proper interpretation of Scripture and the apostolic faith.

From this, the Romanist statement of doctrine concerning tradition quickly developed. Revelation, that is, the contents of the canon, is not just the written portion but includes the unwritten oral traditions handed down by Christ and the Apostles. Thus, the rule of faith includes Scripture *and* tradition, both of which must be used to interpret the Bible, with tradition occupying the primary position. Tradition is most important because, the Roman Church believes, the people cannot know with certainty what books in the canon are of divine origin. It follows that if they cannot know this, they are incompetent to know the meaning of Scripture or which doctrines and traditions are divine and which are human. Thus the Church becomes the infallible teacher and determines these things for them.

### **Tradition**

Let's examine more closely, then, this Catholic idea of tradition. Charles Hodge avers:

Tradition is always represented by Romanists as not only the interpreter, but the complement of the Scriptures. The Bible, therefore, is, according to the Church of Rome, incomplete. It does not contain all the Church is bound to believe; nor are the doctrines which it does contain therein fully or clearly made known.<sup>12</sup>

This is another way of saying what was said before, that the people are incompetent to decide correctly on these matters, and the Church must decide for them. What, then, does the word tradition (*paradosis*) mean? Hodge defines it as (1) the art of delivering over from one to another; (2) the thing delivered or communicated. He says:

In the New Testament it is used (a.) For instructions delivered from some to others, without reference to the mode of delivery, whether it be orally or in writing; as in 2 Thess. 2:15...and 3:6...(b) For the oral instructions of the fathers handed down from generation to generation, but not contained in the Scriptures, and yet regarded as authoritative.<sup>13</sup>

This is the sense that the word was used in the early Church (not the Roman Church), and she constantly appealed to "traditions" or instructions, which she had received from Christ and the Apostles. Not all of the churches had written instructions at first for it was not until the end of the first century that the Apostles' writings were gathered and formed into a canon, i.e., a rule of faith. When they had been collected, they were spoken of as containing the traditions, the instructions derived from Christ and the Apostles. These "traditions,"

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, rep. University of Michigan, 2006, 106.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

however, were not the same as the Catholic Church later brought into play. These “traditions” were the gospels, the “evangelical traditions,” and the epistles, the “apostolic traditions.” There was no distinction between the written and unwritten word at that time. When controversies arose, appeal was made to “tradition,” i.e., to what each individual congregation had been taught and received. When it was found that they differed, they came to the conclusion that there should be some common standard. The wisest of them abided by the written word and did not receive anything of divine authority except what was contained in it.

The Roman Church, however, did not hold to the evangelical and apostolic traditions. Rather, she convened the Council of Trent (which lasted 18 years) and formulated a different view of “tradition.” As a body, she taught, according to Charles Hodge, that:

- (1) Christ and his Apostles taught many things which were not committed to writing, i.e., not recorded in the Sacred Scriptures.
- (2) That these instructions have been faithfully transmitted, and preserved in the Church.
- (3) That they constitute a part of the rule of faith for all believers.<sup>14</sup>

Bellarmin went so far as to divide these unwritten and unrecorded traditions into three classes: divine, apostolic, and ecclesiastical. Although they were not written or recorded in the Scriptures, they were written in the works of the church fathers, the decisions of their councils, their ecclesiastical institutions, and the redacted scripts of the popes. Tradition in the Roman Church, therefore, became supplemental to the Scriptures regarding the interpretation of the written word, not the traditions taught by Christ and the Apostles. The Church thus elevated the traditions to the level of the Scriptures in authority because “both are derived from the same source; both are received through the same channel; and both are authenticated by the same witness.”<sup>15</sup> The Church completely ignored the fact that this authority properly belongs only to those traditions classified as divine or apostolic, believing that the Church was endowed by Christ with the full power to ordain “traditional” rites and ceremonies. The criteria she used to differentiate between true and false traditions was simply their antiquity, catholicity, or the testimony of the extant Church. The ultimate decision, however, rested with the Church.

We see, then, that the Roman Catholic doctrine of tradition differs essentially from the Protestant view of the doctrine of the analogy of faith. The Protestants admitted that there is some tradition, which was limited by the Scriptures themselves, but they did not go beyond those limits. This is the doctrine we are governed by today. According to the rules of hermeneutics, Scripture must be

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 110.

interpreted so that each of the parts harmonizes with the whole. In other words, Scripture must interpret Scripture. Nothing contrary to the rule of faith can be true. Thus, there is a common faith wherein no Christian is isolated and holds his own creed. All Christians constitute one body and one common creed. To reject that creed or any of its parts is to reject the fellowship of the saints and membership in the body of Christ. Charles Hodge admits that Protestants acknowledge the authority of this common faith for two reasons:

First, because what all the competent readers of a plain book take to be its meaning, must be its meaning. Secondly, because the Holy Spirit is promised to guide the people of God into knowledge of the truth, and therefore that which they, under the teachings of the Spirit, agree in believing must be true.<sup>16</sup>

Hodge quotes Moehler, professor of theology at Munich, who admits that “In the objective sense of the word, tradition is the common faith of the Church as presented in external, historical witnesses through all centuries.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, it follows that “tradition” is the guide to the interpretation of the rule of faith as long as it does not go beyond what the Scriptures teach. In this sense the two are one and the same. The additional revelations espoused by the Romish Church are, then, external to the rule of faith espoused by Protestants. The points of difference between the two turn out to be that (1) when Protestants speak of the common consent or common faith of Christians, they refer to Christians as the true people of God. Catholics on the other hand refer to the people who profess to be Christians but are subject to the pope of Rome. (2) The common faith of the Protestants consists only of the essential doctrines outlined in the Scriptures and which enter into every aspect of Christian living and which are essential for salvation. The Catholic Church, to the contrary, maintains the authority of tradition for all kinds of doctrines and precepts, rites and ceremonies, and ecclesiastical intuitions, which have nothing to do with Christian living or the Church, and are external to the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The real question, then, according to Hodge, is not:

(1) Whether the Spirit of God leads true believers into the knowledge of the truth; nor (2) whether true Christians agree in all essential matters as to truth and duty; nor (3) whether any man can safely or innocently dissent from this common faith of the people of God; but (4) whether apart from the revelation contained in the Bible, there is another supplementary and explanatory revelation, which has been handed down outside of the Scriptures, by tradition.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 120.



In other words, where doctrines, institutions, and ordinances exist outside the Scriptures, do they have any warrant in the Scriptures that Christians are compelled to receive and obey on the authority of what is called common consent or common faith?

### **The Perspicuity of Scripture**

The Protestant doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture rejects the Roman Church's doctrine of tradition outright. Kaiser explains the perspicuity of Scripture in these terms: "The principle of the perspicuity of Scripture states that the message of the Bible is clear enough so that even the most unlearned person can understand the basic message of salvation that the Bible presents."<sup>19</sup> The principle of perspicuity does not mean that every part of the Bible is equally understandable or clear and free of difficulty. It was never intended to mean that. Consequently, it has been misunderstood and abused. Kaiser quotes Herbert Marsh as saying:

Another expression used by our Reformers, namely, "the *perspicuity* of the Sacred Writings," has been no less abused than [other] similar expression[s] [such as "the Bible is its own interpreter"]. When [the Reformers] argued for the *perspicuity* of the Bible, they intended not to argue against the application of Learning, but against the application of Tradition to the exposition of Scripture.<sup>20</sup>

The Reformers said no to the traditions of the Roman Church, maintaining that the Bible is sufficiently clear in its doctrines without the aid of external tradition.

All Christians are encouraged to use the Bible devotionally. This being the case, there must be a presumption that the Scriptures are clear enough for all to understand what they say without external input. But is this reasonable? Only if we can assure the readers that they will not wander off into error by delving into the full canon of Scripture and apply their own insights and understandings.

Martin Luther was the most forceful in taking a stand that the Bible is plain in its meaning. He wrote a book entitled *On the Bondage of the Will* in response to a work entitled *On the Freedom of the Will* written by Erasmus. Although he initially disagreed violently with Erasmus and implied that everything in Scripture was plain and equally available to everyone, he turned his thoughts later to the fact that there were certain passages that were obscure because of our ignorance of their vocabulary and grammar. This debate ultimately raised the question as to what degree the average reader and the Church are obligated to submit to tradition and the edicts of the Pope for the proper interpretation of Scripture. Of course, the Reformers shouted "None"! No one's history of tradition was necessary for interpretation of the Scriptures. The idea was that if

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<sup>19</sup> Kaiser, 199.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

the average reader would exert the proper amount of effort through study and research, he would gain the understanding needed for a saving relationship and a life of obedience to the Lord.

The definition of the perspicuity of Scripture found representation in many works of the Reformation. Among these was the well-known paragraph seven of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647):

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

Contrary to this, Catholics teach that “the Scriptures are so obscure that they need a visible, present, and infallible interpreter.”<sup>21</sup> In addition, the people, because they are incompetent to understand the Scriptures, are obligated to believe whatever doctrines the Church declares to be true. It follows, then, that the use of the Scriptures by the people was forbidden by the Church of Rome regardless of the fact that it was never forbidden by a general council. The prohibitions came from the Popes (Gregory VII, Innocent III, Clemens XI, and Pius IV) who forbade any to read any version of the Scriptures, and relegated such prohibitions to the permission of the priests.

Protestants, then, affirm, and Catholics deny, private judgment concerning the Scriptures. The Catholic denial affirms that no unlearned Christian has any right to interpret the Scriptures for himself apart from the traditions of the Church and the pronouncements of the Pope and the priests.

### **Interpretation**

The analogy of faith requires the average reader to interpret all Scripture to agree with the entire teaching of the Bible. According to Kaiser, this presupposes “(1) the coherence of Scripture, (2) the organic nature of the Bible, and (3) the canonical closure of Holy Writ.”<sup>22</sup> If the reader adheres to these principles, then Scripture interprets Scripture, especially when it comes to parallel passages. Pink admonishes that we must take constant care to conform all our interpretations to the analogy of faith. However, before we take a closer look at how the analogy of faith should be used in interpreting the Scriptures, we should consider the parallel term “analogy of Scripture.” John Bright, according to Kaiser, discovered that most biblical passages contain some feature of theology expressed so that it integrates them into the whole fabric of the Bible. The features often appear in earlier texts than those under examination. The clues to this antecedent theology

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 106.

<sup>22</sup> Kaiser, 192.

are found in (1) the use of certain terms that have already acquired a certain meaning in Scripture, (2) the use of direct quotations from writers that precede the text being examined, (3) the use of indirect citations or allusions to previous events, persons, or institutions, and (4) a reference to the covenants and their contents.<sup>23</sup>

Modern interpreters, however, are prone to abandon the important principles mentioned above. As quoted by Kaiser, Blocher argues against this type of “modernization” by stating, “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 [of faith] come into play?”<sup>24</sup> The answer is that it could not. Fortunately, here is where the analogy of faith comes into play again. The Bible is a unified whole written by a single Author. The Author, then, demonstrates coherence and unity in what He writes. This being true, Bible scholars should not assume less than unity, but when they do, they destroy any unifying principles in biblical theology, and succeeding in this they remove the focus on synthetic and synoptic studies in the way that they are needed for interpretation of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, the unity of the Bible, as pointed out previously, can be successfully argued from the standpoint of coherence, organic nature, and canonical closure.

Hermeneutics, then, is extremely important to the proper exegesis of the Scriptures. The term translates from the classical Greek word *hermeneutike*, a cognate of the verb *hermeneuo*. The first to use the term in a technical sense to interpret literature was Plato. The term was used for the first time to describe the interpretation of the Bible by J.C. Danhauer’s *Hermeneutica Sacra*, published in Strasburg in 1654.<sup>25</sup>

Can the Bible be properly interpreted, then, by the average (Christian) reader, and can that reader come to a knowledge of the truth without the aid of any other person or “class” of persons? The answer must be yes. Joseph Meador posits that the Bible teaches that an individual who desires to interpret the Scriptures can do so through personal study and investigation (2 Tim. 2:15). Reading commentaries and sermons may be helpful, but should be done with reservations. God has never authorized a “special professor/preacher class” to act as the rightful interpreters of His will for the Church. Meador also postulates that the Bible is written in propositional style, and that this fact is revealed in the Scriptures in such verses as John 8:32; 14:15, 23; Galatians 1:6, 12; and 1 Thessalonians 5:21. By the word “propositional” he means “the substantive doctrinal content of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph D. Meador, “Should a Christian interpret the Bible on their own?”  
[www.bible-efonet.org/FF/q\\_a/112\\_05\\_27.htm](http://www.bible-efonet.org/FF/q_a/112_05_27.htm)

God's word is set forth in a provable and knowable manner."<sup>26</sup> Having been set forth in a provable and knowable manner, it can be fully interpreted.

What, then, besides the principles outlined in hermeneutics, must a person do in order to interpret the Word of God correctly? Meador says there are several necessary requisites:

First, the one desiring to understand God's will must be honest of heart (Luke 8:15; Acts 13:48). Second, one must strive for purity of heart and mind (Matt. 5:8; 13:14-15; John 5:14; Acts 7:51, 53; 8:21; Phil. 4:8; 2 Tim. 4:3-4). Third, one must have a firm belief in the facts of the Bible, and the evidence for this belief (faith) is produced by revelational proclamation (Rom. 10:11, 17; 1 Cor. 15:14; Heb. 11:1).<sup>27</sup>

As we have seen, the Roman Catholic disagrees vehemently with the Protestant view of the interpretation of the Scriptures. D.R. Dungan argues against the official sanctions of the Church forbidding individual interpretation:

This has been one of the great faults of the Catholic Church...In the decision of their councils, that the laity of the church should not read the book, lest they should reach wrong views; they have left it entirely to the control of those whose special business it has been to furnish people with a knowledge of heaven's will. This enables them to establish a monopoly of interpretation. So that, to the people, the Bible is not the book itself; but the meaning of the book, as interpreted by the priesthood, is to them the Bible.<sup>28</sup>

Power in this respect is always dangerous. It is one of the reasons that Martin Luther launched the Reformation against the power of the Church to dictate what proper interpretation of the Scriptures should be. Nevertheless, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) was adamant, insisting "the interpretation of Scripture is to be given authoritatively by the Church and not the individual."<sup>29</sup> They did not want to lose their power over the people in these matters.

The authoritarian power of this apostate Church steadily grew and evolved to the point that there developed a distinct priestly class despite the warnings of the early leaders. The priests soon began to do things for the people that, according to the priests, they could not do for themselves. Thus, the movement that established the distinction between the laity and the "clergy" began by about 150 AD, and the "clergy" patterned themselves after the Jewish priesthood and became the "interpreters of the law," so to speak. Sadly, this idea was carried over into the Protestant Reformation and remains to this day in modern evangelical churches.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Too many today succumb to the notion that because the minister or priest or preacher has attended seminary, he has a lock on the interpretation of the Bible. A careful reading of what has gone before, combined with the principles of hermeneutics, personal study and investigation and the guidance of the Holy Spirit will prove this notion to be erroneous. Should a Christian interpret the Bible on his own? The answer, when all is considered, has to be a resounding yes!