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An Incarnational Analogy That Is Hard to Escape From: A Polemic with James Prothro¹

Abstract: Theological literature contains many references to the analogy between the Incarnation of the Word and the expression of God’s words in human language. In “The Christological Analogy and Theological Interpretation” James Prothro points out that the incarnational theology is useful only in emphasizing the dual provenance of Scripture (divine and human authorship). Nevertheless, it does not hold true in a situation in which one derives the concept of inspiration from the analogy or tries to formulate conclusions on how to interpret the inspired books on its basis. According to the theologian, the text and the actual Incarnation are two different examples of divine self-disclosure to humans, and there is no immediate transit between Christology and the theology of Scripture. This article is a polemic with Prothro’s theses, which have been subjected to criticism. The theologian’s escape from the incarnational theology has proved unsuccessful. The limitations of the analogy do not prevent one from the possibility of using it. One should only remember about the “dissimilar similarity,” characteristic of every analogy. The final part of the article contains directions for further studies.

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Introduction

Theological literature includes numerous references to the analogy between the Incarnation of the Word and the expression of God’s

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words in human language,² although the incarnational analogy happens to be also occasionally criticised.³ One of the most recent attempts to demonstrate the limitations of the analogy or even its uselessness (at least in the field of biblical hermeneutics) is the publication of a scholar from Ave Maria University.⁴ James Prothro, because he is the one in question, in an interesting and thought-provoking (encouraging a polemic) article expressed the view that the application of the Christological analogy is problematic to such an extent that drawing any binding conclusions on its basis as to the principles of interpreting the inspired texts should be considered virtually impossible. According to him, what those using the analogy intend to be a measure of the “orthodoxy” in interpreting Scripture and to set limits to hermeneutical “heresies” turns out to fail precisely at these crucial moments.

The theologian recalls that in literature, analogy is typically used to emphasise the divine and human provenance of Scripture and the role of the inspired authors, which would be analogous to the participation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Incarnation.⁵ The scholar points out the limitations of the analogy and then presents his own proposal. He departs from the negatively assessed analogy but never stops looking at Scripture from an incarnational perspective.

² See more recent publications, e.g., D. Farkasfalvy, *Theology of the Christian Bible*, 63–86; T. Work, *Living and Active* (the author derives this analogy from the “analogy of the Word”, i.e., the double meaning of the term *logos* – see *ibid.*, 15); P. Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*; C. Vagaggini, *Teologia. Pluralizm teologiczny* [*Theology. Theological Pluralism*], 98, 181; H. Muszyński, “Charyzmat natchnienia biblijnego [The Charism of Biblical Inspiration]”, 55: “in an analogous manner to the Incarnate Word, also the Bible as a divine-human work is wholly divine and wholly human, it is simultaneously and wholly the true word of God and the true word of man”; S. Zatwardnicki, *Chalcedońska formuła* [*The Chalcedonian Formula*], 219–225; D. Senior, “Verbum Dei,” 16–17; S.W. Hahn, “For the Sake of Our Salvation,” 39; M.E. Healy, “Behind, in Front of,” 191–192; R. Sokolowski, “God’s Word and Human Speech,” 188; N.M. de S. Cameron, “Incarnation and Inscripturation.”

³ See, e.g., J. Webster, *Holy Scripture*; J. Barr, *Biblical Faith*; M. Barth, *Conversation with the Bible*.

⁴ J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 102–119.

⁵ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 102.

In this article, we will first present Prothro's stance (par. 1) and then provide a thorough critique of it while attempting to defend the need for recourse to analogy (par. 2). On this basis, we will make a general assessment of the contingent applicability of the Christological analogy and the Marian analogy, and indicate directions for further research (Recapitulation and Perspectives).

1. James Prothro's critique of analogy

1.1 The fallibility of analogy in the field of hermeneutics

The Christological analogy, as Prothro admits, may prove useful in the function of affirming (or even an apologia) the traditional position of faith, according to which the biblical word remains the true Word of God, despite the fact that at first contact it appears as a typically human reality. In the same way, the Incarnate Christ was truly God, although His divinity was made visible to human beings through His true humanity. The parallel remains at the service of the expression of this "both-and" proper to both the doctrine of Christology and the doctrine of inspiration: The Incarnate Word is both God and man; the inspired books are both of divine and human provenance.⁶ But, the author insists, when one tries to draw hermeneutical conclusions on this basis, the imperfection of the analogy undermines its ability to adjudicate the "orthodoxy" of exegetical methods.⁷ "Christology and

⁶ See J.B. Prothro, "Christological Analogy," 103–104.

⁷ See J.B. Prothro, "Christological Analogy," 104. Indeed, criticism of biblical "heresies" analogous to Christological heresies is not unique in the literature – see, e.g., D. Farkasfalvy, "W poszukiwaniu nowej [In Search of the New]," 285; D. Farkasfalvy, *Theology of the Christian Bible*, 70; T. Work, *Living and Active*, 5, 20, 22–24, 47–48, 81–82, 115, 122, 174, 230, 277, 291, 323–324, 326; R. Cantalamessa, "Litera zabija, Duch ożywia [The letter kills, the Spirit brings life]," 275–276; G. Mansini, *Fundamental Theology*, 58–59; J. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji [Faith in Scripture and Tradition]*, 628; M.E. Healy, "Behind, in Front of," 191–192; R. Pietkiewicz, *Gdy otwierasz Biblię [When You Open the Bible]*, 47–48. Misused historical-critical method may support Nestorian or even Arian interpretations in Christology – see J. Ratzinger, *Jezus Chrystus dzisiaj [Jesus Christ Today]*, in: J. Ratzinger, J. Królikowski, *Z Chrystusem w historii. Rozważania chrystologiczne*

Bibliology are too different for the former to determine the latter.”⁸ For example, the author asks if rejecting the “humanity” of the Bible is an exegetical “heresy”, what then would an orthodox understanding of this humanity consist in and how would it be expressed in exegesis.⁹

Prothro also stresses a certain “rigidity” associated with analogy; it conceptualises at the starting point a vision of biblical inspiration, as it were, it “presses” into a framework that may not correspond to reality (and to the testimony of the inspired texts) and does not serve to draw legitimate hermeneutical conclusions.¹⁰

In his opinion, attempts to derive the inerrancy of the Bible from the analogy of the sinlessness of the Word Incarnate are similarly unsuccessful. Particularly in the circles of biblical fundamentalism, the incarnational analogy had an apologetic function – on its basis some scholars used to raise an objection to the historical-critical method and come to the defence of the inerrancy of the Bible.¹¹ Paradoxically, the same analogy is also used to draw exactly opposite conclusions: not only Catholics recognise the importance of the historical-critical method, but also Protestant scholars from the evangelical current (among them, for example, Peter Enns, the author of a book built precisely on the basis of the Christological analogy, to whom the author of the article refers).¹²

In Prothro’s view, the power of simplicity of analogy is its weakness, for analogy does not work in complex matters. It is merely a kind of pendulum swinging towards the two extremes, and if it were to solve problems, then it would require clarification as to what the balance

[*With Christ in History. Christological deliberations*], transl. J. Królikowski, Kraków 1999, 21–22.

⁸ J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 113. The term ‘bibliology’ is used by the author to denote that type of theological reflection which places Scripture as such at its centre; in other words, it is a “theology of Scripture” rather than simply treating Scripture as the basis for Christian theology – see T. Work, *Living and Active*, 8 (with footnote 7), 9–10; C. Pinnock, *Scripture Principle*, 16, 86.

⁹ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 107–108.

¹⁰ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 104.

¹¹ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 105; G.C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 202; N.M. de S. Cameron, “Incarnation and Inscripturation”, 36–37.

¹² See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 105–106; P. Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*.

between the divine and the human is.¹³ As it turns out, different scholars, partly as a result of the denominational traditions from which they come, using the same analogy, trace the same biblical “heresies” in quite different manifestations of exegesis. The Ave Maria University scholar concludes that if the affirmation of the basic Chalcedonian doctrine shared by different Christians does not rule out the various nuances in the understanding of the Word’s incarnation, it is all the more difficult to expect sufficient agreement in the elaboration of a “Chalcedonian” hermeneutic. In addition, those who wield the sword of “heresy” can expose themselves to accusations of another heresy. For example, Denis Farkasfalvy warns against the temptations of Nestorianism (separating or even denying the divine reality of Scripture) and biblical Monophysitism (disregarding the human qualities of the Bible).¹⁴ Prothro, however, asks whether if one considers as Nestorian those tendencies in exegesis which consist in deriving theological meaning only on the basis of conclusions drawn from the historical-critical method, one does not become an Apollinarian oneself.¹⁵

If Chalcedonian distinctions and identification of heresies are correct about the actual incarnation, they are unhelpful in determining biblical method. Theological hermeneutics are already complex, and this analogy overcomplicates matters. Instead of asking whether certain reading strategies befit the Bible, the analogy, when pressed to determine Bibliology and hermeneutics, forces us also to ask what aspects of a method are analogous to which christological heresy and in what respect.¹⁶

Prothro also reminds us of the serious objections of other scholars who insist that if there is a hypostatic union in the Incarnation, then

¹³ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 106.

¹⁴ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 107, 108–109; D. Farkasfalvy, *Theology of the Christian Bible*, 70; D. Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration & Interpretation*, 219.

¹⁵ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 108.

¹⁶ J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 108–109.

the relationship between the divine and the human in the inspired books must be of an entirely different kind. Neither is there an “inscripturation” of the Holy Spirit to be analogous to the “incarnation” of the Son of God, nor is the Bible itself some kind of “another Incarnation.”¹⁷ Some have raised the point that the analogy should be rejected because its acceptance is allegedly at the expense of reducing the actual miracle of the Incarnation.¹⁸ Prothro stresses that the doctrine of inspiration does not concern a single entity (as in the case of the incarnation of the Person of the Son of God), but many persons: the author (editor) or authors (editors) and the Three Divine Persons. In relation with this “non-hypostatic” doctrine of inspiration, it should be said, according to the theologian, that, like Christ, the Bible is both human and divine, but in some other way, so that what is unorthodox in Christology may even be quite appropriate in Bibliology (and *vice versa*).¹⁹

1.2 Uselessness of the Marian analogy

The incarnational analogy is also used in its relation to Mary’s role in the conception of the Son of God. The literature on the subject compares the process of the Incarnation with that of the inspiration of the hagiographers in order to capture the way in which human authors enabled the Word of God to be “born” in the human word. Their participation in the production of sacred texts could not consist in a merely passive or automatic submission to divine influence, since the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the Annunciation, in response to Gabriel’s proposal (that is, God’s initiative), gave her free and willing consent (cf. Lk 1:38).²⁰

¹⁷ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 109; G.C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 202; T. Work, *Living and Active*, 29, 65.

¹⁸ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 113.

¹⁹ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 109.

²⁰ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 109–110; S.W. Hahn, “For the Sake of Our Salvation,” 40; I. de La Potterie, *Maryja w tajemnicy przymierza* [*Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*], 68: “Maryjne *fiat* nie jest zwykłą akceptacją, a tym mniej rezygnacją. Wyraża ono radosne pragnienie współpracy w dziele, które

One cannot tell why Prothro makes his task easier and shows the limitations of this analogy by means of examples that leave much to be desired. The parallel would be between the consciousness of Mary, consenting to give birth to a human being of divine provenance, and the consciousness of inspired authors, who in such a comparison should be aware of the divine origin of what they write. The inspired texts do not, however, support the thesis that hagiographers should know, through special enlightenment, that their works are of a different kind (inspiration!) from apostolic preaching or ecclesiastical traditions.²¹ Prothro here follows Gerald O'Collins, whose conclusions he fully identifies with; the Australian theologian wrote that:

the Spirit of God can be actively present in special ways – specifically, by inspiring biblical authors – but need not make that presence and activity consciously felt. [...] They were blessed and enriched by the special activity of the Holy Spirit, but apparently remained unaware of that presence.²²

Second, the Marian analogy would suggest that the process of inspiration takes place between the Holy Spirit and a single inspired author. And we know that, in fact, many people were involved in the genesis of sacred texts. In this case, the theologian inquires, is the inspired meaning to be attributed to the authors who “birthed” individual texts (e.g., the Psalms), or rather to the final editors (e.g.,

Bóg Jej wyznaczył [Mary's *fiat* is not mere acceptance, much less resignation. It expresses a joyful desire to collaborate in the work God has assigned to her].”

²¹ See J.B. Prothro, “The Christological Analogy,” 110.

²² G. O'Collins, *Inspiration*, 122. It should be added that the theologian wrote about the varied consciousness of inspired writers. Some knew that they were guided by the Holy Spirit (the author of *Revelation*) or at least that they conveyed their message in God's authority (St. Paul, who, however, did not explicitly claim to write under inspiration), while other hagiographers did not have to be aware at all of the special divine influence by which they produced inspired texts (e.g., the author of the *Book of Sirach* or the evangelist Luke) – see *Inspiration*, 40–42, 58, 96, 118–123; G. O'Collins, *Revelation*, 161.

of the entire Psalter). Or, from another perspective: were not some contributors to composition and editing guided by inspiration?²³

The third extreme example to which Prothro refers is to demonstrate on the basis of a Christological analogy that the inspired text is flawless and remains the word of God Himself – just as Mary’s mediation consisted in the voluntary transmission of something coming directly from God. Prothro endorses this position as follows: Mary’s vocation involved angelic visitation and Mary’s absolute receptivity, which guaranteed that the born child would be saint (cf. Lk 1:34–35). If the apostolic or prophetic vocation to mediate Revelation often involved divine intervention, it would be difficult, in turn, to find in the lives of hagiographers such a moment of special call to write. Rather, they write, as it were, “from within” the vocation they have already received, from the conviction that they have possessed a truth important for faith and salvation and therefore worthy of proclamation (cf. Lk 1:4; Jn 20:31), or even, as in the case of St. Paul, they solve occasional problems on the basis of faith and apostolic vocation (cf. Phlm 8–9, 19–21).²⁴

1.3 Summary of critique and Prothro’s alternative

If the role of analogy were limited to affirming that the humanity of the inspired authors (including their cultural rootedness, limited vision and goals, modes of expression, and the human process of composition of sacred texts) is not an obstacle to the biblical text remaining the Word of God, there would be no problem. Analogy can be useful in highlighting the dual provenance of Scripture and showing the non-competitive nature of this duality of genesis (and of authorship). The problem arises, however, when the concept of inspiration and the manner of reference of the divine and human moments in Scripture, from which hermeneutical principles are derived; analogy proves unhelpful in relating these divine and human features of the Bible in interpretive practice. The crucial question concerns the way God communicates through “human” texts and the role of authors

²³ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 112.

²⁴ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 110–111.

and their historical location for the meaning of sacred writings.²⁵ To sum up Prothro's critique in his own words:

Scripture and the incarnation are far from identical with respect to the actual interrelation of the "divine" and "human," both in generation (virginal conception vs. textual composition) and product (a living person vs. a collection of books). It is not merely that the analogy is "imperfect" at points—all analogies are—but that it fails to correspond at the very points at issue in interpretive debates. This lack of precision can allow the analogy to be used by all sides in debates about inerrancy, inspiration, and the role of historical criticism in theological hermeneutics. The analogy, even when amplified by a comparison of Mary and Scripture's human authors, does not correspond properly to the generation of the inspired text or to how the human and divine interrelate within Scripture. In the positive application of the analogy to guide a proper hermeneutic, it fails to illumine sufficiently the questions of human communication-symbols, authorial agency, and divine revelation, which hermeneutics must ask.²⁶

This critical evaluation of the applicability of the Christological analogy does not mean that Prothro abandons the incarnational point of view altogether. Rather, he proposes an alternative vision: instead of a direct analogy between the Incarnation of the Word and the "incarnation" of God's words into human speech, he advises seeing the Incarnation and the text as two different examples of God's "condescension"; in other words, he situates Scripture within the broader framework of God's incarnational economy. Like the Incarnation, the Bible participates in the same mode of humble communication of God graciously manifesting himself to the world.²⁷

²⁵ See J.B. Prothro, "Christological Analogy," 111, 118–119.

²⁶ J.B. Prothro, "Christological Analogy," 119.

²⁷ See J.B. Prothro, "Christological Analogy," 102, 104, 113. The author writes about "condescension" in reference to St. John Chrysostom, who used the Greek term "συγκαταβασις." This concept, which is difficult to express in a single Polish word, could be translated as "descending," "approachability" or "adjustment" of

He considers his proposed revision to be “incarnational” in the sense that the biblical text and the actual Incarnation are two instantiations of divine self-disclosure to human beings, so different that no further Christological detail must be introduced into Bibliology.²⁸

God reveals Himself in history through various events, and His self-manifestation leads to the expression of truth in propositional tenets. In God’s economy of salvation and revelation we are dealing with intrinsically interrelated words and actions. God discloses truth through communicative or revelatory events of a paralinguistic or linguistic nature (“deeds and words”) within the pre-existing network of symbols appropriate to the recipient of the revelation.²⁹ All these human forms “give flesh” to the divine truth and make it audible and intelligible at all. The God presented in Scripture always acts in a “condescending” manner. The actual incarnation of Christ is to be seen against the background of this pattern, and since in this case we are dealing with the very person of the Son of God in human flesh – this is the high point of salvation and revelation.³⁰

The biblical words, too, are the product of this kind of divine self-communication, which, as not intended for private knowledge only, was to be passed on to subsequent generations. The textualization of previously orally transmitted documents participates in the

God to man. This kind of divine action was the consequence of God’s love, care and graciousness in reaching out to people because of their need resulting from the spiritual condition they found themselves in. God made Himself accessible to people by adapting Himself to their mentality – see P. Szczur, “Dzieło stworzenia [The Work of Creation],” 334 (with footnote 64). The translators of the conciliar document decided on the term “*condescension*” (Latin: *condescensio*) and, quoting Chrysostom, they wrote that God “has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature” – see Second Vatican Council, *Dei verbum*, 13 [hereinafter DV]; see John Chrysostom, *In Gen.*, Hom. 17, 1 (PG 53, 134). This movement of the descent of God to men must be seen within the framework of the whole process whose goal is the elevation of men to God and the attainment of divinization – see A. Oliynyk, “Liturgiczno-sakralne źródła [Liturgical and Sacral Sources],” 121.

²⁸ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 114.

²⁹ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 4–116; DV 2; G. O’Collins, *Revelation*, 3–18.

³⁰ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 115.

self-manifestation of God in history by transmitting events and revelatory truths. It hands down the same essence of revelation as the direct revelation of God. It also serves the same purpose – the communication of divine truth enabling the knowledge of God, worship and obedience. The transcendent truth becomes, as it were, “enfleshing” in the existing sign-meaning networks. The biblical text, separated temporally from the revelatory events themselves, nevertheless participates in the same reality and remains revelatory.³¹

It is against this background that the doctrine of inspiration must be located. As Prothro maintains, it affirms that divine action lies at the basis of the later canonised writings and attests to the divine providence that guides the process of their textualization, so that they transmit the Revelation and remain beneficial for the faith and the life of future generations (cf. 2 Tim 3:16–17). Our theologian concludes that this providential action can be discerned in the New Testament authors’ use of the Hebrew Bible; the Holy Spirit guided the Old Testament hagiographers in such a way that their texts could then be read against the background of a new network of symbols linked to the Christ-event (cf. for example Jn 2:22; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11). As God intended, the inspired writings participate in the “incarnational” action of God, who in his humble self-manifestation communicates through pre-existing symbols.³²

It is not so much that Christ and the Bible are analogues, but that the Incarnate Christ and the inspired texts are different realizations of God’s economy of revelation, within which God graciously lowers Himself to humanity in order to reveal Himself in the manner of cognition available to man. Prothro’s conception, in his view, safeguards Scripture (divine origin, divine-human bipolarity, capacity to bring about revelation) to a degree comparable to the Christological analogy, but in contrast to it, it would not impose a paradigm alien to the biblical texts. It would therefore be a better starting point in the search for hermeneutical methods best suited to the actual object of

³¹ See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 115–116.

³² See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 116–117. Interesting and theologically cogent is the author’s observation that even God’s self-identification as “god” is already a descent and acceptance of a pre-existing concept – *ibid.* 118.

study. It does not locate inspiration in the mind of a single author but sees inspiration as the Holy Spirit's oversight of the whole process of textualization. This model, starting from revelation and divine communication, would, according to the researcher, offer not only a confirmation but also an integration of the two poles ("both-and") which the incarnational analogy confirms but which it cannot link or explain.³³

2. A critique of the critique and an apologia of analogy

2.1 Something more than a theological hypothesis

My first objection concerns Prothro's attitude towards the Magisterium. The author seems to treat the Christological analogy as a mere theological hypothesis created by theologians with whom one discusses "as equals." In my opinion, the statements of the teaching office of the Church are explicit enough to warrant taking the analogy more seriously than the theologian would like to admit.

In celebrating God's "inclination" towards man, Pius XII referred to the incarnational analogy: "For as the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things, 'except sin,'[31] so the words of God, expressed in human language, are made like to human speech in every respect, except error."³⁴ The analogy between the Word made flesh and the Word of God mediated in human speech was also addressed by the fathers of the Second Vatican Council:

In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvelous "condescension" of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, "that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature." For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just

³³ See J.B. Prothro, "Christological Analogy," 117, 119.

³⁴ Pius XII, "Divino Afflante Spiritu," no. 37; see P.T. Gadenz, "Magisterial Teaching," 88.

as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men (DV 13).³⁵

John Paul II, in his *Address on the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, also spoke of this need to take into account the divine-human character of Sacred Scripture and the exegetical methods appropriate to this specificity.³⁶ Also in the exhortation *Verbum Domini* signed by Benedict XVI, the question of “the analogy drawn by the Fathers of the Church between the word of God which became ‘flesh’ and the word which became a ‘book’” was evoked.³⁷ A member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission sees the doctrine of the Incarnation as the key to the entire exhortation and to an understanding – from a Christian and Catholic perspective – of the nature of Scripture and the resultant research methods.³⁸

The documents of the Magisterium provide a basis for using the proposed incarnational analogy in theology and hermeneutics. It is difficult to assume that in a dogmatic constitution, or an exhortation written by such a seasoned theologian as Ratzinger, the analogy can only serve as a pastorally useful metaphor without much significance for *scientia fidei* and exegesis. It is from this divine-human specificity of Scripture (analogous to the union of the divine and human natures of Christ) that these documents derive their hermeneutical conclusions: interpretative principles must consider both moments, divine and

³⁵ See P.T. Gadenz, “Magisterial Teaching,” 88–89.

³⁶ See John Paul II [John Paul II], *Discorso di sua Santità Giovanni Paolo II sull'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*. See P.T. Gadenz, Magisterial Teaching, 89–90.

³⁷ Benedict XVI, Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 18 [hereinafter VD]. See W. Linke, “Logos Wcielony [Logos Incarnate],” 114–115. The fathers of the synod preceding the publication of the exhortation also referred to the incarnational analogy. They drew attention to the Creed which contains a parallelism: The Son of God through the Holy Spirit took flesh from the Virgin Mary – the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets. “The Word is clothed with concrete words, to which it descends and adapts itself in order to become audible and intelligible to men” – see *Message to the People of God* (concerning the quotation and the preceding paraphrase).

³⁸ D. Senior, “Verbum Dei,” 16–17.

human (the dual dimension and authorship of the biblical books).³⁹ It is necessary to use scholarly exegesis (especially the historical-critical method) to reach what God, through human authors, wanted to reveal. Secondly, the Council fathers recalled the theological principles necessary to discover the divine dimension of the inspired books. To limit oneself to merely theological principles would be to deny the “corporeality” of the Bible, in fact to reject the “incarnation” of the Word of God.⁴⁰

The last problem that remains to be solved is the uniting of these two approaches: scholarly and theological. Commenting on the Council’s constitution, Ratzinger questioned whether the relationship between critical exegesis and ecclesiastical exegesis was clearly defined in *Dei verbum*.⁴¹ It seems that the Council fathers did not sufficiently demonstrate what the relation between the historical-critical method and theological hermeneutics would consist in. Despite the phrase “no less serious attention must be given” used in the document, many exegetes had the impression that priority was given to the methods of modern exegesis.⁴² A rift has emerged between post-conciliar scholarly research and the study of the theological meaning of texts, which Benedict XVI has called for to be overcome (VD 34).⁴³ It is not a mere consideration of both, for in exegetical practice there has

³⁹ See DV 12; VD 34; Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Academics of the Pontifical Biblical Institute*; Synod of Bishops, *Message to the People of God*.

⁴⁰ “The “corporeal” dimension of the Bible requires scholarly analysis because “the Word is clothed in concrete words to which it descends and adapts itself in order to become audible and intelligible to men” – *Message to the People of God*. The divine-human character of the Word of God, as emphasized by the former prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, is a consequence of the incarnational character of Revelation being a divine-human event – see G.L. Müller, *Catholic Dogmatics*, 92–93.

⁴¹ See J. Ratzinger, *On the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council*, vol. 7, part 2., 637.

⁴² See J. Ratzinger, “Kontrowersje wokół interpretacji [Controversies over interpretation],” 95–96; J. Ratzinger, “Wprowadzenie do dokumentu [Introduction to the document],” 22; J. Ratzinger, “Jesus of Nazareth,” 382.

⁴³ See Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI During the 14th General Congregation of the Synod of Bishops*.

been a temptation to divide the work of research into two stages: the first dominated by the historical-critical method, and the second consisting in separating the “grain from the chaff,” that is, reconciling the results with the faith of the Church. Meanwhile, the coexistence of the two levels of Bible study must encompass the whole process, although necessarily the distribution of emphasis will vary at different stages of the work. “To distinguish two levels of approach to the Bible does not in any way mean to separate or oppose them, nor simply to juxtapose them. They exist only in reciprocity.”⁴⁴

The language used by Pope Emeritus evokes the idea of a synthesis between the two following the model of the Chalcedonian “without confusion and without separation.”⁴⁵ This means, on the one hand, that the hermeneutics of faith postulated by Benedict XVI remains open to the historical-critical method and, on the other hand, that the method itself must take a new methodological step and recognise itself again as a theological discipline (“without separation”) without renouncing its scholarly and historical specificity (“without confusion”).⁴⁶ Would Prothro want to see this as Apollinarianism?

⁴⁴ VD 35; see D. Senior, “Verbum Dei,” 19.

⁴⁵ See D. Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration & Interpretation*, 219: “The Catholic truth about the Bible lies in an equal affirmation of its divine and human components, ‘unconfused and inseparable,’ allowing no material distinction between the parts to be assigned either solely to God or solely to the human author.” Ultimately, it is a question of the interaction between faith and reason (VD 36), and therefore also between theology and philosophy, which, according to the Chalcedonian paradigm, takes place in respect for the identity of the one and the other – see B. Ferdek, “Via philosophica,” 199, 205.

⁴⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 382; see S.W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 27–30, 45–46; T.M. Dąbek, “Postulat jedności interpretacji [The Postulate of Unity of Interpretation],” 13. Theology can only learn truth if it examines its normative testimonies, contained in the canon of Scripture, and if in exegetical work “it relates the human words of the Bible to the living Word of God” – International Theological Commission, *Theology Today*, no. 21. The scholarly method “will bear no fruit unless they are employed subject to faith, and without claims to autonomy,” while “the historico-critical interpretation is to be inserted as a contribution to the theological and ecclesial interpretation” – International Theological Commission, *Interpretation of Dogma*, C, I, 3–4.

2.2 Ecumenical oversensitivity

Prothro's conclusions drawn from examples of the use of analogy by theologians of different denominations are unconvincing. Naturally, not all will view the nature of Scripture similarly, even if they all agree on a common Christological basis. Of course, the "balance of orthodoxy" is always the most difficult to maintain, and thus in Christological reflection we move between two poles – from the unity of the Person to the distinction of natures and back again – like a pendulum, precisely because we are incapable of grasping both poles simultaneously.⁴⁷ This makes it plausible that the accusation of Nestorian tendencies can be formulated by someone who himself perhaps succumbs to the Monophysite temptation (and vice versa). History shows that the position of Leo the Great was at times perceived as quasi-Nestorian, while from the Leonine perspective, the statements of Cyril of Alexandria may appear to be inclined towards Monophysitism. However, there is a limit beyond which the views can be defined as Nestorian or Monophysite without any doubt. In modern Christology, too, there are positions that can be interpreted differently. For example, Karl Rahner, in an attempt to move away from the crypto-Monophysite tendencies he perceived, went in a direction that Aaron Riches considered unorthodox, indeed too Nestorian, in reaction to which he himself postulated a Christological synthesis in the Cyrillic spirit.⁴⁸ Perhaps both of them were right, only with different accents, and perhaps the truth lies with one of them. But in no way does this mean that the Chalcedonian criterion and the negative measure of Christological heresies should be considered useless. Heresy remains heresy, and even if one makes the "presumption of orthodoxy" in the individual statements of theologians

⁴⁷ I do not know if Prothro is aware of this, but it is the Chalcedonian definition that has a structure resembling the movement of a pendulum, from unity to distinction and vice versa – see S.W. Need, "Language, Metaphor, and Chalcedon," 252–253.

⁴⁸ See A. Riches, *Ecce homo*, 9–15. Also Barth's approach at some points seems closer to Nestorius than to Cyril – see T. Work, *Living and Active*, 81–83.

or exegetes – one can at least theoretically determine what no longer belongs to orthodoxy.⁴⁹

Prothro assumes that if the Chalcedonian doctrine itself is already understood differently by Christians, the “Chalcedonian” hermeneutic will be all the more a bone of contention. This would, in his view, negate the usefulness of the incarnational analogy. The author seems not to have accepted the idea that these different interpretations are not at all due to the weakness of the analogy, but to the fact that one of the parties misinterprets it. Besides, the mere declarative recognition of orthodox Christological confessions is not yet a guarantee that the mystery of Christ is interpreted in an orthodox manner or even that it has been fully accepted. I would venture to say that Christological orthodoxy is verified in Mariology (the case of the Ephesian *Theotokos!*) and ecclesiology, and subsequently also in the hermeneutics of Scripture, and it is in these fields that differences can arise to such an extent that it will be difficult to accept all stances as equally true. This, in turn, means that existing denominational theologies will translate into reflection on Scripture and result in a more or less adequate reading of the incarnational analogy. It is interesting how ecumenical (over)sensitivity can become insensitivity to real differences.

In the case of Scripture, the problem does indeed become more complicated – here I agree with Prothro. Is it to such an extent that analogy loses its *raison d’être* in determining the “orthodoxy” of hermeneutics? The researcher does not see a transition from Christology to Bibliology, but his view must be relativised by the simple observation of the relationship of the Incarnate Word to the Scriptures he used. Consider that Christ (God and man) expressed himself in the human speech, and in revealing his identity and mission he used inspired books. We can say that the words of the Bible therefore belong to the Word in which God spoke; without them, that speech would not exist, Christ could not be understood and accepted. We also know that in the Gospels only part of Christ’s speech belongs to the so-called *ipsissima verba*, and this in turn means that the

⁴⁹ Even an ecumenically minded theologian like Telford Work admits that some hermeneutical techniques can prove heretical – see T. Work, *Living and Active*, 8.

human speech of the inspired authors truly constitutes the Word of God inseparable from the Incarnate Word, since without it we cannot access the *vera et sincera de Jesu*.⁵⁰ I understand sensitivity to epithets hurled against Christians of other faiths, but such sensitivity does not, in my view, justify defending the views of all sides of the argument as equal. It is not possible to equate biblical fundamentalism with the Catholic position and regard them as equally valid. Statements of the Pontifical Biblical Commission or Benedict XVI are very firm in this matter.⁵¹ But this is not the only example proving that “heterodox” hermeneutics leads to wrong exegetical and therefore probably not only pastoral but also doctrinal conclusions. An example would be the Evangelical Pentecostal communities, among which one can even find communities that openly reject the Trinitarian doctrine (the so-called *Oneness Pentecostals*).⁵²

One would also have to question the view that analogy applied to the field of hermeneutics further complicates an already complex issue. Such an observation, even if it were true, does not in any way lead to the conclusion that analogy is of little use. Indeed, one might even expect that the complex reality of the encounter between the divine and the human must be matched by a correspondingly complex reflection on the principles of interpreting the witness of that encounter. A mystery is not explained by reducing or rationalizing it, but conversely by illuminating it with a greater mystery, the mystery of the Incarnate Christ. The intertwining of the divine and the human in the doctrine of inspiration and the nature of inspired writings will be, as it were, less “exemplary” than in the case of the Incarnate Word and will therefore require numerous additions. Paradoxically, it is easier to define the union of natures in the Person of Christ, even if, in this case, this can only be done by indirect means and protecting the mystery (cf. the four adverbs of contradiction in Chalcedonian definition: “unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably”⁵³).

⁵⁰ See Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Instruction Concerning the Historical Truth of the Gospels*.

⁵¹ See S. Zatwardnicki, *Księgi natchnione* [*The Inspired Books*], 172–180.

⁵² See A. Siemieniowski, *Pentekostalizacja chrześcijaństwa* [*The Pentecostalisation of Christianity*].

⁵³ *Council of Chalcedon 451*, 61; I.J. Davidson, “Chalcedon, Council of,” 92–93.

Exactly what Prothro accuses the incarnational analogy of doing could apply to the Christological definition, which also requires a complex investigation in the field of theology.

2.3 The hermeneutics of faith in science

Prothro expects too much from analogy and from the scholarly elaboration of hermeneutics. It is precisely this unreasonable expectation that causes him to reject analogy. It should be recalled that analogical cognition is an intermediate cognition between univocity and equivocity (closer even to the latter). This means that analogical predicatives will only make sense in certain respects. This apparent weakness of analogy is, however, its strength, because thanks to it analogy is a cognition faithful to reality, at the same time concrete and generalising, because it comprises real and widely seen relations tying different things together. The assumption here is that there is a similar relation between correlates in unknown facts as in those already known. Univocal cognition is an abstract and more accurate cognition, but at the same time it is less real, because it selects only certain features of things from the whole of reality and omits others.⁵⁴

Therefore, neither analogical reasoning can be reduced to univocal, nor should analogy be abandoned. If such a scholarly measure as Prothro seems to expect were applied to the exegesis of the Old Testament practised by the early Church, we would not be Christians today. Something else led the generation of the apostolic times in recognizing the Christ event. Ultimately, it is a matter of faith, because even if the hermeneutics of faith means that scholarly methods (including this historical-critical one) have to be used, this is always done at the service of faith.⁵⁵ The Pontifical Biblical Commission has recalled that Catholic exegesis must remain a theological discipline,

⁵⁴ See M.A. Krąpiec, “Analogia,” 5, 9, 10.

⁵⁵ Benedict XVI, guided by the “hermeneutics of faith” in *Jesus of Nazareth*, has always done so with a sense of “odpowiedzialności za rozum historyczny, z konieczności zawarty w samej tej wierze [responsibility for historical reason, necessarily contained in this faith itself]” – J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 382; Benedict XVI, “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI during the 14th General Congregation of the Synod of Bishops,” 34.

open to scholarly research carried out in accordance with its autonomy, without scholarly methods being an end in themselves, but placed at the service of the authentic content of the inspired books.⁵⁶

The adoption of the incarnation analogy solves this problem, because as Cipriano Vagaggini showed it always, in every intertwining of the two poles in the bipolar structure, grants supremacy to the divine (infinite) pole, which, however, does not imply a depreciation of what is human (finite).⁵⁷ The very pendulum movement criticised by Prothro has its importance in working out interpretative principles. It does not lead to a conclusive definition of orthodox Chalcedonian equilibrium, but it does make it possible to come to terms with the inevitable bipolarity of exegesis, and to value the sense of faith in the “orthodox” use of this pendulum movement.⁵⁸ In analogical inference, stressed Mieczysław Krąpiec, “ważniejszą rolę odgrywa intuicja badacza, niż jego dedukcyjny sposób myślenia [the intuition of the researcher plays a more important role than his deductive way of thinking].”⁵⁹ Only a believing exegete will be able to perceive the interrelations, as Farkasfalvy put it, of the two realms (faith and scholarly research).⁶⁰ Only faith will make it possible to link historical-critical and theological methodologies in the work of the exegete,⁶¹ although of course at each stage of work on the texts the relation between faith and reason will have different manifestation. It is not possible here to define precisely the process, which requires artistry in addition to craftsmanship.

⁵⁶ See Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Conclusion.

⁵⁷ See C. Vagaggini, *Teologia. Pluralizm teologiczny* [*Theology. Theological pluralism*], 124, 133–134.

⁵⁸ In one of its studies, the International Theological Commission pointed to the necessity of a rigorous establishment of facts using the historical method, and at the same time recalled that their consideration becomes *locus theologicus* only thanks to the *sensus fidei* – *From the Diakonia of Christ, Introduction*. On the role of the sense of the faith in exegesis – see S. Zatwardnicki, *Księgi natchnione*, 63–67, 103–108, 117–135.

⁵⁹ M.A. Krąpiec, “Analogia,” 10–11.

⁶⁰ See D. Farkasfalvy, “W poszukiwaniu nowej [In search of the new],” 286.

⁶¹ See A. Nichols, *Epiphany*, 53: “The exegesis of the Bible, the Word of God, is or should be theology (believing interpretation) from the beginning.”

One could as well cite examples testifying in favour of the analogy than against it. If Prothro focused on the contradictory uses of the analogy by various authors, he himself admitted that the analogy has a wide ecumenical genealogy and is used by theologians and exegetes of various denominations.⁶² One could provide a long list of those who have fruitfully elaborated analogy or at least referred to it in their research work: Karl Rahner, Joseph Ratzinger,⁶³ Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Denis Farkasfalvy, Aidan Nichols, Telford Work, to name but a few.⁶⁴ Perhaps this is not enough to announce a satisfactory “contemporary consensus,”⁶⁵ but the matter is so serious that one must not, in a single article, attempt to discard the usefulness of analogy using examples with little theological depth.

⁶² See J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 104.

⁶³ Rahner and Ratzinger drew attention to the incarnational character of the inspired books in a draft scheme on Revelation prepared in October/November 1962. According to the theologians’ view, the sacred writings “are to be regarded as truly divine and no less truly human, just as the Lord Jesus is at the same time truly Man, since the divine and human natures are in Him without confusion or separation. [...] In expounding the Scriptures it is most important to bear in mind that their words are at the same time truly the words of God and truly the words of certain men who in their own time, in their own language and in their own ways spoke and thought, so that their human language is, as it were, the flesh of the Word of God. From these presuppositions it is clear that the word of God in the sacred writings does not appear to us without a veil and in its clarity, without any mediation, but is covered by a veil, the two, however, always forming an unmixed and inseparable unity” – see J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego [On the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council]*, vol. 7, part 1, 178–179. According to Ratzinger, human language is like the body of the word of God – see R. Pokrywiński, “Pojęcie Objawienia Bożego [The Notion of Divine Revelation],” 99.

⁶⁴ See the latter’s opinion: “The widespread intuition among theologians of all Christian traditions that there is a connection between the two natures of Christ and the divine and human aspects of the Bible is itself a warrant for a Christological and thus Trinitarian account of Scripture” – T. Work, *Living and Active*, 16.

⁶⁵ In Gerald O’Collins’s guide for theologians interpreting Scripture, one of the principles (*The Principle of Contemporary Consensus*) is to consider those theses of scholars that have found wide acceptance (and to reject discredited or marginal theories) – see G. O’Collins, *Inspiration*, 175–176. The Australian theologian also referred to the incarnational analogy when he suggested a concept of inspiration analogous to the divine-human reality of the Incarnate Christ – see G. O’Collins, *Inspiration*, 125–126; G. O’Collins, *Revelation*, 163.

2.4 Union, but not hypostatic

The incarnational analogy has also been presented with black and white colours in the context of its relation to the unique event of the Incarnation. From the generally correct statements about the difference between *unio hypostatica* and the union of the divine and human moments in Scripture, one should not draw conclusions against the analogy. None of the more serious proponents of the use of analogy, after all, either seeks a hypostatic union or reduces inspiration to a relationship between God and an individual human being. They do not suggest some kind of “another Incarnation” or understanding the words of Scripture as if they were to be “another” Word of God unrelated to the Incarnate Christ; rather, one sees a relationship between one and the other, between the Word of God in the Bible and the Word of God in the flesh. Even Denis Farkasfalvy, the great advocate of analogy, warns firmly against drawing too far-fetched conclusions from the incarnational analogy:

The inspired author and the Holy Spirit who inspires him are not linked by anything even resembling the hypostatic union. There is here no personal union between „two authors”; their union is not that of two different natures in the identity of one person. There is here not only a distinction of two natures but also a distinction in the manner of causality, that is, the way in which the respective distinct persons exercise their authorial role. On the level of personal self-expression (an essential feature of literary authorship), they remain distinct; one infinite and the other finite, one omniscient and the other limited in knowledge, one omnipotent and the other limited in power.⁶⁶

As Telford Work has pointed out, the uniqueness of the Incarnation lies in the hypostatic union (with emphasis on the first word), and the incarnational analogy places emphasis on the non-hypostatic union (emphasis on union). Verbal union cannot be hypostatic union, and words are not real flesh. The presence of God in the human words of the Bible is real, but it is not a full personal presence. The difference

⁶⁶ D. Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration & Interpretation*, 219–220.

therefore lies in the type of presence (personal vs. non-personal). The analogy is to be seen not where it does not occur (a difference in the kind of union) but where it is actually perceived (the unity of the divine and the human).⁶⁷

Prothro criticises attempts to derive the inerrancy of the inspired texts from the sinlessness of the Incarnate Christ. The clumsy use of analogy by biblical fundamentalists does not justify an oversensitive reaction to the failed attempts at an apology of absolute inerrancy. Rather, it is precisely the fundamentalist position that needs to be criticized and conclusions about the truth of the Bible should be drawn from a proper analogy (full appreciation of the human character of the inspired books and therefore of the limitations of human authors). In fact, the question is not new – Ratzinger, when he was a peritus on the Council, called for taking into consideration the relation between truth and the unveiling of the mystery of God and for rejecting the absolute inerrancy of the inspired books. He rooted his argument in the “mystery of God’s mercy” and in the human character of the inspired books, which in turn stemmed from the mystery of the Incarnation:

The point of inspiration was not, of course, to avoid all inaccuracies in matters incidentally mentioned within the broad horizon of human utterances; its point was to bring the mystery of God to mankind in truly human words. The truly human character of Scripture, behind which the mystery of God’s mercy becomes all the more apparent, is only gradually revealed to us; Scripture unquestionably is and remains inerrant in

⁶⁷ T. Work, *Living and Active*, 95, 102, 104. Anthony Giambrone sees the Word written in Scripture as the verbal image of the Image, which is the Word Incarnate. According to the Dominican, the Gospels retain an analogy with Christ thanks to the congruence, the revelatory isomorphism of *littera i gesta* – see A. Giambrone, “Quest for the ‘Vera et Sincera de Jesu,’” 101. The inspired texts help encounter the Living God – see W.M. Wright IV, F. Martin, *Encountering the Living God*, 189: “God makes himself and his will known through the various realities of the divine economy, which the biblical text mediates. By coming into cognitive contact with these biblical realities, human beings come into cognitive contact with the God whose mysterious presence these realities bear.”

all that it really wants to say, but not necessarily in the words accompanying the utterances, which are not part of the actual utterance itself. Therefore, if historical reason is not to fall into a conflict without solution, the inerrancy of Scripture [...] must be limited to *vere enuntiata*.⁶⁸

The notion of inerrancy cannot have a mechanical sense, but rather it must be viewed precisely according to the incarnational paradigm – the Word’s incarnation involves God’s participation in what is human and therefore also historical.⁶⁹ Truth comes to man in the vagaries of history, it develops in history and is expressed in proportion, one might say, to the stage of revelation in which the inspired author finds himself. It must be sought not so much in a given moment of history as in the whole of the history of faith, in the belief that Christ and his Gospel are the key to this whole. And even more: since the fullness of truth, as Ratzinger believes, is present in an absolute way only in the Risen One, it must therefore be seen in the tension of faith which transcends history. This, in turn, is only possible in the entity on pilgrimage through time – the Church, in whose memory the unity of times exists.⁷⁰ In the context of hermeneutics, this means that the intention of a single text must be seen against the background of the intention of the whole Bible as interpreted by the Church.⁷¹

2.5 The Marian analogy and inspiration in the Church

Prothro’s conclusion as to the validity of recourse to the Marian analogy seems crushing: it would tend to “invite a fundamentally different conception of authorial inspiration than that portrayed by the texts themselves.”⁷² But, again, this conclusion is based on false premises and extreme illustrations of the “rigid” application of the

⁶⁸ J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego* [On the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council], vol. 7, part 1, 150–151. See DV 11.

⁶⁹ J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego*, vol. 7, part 1, 292–293.

⁷⁰ See J. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji* [Faith in Scripture and Tradition], 162–164; see also VD 42.

⁷¹ See G. Mansini, *Fundamental Theology*, 107–108.

⁷² J.B. Prothro, “Christological Analogy,” 111.

analogy. It would be better to say that the analogy should be applied carefully and flexibly, taking into account, to use the title of one publication on inspiration, “the testimony of the texts about themselves.”⁷³ Taken to the extreme Prothro’s reasoning, he would have the Bible read outside the hermeneutics of ecclesial faith; conversely, reflection on the ecclesial creeds legitimates a theological perspective on the question of the nature of Scripture and its hermeneutics. What is needed here is not an “either or” choice, but a kind of circularity of reflection (from Scripture to theological conclusions, from orthodox theology to an understanding of Scripture).

Prothro neglected the Marian analogy complementing the Christological analogy. In my opinion, he referred to views that are far from being sufficiently representative to be considered as an argument against the legitimacy of using the analogy. In particular, the complete lack of reference to the Exhortation *Verbum Domini* should earn a reprimand, since it is there that Pope Emeritus clearly articulates that such an analogy exists, except that it must be applied not to the relationship between Mary’s role and the participation of an individual inspired author, but to the relationship between the Virgin and the Church: “A key concept for understanding the sacred text as the word of God in human words is certainly that of inspiration. Here too we can suggest an analogy: as the word of God became flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, so sacred Scripture is born from the womb of the Church by the power of the same Spirit” (VD 19). This sets the matter in a very different perspective. The work of the Holy Spirit and the hermeneutics that arise from His activity are to be related primarily to the Church as the Body of Christ, and only secondarily to the hagiographer as a member of the community of believers. Ratzinger wrote: “Although the authors of the New Testament were inspired as individuals, they only had the Spirit of Christ as members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. The author was thus, as it were, the Church in her chosen members [...]”⁷⁴ This issue obviously requires

⁷³ See M. Wróbel, S. Szymik, K. Napora (eds.), *Natchnienie Pisma Świętego [The Inspiration of Scripture]*.

⁷⁴ J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego*, vol. 7, part 1, 180–181.

in-depth research, but it is already possible to put forward the thesis that the gift of inspiration is one of the gifts in the Body of Christ and must not be separated from the holistic and comprehensive work of the Spirit as the “soul of the Church.” Let us risk the following theological assertion: Mary’s *fiat* corresponds to the *fiat* of the Ecclesia, not (or: not in the first place) to that of the hagiographer.

The Bavarian theologian did not hesitate to see the theandric-kenotic character of all the inspired writings, including the books of the Old Testament, precisely in the horizon of the Incarnation. In his view, the Incarnation, which takes place at the climax of history, encompasses the whole of God’s earlier dialogue with men anticipating the coming of the Son of God. For God’s speaking in a human way from the beginning was directed towards the Incarnation. Therefore, Ratzinger concluded, the human authors of Scripture are “prefiguration of the figure of Christ” and belong “to the future Body of Christ and only in this way are they his voice [...] The sacred authors belong to the future Body of Christ, with them the Incarnation begins, the Logos becomes flesh.” Scripture can only be the Word of God in mediation: “God speaks in a human way, and this kenosis of God is not only realized at the moment of the incarnation of the Logos”, therefore “the Church is in a certain sense, secondarily, the co-author of Scripture, because God has indeed included being human in his speech act, which is a theandric act, a divine-human act.”⁷⁵ Hence, to identify in Scripture the Word of God while excluding “a very real human and at the same time Christological and ecclesiological mediation” should be regarded as Monophysitism.⁷⁶

There remains another weakness of the Marian analogy pointed out by Prothro. It concerns the incompatibility of divine intervention (through the mediation of an angel) in the life of the Virgin of Nazareth with the absence of such spectacular “incursions” of God into the lives of hagiographers resulting in a vocation to write. Rather, their role as inspired authors seems to fit into a more general vocation and to stem from the conviction that they have important religious truths to speak. But should not this weakness of the analogy be considered

⁷⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji*, 627.

⁷⁶ See J. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji*, 628.

its strength when the analogy is interpreted precisely in the ecclesial horizon proposed by Ratzinger? *Fiat* can be expressed not only at the moment of a particular “annunciation”, but by simply becoming part of the life of the community of believers and drawing on the deposit entrusted to it and on the divine revelation constantly communicated in it. Without abandoning the Marian analogy, God’s intervention can therefore be located elsewhere, in the very Church to which the Word of God has entrusted himself completely (cf. VD 17), and here to seek the holiness of the Word of God analogous to the Holy One conceived in the womb of the Woman of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35).

The awareness that a given text was written under inspiration can, as it were, be spread throughout the entire Body of Christ, like the other gifts of the Glorified One (cf. Eph 4:7–16), and lies not only or even primarily with the hagiographer, but with the entire community which recognized the texts as inspired (this does not mean, of course, equating inspiration with canonization). On the other hand, the very action of the Spirit is not limited to a single person, but encompasses all those involved in the genesis of the sacred writings.⁷⁷

Even if one were to stick to the annunciation-inspiration analogy given to the hagiographer, does it really necessarily follow that the hagiographers are aware that they are writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? After all, the very question of the Virgin Mary’s consciousness could be the subject of research that would take into account the identity, but also the difference, between the “Mary of history” and the “Mary of faith.”⁷⁸ Assuming, however, the full

⁷⁷ Gerald O’Collins speaks of impulses, not an impulse, coming from the Holy Spirit and involving a long process of creating inspired writings. According to the theologian, the charism of inspiration must have guided all those who contributed to the creation of the sacred writings (which is what the so-called social theories of inspiration refer to) – see *Inspiration*, 123–124; *Revelation*, 161–162. It seems to me, however, that in this way the author dilutes the gift of inspiration by reducing it to the providential action of the Holy Spirit over the lives of many people.

⁷⁸ The Pontifical Biblical Commission calls for a “comprehensive Christology” which unites Christologies “from below” (which search for the “Jesus of history” in a historical-critical way) and Christologies “from above” (which take as their starting point the “Christ of faith”). Both form a whole, but not at the cost of confusing the way the historical Jesus appeared and was understood with the way His Person and life after the Resurrection were understood, when Christ was construed

consciousness of Mary of Nazareth – the full consciousness of the inspired authors does not necessarily follow from the analogy. The Catholic must remember the special vocation of the Immaculately Conceived and full of grace (cf. Lk 1:28) and see the hagiographers as analogous to her also on the basis of “dissimilar similarity”⁷⁹ (which is characteristic of any analogy⁸⁰). Precisely in this “dissimilarity” may lie the solution to the question which so troubles contemporaries: to what extent can the testimony of the hagiographers be an “immaculate” reflection of Divine Revelation, so that in the case of Scripture we would be dealing with the “pure” Word of God in every single biblical word? And to what extent it would be necessary, as Ratzinger suggested, to seek biblical truth in the whole Bible and in a movement of faith that transcends history?

2.6 Prothro’s proposal as one of the reinterpretations of analogy

When Prothro notes that his alternative approach avoids “pressing” some aspects inherent in Christology into Bibliology, one might respond that a sober and reflective treatment of the analogy would equally well dismiss such a danger. It is significant that, while eschewing the incarnational analogy, the author himself refers to incarnational language when he writes, for example, of transcendent truth and divine revelation “incarnated” in pre-linguistic and linguistic symbols. Ironically, Prothro’s proposal could just as well be derived from the analogy he has criticised. If one were to draw

in the Holy Spirit. It would thus be a matter of acknowledging both the limitations of the human nature of “Jesus of Nazareth” and the confession of the “Christ of faith” proclaimed by the Church – see “Bibbia e Cristologia”, nos. 1.1.11; 1.1.11.1; 1.1.11.2 (points a and b); 1.2.11; J.A. Fitzmyer, “Biblical Commission,” 473–475. Something similar could also be applied to the earthly “Mary of history” and the assumed “Mary of faith.” We know that Luke reworked the historical content theologically, and that his account of Jesus’ childhood was marked by Christology – see P. Łabuda, “Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI”, 34.

⁷⁹ Work writes about “identity-in-contrast” – see *Living and Active*, 11.

⁸⁰ We speak of analogy when things are fundamentally different and similar only in some aspects (“dissimilar similarity”) – see M. Krąpiec, “Analogia,” 1.

definitive conclusions from the submitted revision, then it would doom the analogy in its entirety; if, on the other hand, one reads it less radically, as the originator seems to suggest, then the revision comes so close to a deeper understanding of the analogy that it could easily constitute one interpretation of it.

Indeed, what is meant to be an alternative coincides with Work's reflection, on which the author draws, and Ratzinger's views derived precisely from the mystery of the Incarnation. To illustrate:

Of course, Scripture is the word of God, but it is not, as it were, a naked word: it is a mediated word. God speaks in a human way and this kenosis of God is not only realised at the moment of the incarnation of the Logos. Becoming human in order to speak to man begins at the moment of the first covenant, it begins at the moment of the opening of the dialogue between God and man – it begins at the moment of man's creation. This means that the "inspired" man is not a purely external instrument of God's speaking but participates in this act of speaking with his whole existence.⁸¹

This broad view of the mystery of the Incarnation is worth emphasising – it is not limited to the birth of Christ who, if he is to be truly human, must enter into human history as it has been prepared from the beginning.⁸² Benedict XVI recalled that the same Spirit who acted in the Incarnation, guided Jesus and inspires the Church, also spoke through the prophets and inspired the authors of the sacred writings (cf. VD 15). In this way, the Holy Spirit unites everything in a single economy of salvation, of which the Incarnation is the centre.⁸³

⁸¹ J. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji [Faith in Scripture and Tradition]*, 627.

⁸² The full meaning of the Bible can only be read if one grasps sacred history in all its continuity – see L. Bouyer, *Wprowadzenie do życia duchowego [Introduction to the Spiritual Life]*, 50.

⁸³ See D. Farkasfalvy, *Theology of the Christian Bible*, 43–44. The incarnational algorithm means the whole history of salvation – see G.L. Müller, *Dogmatyka katolicka [Catholic Dogmatics]*, 92–93.

Prothro, by locating Scripture and the Incarnation within the higher category of God's "making himself available" in a kenotic manner – willingly or unwillingly, he recognizes this incarnational economy as the analogical perfection. Consequently, the Incarnate Word had to be regarded as the primary analogue in the light of which all other manifestations of the incarnational analogy would have to be considered. Everything that prepared the coming of Christ and everything that follows derives its power from this, because ultimately all of history is about one divine plan reaching from creation to the ultimate fulfilment of all things in Christ.⁸⁴ The mystery of God's greatest approach to man sheds light on the whole economy of salvation and revelation, within which Prothro also locates Scripture (it would be a minor analogue). Prothro's escape proves unsuccessful, being nothing more than an attempt to look from a different perspective at the same thing he criticises.

Recapitulation and perspectives

The author of the article *The Christological Analogy and Theological Interpretation* emphasizes that "[A]nalogies are only good for what they are good for. The analogy comparing the biblical text to the incarnate Christ is useful in emphasizing the dual provenance of Scripture and that this duality is non-competitive."⁸⁵ It is difficult to say whether Prothro is only against inferring too far-reaching conclusions from Christology to Bibliology (this is what he states explicitly), or whether his criticism is levelled at the possibility of using analogy at all (which could be indicated by emphasising the difference between the hypostatic union and the union of the poles of the divine and human in Scripture, and by quoting other voices critical of analogy). The researcher believes that analogy does not explain the question of the origin of the inspired texts and does not answer how the divine and the human are related in Scripture. All the more so, in his view, the positive application of analogy in hermeneutics does not occur. It would only be a general signpost indicating the direction

⁸⁴ See M. Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine*, 232–233.

⁸⁵ J.B. Prothro, "Christological Analogy," 118.

to be taken in understanding the nature of Scripture and working out the resulting hermeneutical principles.⁸⁶ However, Prothro's escape from the incarnational analogy proved unsuccessful, indeed it could be considered as one interpretation of analogy.

Instead, one must admit that Prothro had a point claiming that the translation of Christology into Bibliology requires numerous additions, and any attempt to draw conclusions from the analogy must avoid suggesting "another Incarnation." One must agree with the author about the limited application of the incarnational analogy (each analogy has its limitations), but not to draw such radical conclusions as Prothro does. Can there be an analogy understood so broadly that it would only be a hedge of "both-and," without any hermeneutical conclusions to be drawn? Wouldn't exegetical "heresies" have at least the same function as Christological heresies? Certainly, they can at least constitute a kind of *felix culpa*,⁸⁷ since they indicate what errors should be avoided in the orthodox interpretation of the inspired books. The Catholic theologian cannot be indifferent to the statements of the Church's Magisterium concerning the incarnational analogy; ecumenical sensitivity cannot necessitate giving up on determining the "orthodoxy" of hermeneutical principles. A closer look would be required to evaluate Prothro's claim that what is unorthodox in Christology may not be heresy in exegesis at all.

The theologian draws attention to the "rigidity" of the analogy, which would conceptualize at its starting point the vision of biblical inspiration that would not correspond to, or perhaps even contradict, the biblical testimonies. The misunderstanding here is that it is not so much that the analogy itself is "rigid", but that it is the theologian or exegete who may use it in this manner. Properly understood, analogy demands that both the "similarity" and the "dissimilarity" that mark every analogy be taken seriously. It follows from the "dissimilar similarity" of the analogy that it is possible to use it incorrectly,

⁸⁶ See in this context Farkasfalvy's opinion: "The discovery of parallelism between the Incarnation and biblical inspiration is an important feature that must pervade every kind of discussion of the matter" – D. Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration & Interpretation*, 219.

⁸⁷ See B. Ferdek, "Błąd teologiczny a ekumenizm [Theological error and ecumenism]," 166–167.

precisely by “pressing” Christology into Bibliology (excessive emphasis on similarity), or to discard it (as a result of choosing dissimilarity) at the risk of thereby losing the “boundary stones” of orthodoxy. However, it can be applied with care, examining where similarity is perceived and where dissimilarity appears.

In view of this, we should postulate the use of analogy on the principle of the so-called hermeneutic circle.⁸⁸ It allows for an initial understanding, which must then be verified (modified, and perhaps in some situations challenged) in contact with the inspired text and the reality to which it testifies and in which it was created. It is necessary to oscillate (pendulum movement) from the incarnational analogy’s conception of Scripture and inspiration to the diversity of sacred writings (read with the use of the historical-critical method), and then to bring this biblical richness back to a unifying vision, which will thus be reinterpreted.

At each stage the Scripture is interpreted, the balance between faith and reason, or, more precisely, theological principles and scholarly methods will probably be different. But at none of them (the incarnational analogy!) can it be broken. This is why, for example, the use of a historical-critical method separated from faith must be excluded from the “orthodox” exegesis, since it necessarily leads to conclusions that are not neutral but contrary to faith. Naturally, analogy alone cannot be the only point of departure or arrival. Analogy must not be seen, which Prothro does not mention at all, in isolation from the so-called great principles of interpretation; it is only together with them it can show its power. Christology, in turn, must be linked to pneumatology, and thus the incarnational analogy from which the “Christology” of the Bible is derived must be complemented by the “pneumatology” of the Bible.

One of the authors referred to by Prothro wrote that “[A] properly drawn Analogy of the Word neither incarnates nor ignores the Holy Spirit. It identifies and honors the equivocations that distinguish analogy from identity.”⁸⁹ Prothro’s error lies precisely in the fact that he rejects analogy on the grounds that it is not identity. Consequently,

⁸⁸ See W.G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 17–18.

⁸⁹ See T. Work, *Living and Active*, 32.

he proposes an alternative vision of considering the Incarnation and the Bible as two different ways of realising the one divine economy of God graciously descending to humanity. But what has the scholar actually gained in this unsuccessful attempt to escape from analogy towards such a separation that the unity of God's action is not easily perceived? Many similar conclusions could have been reached if the analogy had been considered in a Catholic way and in harmony with the statements of the Magisterium. The analogy does not entail the adoption of a vision of "two Incarnations" but results precisely from the interrelation of Scripture and the Incarnation within the one divine plan for which *the Logos Incarnatus* is the centre. Prothro's alleged alternative results from not thinking deeply enough about this incarnational algorithm, that is the whole of salvation history. It is rooted in none other than the transcendence of Christ (God and man) in relation to all people and all history.⁹⁰

Numerous issues signalled in Prothro's article call for further research. First of all, the bond of the Incarnate Son with the Word of God expressed in human words. How do the words of the hagiographers unite with the Word of God if we are not dealing with a hypostatic union in this case? The inerrancy or truth of the Bible, if it is to be derived from analogy, is only possible on the assumption of an "dissimilar similarity" and of numerous clarifications. It is necessary to continue the reflection in the direction indicated by Joseph Ratzinger (biblical truth available only if one takes into account canonical exegesis and the living Tradition of the Church and considers it within the framework of the mystery of the Incarnation), and to expand it with the theme of the soteriological meaning of Scripture (the paths paved here by Work). Biblical truth must not be taken out of the context of the kenotic nature of God approaching men. The following question arises here: how is it possible to preserve the holiness and infallibility of the Word of God if it is mediated by the word of non-immaculately conceived human beings? The Marian analogy, which has been hitherto neglected, awaits a more serious study, as expected by Benedict XVI (DV 27). The link between the

⁹⁰ This was pointed out by the International Theological Commission – see *Select Questions of Christology*, no. II, 5.

role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Mother of God and the Church (and only secondarily of the hagiographer as a member of the Body of Christ) will probably prove crucial here. I would even posit that the ecclesiology of inspiration may prove fundamental to the doctrine of inspiration and the hermeneutics of the inspired books.

Last but not least, the very concept of analogy and the possibility of its use by theologians would need to be reworked; the philosophical concept of analogy is insufficiently capacious and should be transformed by theological reflection on Revelation, including the relationship of the Incarnate Christ with Scripture. By no means should analogical language be abandoned: “realizing its [everyday and philosophical language’s – SZ] analogical character and the nature of the very analogy used in language is the only way to make that language more precise, not to replace analogical names with univocal ones.”⁹¹ “Orthodox” exegesis cannot be strictly defined, and the exegete’s sense of faith will play no small part in interpreting the Bible.

Analogia inkarnacyjna, przed którą trudno uciec. Polemika z Jamesem Prothro

Abstrakt: W literaturze teologicznej znaleźć można liczne odwołania do analogii między Wcieleniem Słowa a wyrażeniem słów Bożych w ludzkim języku. W „The Christological Analogy and Theological Interpretation” James Prothro wskazuje, że analogia inkarnacyjna jest przydatna jedynie w podkreślaniu podwójnej proveniencji Pisma (Boskie i ludzkie autorstwo). Nie sprawdza się jednak w sytuacji, gdy z analogii wywodzi się koncepcję natchnienia albo próbuje na jej podstawie wyprowadzić wnioski dotyczące interpretacji ksiąg natchnionych. Według teologa tekst i rzeczywiste Wcielenie są dwoma różnymi przykładami boskiego ujawnienia się ludziom, a między chrystologią i teologią Pisma nie ma bezpośredniego przejścia. Niniejszy artykuł jest polemiką z tezami Prothro, które zostały poddane krytyce. Ucieczka teologa przed analogią inkarnacyjną okazała się nieudana. Ograniczenia analogii nie przekreślają możliwości jej użycia. Należy tylko pamiętać o „niepodobnym podobieństwie” charakteryzującym każdą analogię. W zakończeniu wskazano kierunki dalszych badań.

Słowa kluczowe: James Prothro, analogia inkarnacyjna, analogia Maryjna, hermeneutyka biblijna, natchnienie biblijne, chrystologia a bibliologia

⁹¹ M.A. Krąpiec, “Analogia,” 9.

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