

§ ix. The last objection, which at first glance seems to be the greatest, is this:

Objection: If the Scripture is not the adequate, principal, and only rule, then it would follow that the Scripture is not complete and the canon is not closed. If people are now led and ruled directly by the Spirit, they may add new scriptures of equal authority to the old. But everyone that adds is cursed; what assurance do we have to prevent everyone from bringing in a new Gospel according to his own wishes?

The dangerous consequences insinuated in this objection were fully answered in the latter part of the thesis, and in what was said a little before this, making a free offer to disclaim all pretended revelations contrary to the Scriptures.

Objection: If it is argued that it is not enough for us to deny these consequences which naturally follow from our doctrines of direct revelation and denying that the Scripture is the only rule:

I answer that we have proved both these doctrines to be true and necessary, according to the Scriptures themselves; and therefore to attach evil consequences to these doctrines (consequences which we have proved do not follow) does not accuse us, but rather accuses Christ and his apostles who preached these doctrines.

Secondly, we have shut the door upon all such consequences* in our clear position: That the Scriptures give a full and ample testimony to all the principal doctrines of the Christian faith. We firmly believe that no other gospel or doctrine should be preached, except the one which was

preached by the apostles; we freely subscribe to that saying, “let the man be accursed who preaches any other gospel than that which has already been preached by the apostles, and according to the Scriptures.”¹

So we distinguish between a revelation of a new gospel and new doctrines, and a new revelation of the good doctrines and Gospel of old. We advocate the latter, but we utterly deny the former. We firmly believe that “no one can lay any foundation other than the one which is laid already.”² We have already proved that this new revelation of the old is necessary, and this distinction sufficiently guards us against the danger which the objection insinuates.

As for the Scriptures being a *closed or complete* canon*, I see no necessity of believing it. If these people who believe that the Scriptures are the only rule will be consistent with their own doctrine, they must agree with me. It is simply impossible to prove the canon by using the Scriptures. The canon cannot be found in any book of the Scriptures, saying that these books, and only these and no other, are canonical; everyone is forced to acknowledge this. How can these people evade this argument?

That which cannot be proved by Scripture is not a necessary article of faith.

But the canon of the Scripture, which means that there are precisely this number of books, neither more nor less, cannot be proved by Scripture:

Therefore, the canon is not a necessary article of faith.

Objection: If they allege that admitting any other books which might now be written by the same Spirit might imply the admission of new doctrines:

I deny that consequence. The principal or fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion are contained in a tenth

¹ Galatians 1:8-9 RB

² 1 Corinthians 3:11

part³ of the Scripture, but it does not logically follow that the rest is irrelevant or useless. If it pleased God to give us any of those books mentioned in Scripture which have been lost by the damage of time, such as the Prophecy of Enoch, the Book of Nathan, etc., or the Third Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians — I see no reason why we might not receive them and place them with the rest. What displeases me is that people first affirm that Scripture is the only principal rule, and yet they make a great article of faith about something which the Scripture can give no light on.

For instance: how can a Protestant prove by Scripture that the Epistle of James ought to be received, to people who deny that it is authentic?

If the Protestant says, because James does not contradict the rest of Scripture (besides the fact that there is no mention of it in any of the rest), perhaps these people think it contradicts Paul in relation to faith and works. But if one accepts that reasoning, it could follow that every writer that does not contradict the Scripture should be put into the canon. In this way our adversaries fall into a greater absurdity than the one they accuse us of; each one would consider the writings of their own sect to be equal to the Scriptures. I suppose that they think that their own confession of faith does not contradict the Scriptures: does that mean that it should be included in the Bible? And yet it seems impossible, according to their principles, to come up with any better argument to prove that the Epistle of James is authentic. Therefore there is an unavoidable necessity to choose either: (a) We know it by the same Spirit according to which it was written; or else (b) to go back to the church of Rome and say, We know by tradition that the church has declared that it is canonical, and the church is infallible. Let

³ The Latin text adds, *ne dicam centesima*, “not to mention, hundreth.”

them find a middle way if they can. Out of this objection we shall offer an unanswerable argument *ad hominem*:⁴

If a rule cannot convince me concerning an article of faith that must be believed, that rule is not the primary, adequate, only rule of faith, etc.

But the Scripture cannot convince me in this way;
Therefore, etc.

I prove the assumption in this way:

That which cannot convince me concerning the canon of the Scripture, that is, that only these books are to be admitted and the Apocrypha are to be excluded, cannot convince me concerning an article of faith which must be believed.⁵

Therefore, etc.

Objection: Finally, concerning these words (Revelation 22:18), “if any man adds to these things, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book,”

I ask that they show me how it relates to anything other than to that particular prophecy. It does not say, “now the canon of the Scriptures is filled up; no one is allowed to write more based on that same* Spirit.” Does not everyone admit that there have been prophecies and true prophets since then? The Papists do not deny it. Is it not true that the Protestants affirm that John Huss prophesied about the Reformation? Was he therefore cursed? Was what he did evil? I could give many other examples which they themselves admit to.

Moreover, basically the same thing was commanded long before (Proverbs 30:6): “Do not add to his words, lest he

⁴ The modern usage of *ad hominem* refers to an attack on the character of the person making the argument. However in the seventeenth century *ad hominem* refers to an argument calculated to appeal to the individual addressed rather than to impartial reason.

⁵ The English text is unclear; the last part of this sentence is based on the Latin text: *de articulo fidei creditu necessario me certum facer non potest.*

might reprove you, and you would be found to be a liar.” Yet how many books of the prophets were written after that? The same was said by Moses (Deuteronomy 4:2), “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor shall you remove anything from it.” So even if we extended the saying of Revelation beyond the particular prophecy of that book, it cannot be interpreted to mean anything except a new gospel or new doctrines; or else it was restraining man’s spirit so that he would not mix his human words with the divine. This verse cannot apply to a new revelation of the old gospel, as we have said before.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition III § ix (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 81-84 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 50-53

.