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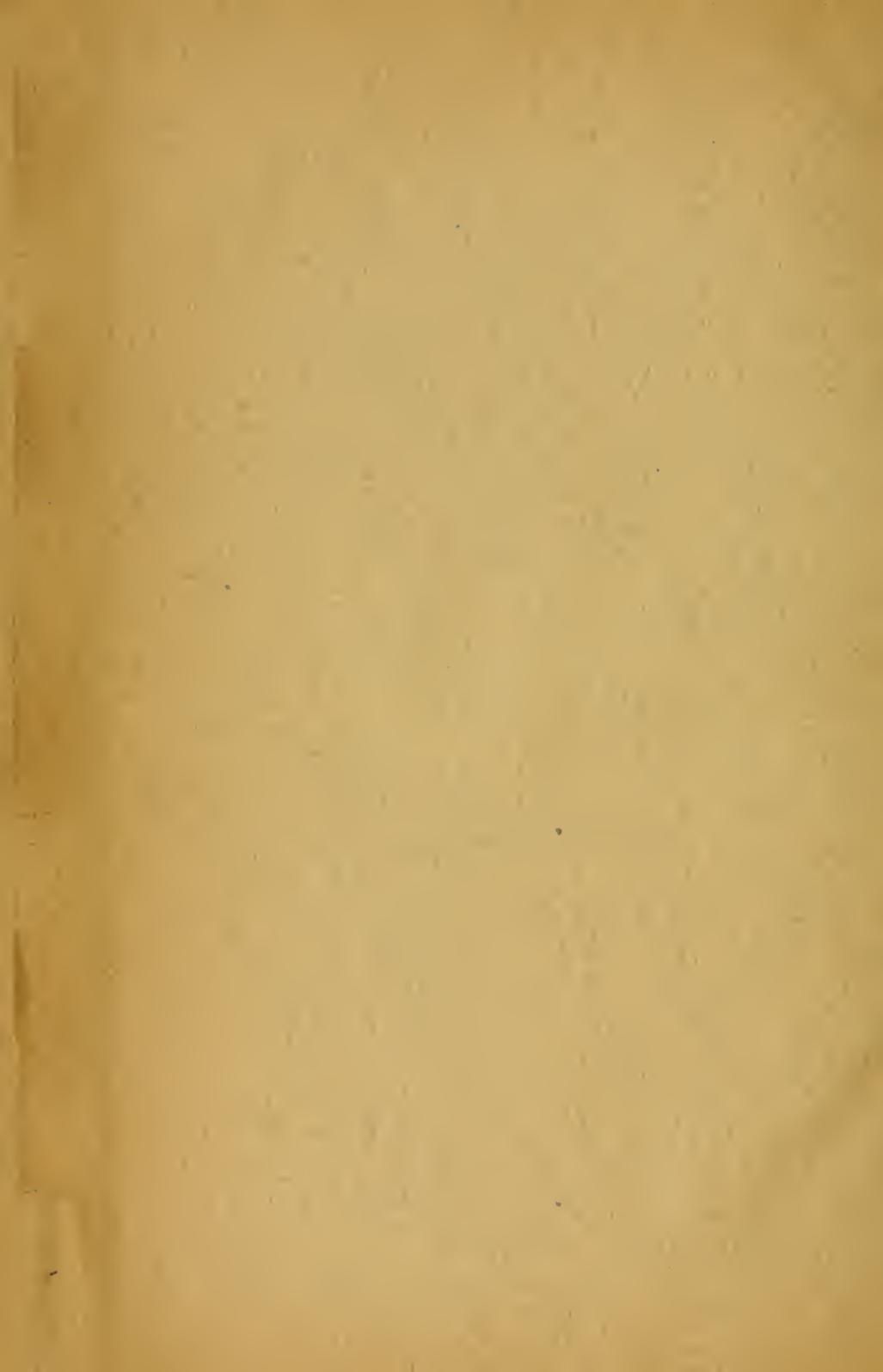
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## II. A RECENTLY PROPOSED TEST OF CANONICITY.<sup>1</sup>

THE work of the occupant of the chair of Biblical Literature is in some respects an exceedingly humble one. It is that of "a hewer of wood and drawer of water" for the chair of theology. But its importance is none the less on that account, for even the "queen of the sciences" owes her crown, her sceptre, and her throne, to this "power behind the throne." For it deals with the questions that lie at the foundation, as it were, of our system of church government, at the foundation of our system of doctrine; yes, at the very foundation of the Christian religion. That this is not the language of exaggeration is clear from the fact that "the Bible," according to the famous saying of Chillingworth, "is the religion of Protestants," and Biblical Literature deals directly with the Bible. It examines its claims to be a revelation from God; fixes the elements of which it is composed; traces the history of its human origin, its preservation and its circulation; and, to pass by other points, undertakes to determine the meaning of its contents. The occupant of this chair thus, as it were, searches out, quarries and chisels into shape the stones out of which the temple of the Christian system is erected.

Hence the vast inherent responsibility attaching to the duties of this department. But if the inherent responsibilities are themselves great, they are greatly enhanced by the present trend of theological discussion. One needs scarcely to be reminded that the Bible itself, rather than this or that particular biblical doctrine, or system of doctrine, is the centre around which the theological thought of the day revolves. We have seen the claims of almost every book of Scripture challenged, and its historic origin questioned to a greater or less extent. Not only have we seen the canonical authority of individual books discussed, but we have

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<sup>1</sup> Inaugural address by W. M. McPheeters, D. D., on the occasion of his installation as Professor of Biblical Literature in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S. C., May, 1890.

witnessed the reopening of such questions as these: What are the essential elements of canonicity? And again, What is the ultimate test of canonicity?

The last of these questions is so fundamental in its character, of so great intrinsic importance, and withal one rendered so prominent by recent discussion, that I hope it may furnish an appropriate and interesting theme for this occasion.

The theme, therefore, to which, without further delay, I invite attention is: A RECENTLY PROPOSED TEST OF CANONICITY.

Before proceeding to discuss it, I may be permitted to recall a few definitions which are familiar to many of you, but may be serviceable to some others. First, the term "canon" meant originally a "reed." By an easy transition it came to mean a "measuring-rod;" by another, equally easy, it came to mean a "rule." Finally, it was to be applied to those writings which God has given to be a rule of faith and life to his people. In this sense it will be used in the following discussion. Canon, then, as thus defined, is synonymous with the more familiar term, Scripture. To say, therefore, that a book is entitled to a place in the canon is equivalent to saying that it is entitled to a place in Scripture.

Closely connected with the term canon are two others, which, as they will occur frequently, may as well be defined here. They are *canonicity* and *canonical*. By the former, or canonicity, is meant that quality or characteristic of a writing which invests it with authority as a rule of faith and life. And by canonical, the adjective, is meant the possession of canonicity, or of a right to a place in the canon.

It will be well, further, at this point to fix attention upon the precise nature of the question to be considered. The question, then, is not, what are the *elements* of canonicity? but, what are the *evidences* that a writing claiming to be canonical does indeed possess that quality or those qualities which constitute it a rule of faith and life? We do not inquire at present what quality it is that invests a writing with this peculiar dignity and supreme authority, but how can the claims of a writing to the possession of this quality be tested? To discuss the question, what are the

essential elements of canonicity? would consume time needlessly, and would divert attention from the single issue now to be considered. It is admitted, then, at least so far as the present argument is concerned, that inspiration is the essential element of canonicity. It is admitted that it is the fact that a writing is inspired that constitutes it a rule of faith and life. And the simple issue before us is, How can we assure ourselves that a given writing claiming canonical authority is inspired? What are the evidences of the inspiration of a book? Or, to state the case in concrete form, upon what grounds do we admit the inspiration of *Ecclesiastes*, and deny the inspiration of *Ecclesiasticus*? I should  
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Numerous answers have been returned to this question. They may all, however, for present purposes, be reduced to three.

The first is that of the Romish church. It has been stated thus by Dr. Lynch, a former Roman Catholic bishop of Charleston: "God has ordained that each Christian shall learn what books are inspired from a body of individuals, to whom, in their collective capacity, he has given authority to make an unerring decision on that point." Stated in different terms his answer comes to this: The Christian is obliged to recognize the canonical authority of a certain writing because the (Romish) church says it is inspired. According to this view, then, the possession of *proper ecclesiastical sanction* is the ultimate test of canonicity. The books which have received such sanction are thereby invested with canonical authority. And to prove, in reference to any book, that it has received the official sanction of the (Romish) church is to establish its canonicity. This, however, only pushes our question one step further back. For we instinctively inquire: How does the church know that a given writing is inspired? The answer returned to this query is that, as God has given her "authority to make an unerring decision on the point," so he likewise gives her that illumination and special guidance of his Spirit that enables her to render such a decision. In a word, the answer virtually given is: "The church is inspired." Now, a pertinacious Protestant would be likely to press his inquiry by asking, "How may I know that the church is inspired? It cannot be because the Bible says so, for on this theory I have none until she gives it to me, and I cannot receive it from

her unless assured that she is herself inspired. How, then, may I know that such is the case?" But as it is not my purpose to discuss Rome's test of canonicity, I will dismiss it with the single remark, that she has always found it more convenient to gag than to answer those who have called in question her baseless and blasphemous pretensions.

The next answer that we may profitably notice is that of a long line of Protestant apologists and theologians. I cannot do better than to give it in the very words of one among the most illustrious of them all. I refer to the sainted and gifted Thornwell. He says:

"It is a favorite scheme of the papists to represent the settling of the canon as a work of gigantic toil and formidable mystery. It evidently, however, reduces itself to a simple question of fact: What books were written by men whose claims to inspiration were either directly or remotely established by miracles? It is a question, therefore, of no more difficulty than the authenticity of the sacred books. To illustrate the matter in the case of the New Testament: the churches that received the Epistles from Paul could have had no doubt of their canonical authority, because they knew that the apostle was supernaturally inspired as a teacher of the faith. He produced in abundance the signs of an apostle. So also the writings of the other apostles would be recognized by their contemporary brethren as the word of the Lord. The books actually written by the apostles, or approved by their sanction, would be known by living witnesses to the fact. The historical proofs of this fact—that is, the testimony of credible witnesses—would be sufficient in all future time to attest the inspiration of any given work. If a man, for example, in the third century is doubtful of the Epistle to the Romans, all that is necessary to settle his mind is to convince him that Paul actually wrote it. This being done, its inspiration follows as a matter of course."

Such is Dr. Thornwell's admirably clear and strong statement of the case from the ordinary standpoint of Protestants. Similar language might be cited, were it necessary, from the writings of Paley and Cosin, the Alexanders and the Hodges.

It is not my purpose now to show the correctness of this answer. Let it suffice to emphasize the following points: First, according to this view the questions of origin and canonicity are inseparable. To prove the canonical authority of a writing we must be able to trace it to men "whose claims to inspiration were either directly or remotely established by miracles." And conversely, to trace a writing to such a source is to prove its canonicity. So that the ultimate test of canonicity, according to this

view, is not ecclesiastical sanction, but apostolic origin or sanction. Secondly, it is important to note that it follows, from what has been said, that the question of the canonicity of a writing is purely a historical question, to be settled by historical evidence. Third, it is fair to say by way of caution, that those who hold this view do not ignore the evidences of inspiration furnished by the contents of a writing, nor do they ignore the testimony which the Holy Spirit bears in the hearts of believers to the infallible truth and divine authority of Scripture. On the contrary, they regard both of these as important independent lines of corroborative testimony, calculated greatly to confirm the conviction produced by the historical evidence, and in connection with it to beget a "full persuasion" of the canonical authority of a writing. But for valid reasons, as might be shown did time permit, they decline to find, either in the contents of a writing or in any subjective impressions in reference to it, the ultimate test of its canonicity. And, not to dwell too long upon this theory, it is proper to observe, in the fourth place, the contrast between this view and that of Rome. The two have recently been declared to be identical; but in reality they are wide apart as the poles. There is a sense in which both may be said to appeal to the testimony of the church, though this language, which is ambiguous and misleading, should be avoided. But how different is the nature of the appeal in the two cases. Romanists appeal to the church in her organized and official capacity. Protestants appeal to the individuals who compose the church, and appeal to them, not for their official *sanction*, but for *information* upon a simple question of fact. Romanists appeal to the church as a judge whose decision is final. Protestants appeal to her members as credible witnesses. Romanists appeal to her for an authoritative decision upon a question which they are unable or indisposed to examine for themselves. Protestants appeal to her members for evidence, which they weigh as they would any other evidence. According to the Romish view, the church collects the evidence and passes upon it, and declares her judgment in the premises, from which judgment there is no appeal. According to the Protestant view, the persons who compose the church may collect the testimony and perpetuate it from

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generation to generation, but each individual may and should pass upon it for himself. To fail to see this distinction does not speak well for one's mental acumen. To deny its existence argues "invincible ignorance."

There is a third answer to the question, What is the ultimate test of canonicity? to the consideration of which the remainder of this paper will be devoted. The reasons for singling out this third answer for special examination are several. First, There is at present an effort being made in high quarters to give it wide-spread currency. Second, It is not only intrinsically false, but is based upon principles which, if admitted, must be fatal to the Christian system. It looks like an attempt to derationalize religion in order to make room for rationalism. It gilds the spire of the Christian temple with a false glory, to dazzle the eyes, and to distract the attention from the fact that it is busy sapping its foundations. Third, This theory, though false, is specious. It seeks to adorn itself with a show of humility, which is exceedingly fascinating. Then, too, it looks like reverence personified. Finally: It is, let us not say boastful and arrogant, but lofty in its claims. Probably it would be as well just here to state what these claims are.

It claims, then, to represent the doctrine of the Reformers and Puritans. It claims the sanction of the Westminster Confession. It claims to be the doctrine of many of the most gifted and godly modern scholars, such as Neander, Tholuck, Müller and Dorner. It claims to furnish the only sure basis for certitude in regard to the canon. It claims to put the humblest Christian above the need of a "mediating priesthood of theologians," above the need of any help from apologetics and polemics, above the reach of all cavils, and I suppose one might add, above the need of all church history. It claims as a peculiar merit that, while it enables the humblest Christian to rest in the sweet assurance that he possesses the truth of God, it also enables the higher critic to go on in his destructive and constructive work with the comfortable reflection that under its ægis there will be none to molest or make him afraid. It claims that it alone prevents the reason, the conscience and the religious feeling from being forced into conflict one with another, and one or all with the Spirit of God. It claims to render the

reason, conscience and religious feeling independent of "the external authority of scholars and schools, of church or state, of tradition or human testimony, however extensive,"<sup>1</sup> with which it asserts they can never be satisfied, and to furnish them a divine authority upon which to rest. It claims that it alone secures to the individual Christian the inalienable and inestimable right of private judgment, not only as regards the several doctrines of our faith, but also as regards the source of these doctrines. This it does by encouraging and enabling every Christian to make his own Bible.

These are unquestionably lofty claims, and may well arrest our attention upon the theory in behalf of which they are made. Let us then proceed to examine it. I will give it in the words of one of its latest and ablest advocates, Dr. C. A. Briggs:

"The principles on which the canon of Scripture is to be determined are, therefore, these: (1.) The testimony of the church, going back by tradition and written documents to primitive times, presents probable evidence to all men that the Scriptures, recognized as of divine authority and canonical by such consent, are indeed what they are claimed to be.

"(2.) The Scriptures themselves, in their pure and holy character satisfying the conscience; their beauty, majesty and harmony satisfying the æsthetic taste; their simplicity and fidelity to truth, together with their exalted conceptions of man, of God and of history, satisfying the reason and the intellect; their piety and devotion to the one God, and their revelation of redemption, satisfying the religious feelings and deepest needs of mankind—all conspire to convince more and more that they are indeed sacred and divine books.

"(3.) The Spirit of God bears witness by and with the particular writing, or part of writing, in the heart of the believer, removing every doubt, and assuring the soul of its possession of the truth of God, the rule and guide of life. . . .

"Thus the human testimony, the external evidence, attains its furthest possible limit as probable evidence, bringing the inquirer to the Scriptures with a high and reverent esteem of them, when the internal evidence exerts its powerful influence upon his soul, and at length the divine testimony lays hold of his entire nature, and convinces and assures him of the truth of God, and causes him to share in the consensus of the Christian church."<sup>2</sup>

Such is the theory we are now briefly to examine. One could wish that it furnished less to support the sneer of the distinguished French diplomatist who said that language is designed to conceal our thoughts. How much would it aid us in forming a judgment of this theory had the writer just quoted stated "in a few plain

<sup>1</sup> Briggs' *Biblical Study*, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 137.

words" what he has hidden under many cloudy sentences. As it is, we must carefully and patiently thread our way through a maze. Still we need not despair of finding the clue to this labyrinth. Fortunately, what is dark or obscure in the above statement may be so illuminated and explained by other statements from the same pen as to enable us to fix with certainty the essential features of the theory.

First, then, let it be observed that this theory reduces the evidence for the canonicity of any writing to three heads, namely, that furnished by "the testimony of the church;" that furnished by the contents of the writing itself; and that furnished by the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

It will simplify our investigation to dismiss at once from consideration all that is so truly and eloquently said about the evidence which the character of the contents may furnish for the canonicity of a writing. We may dismiss this because it presents a view not peculiar to this theory, but common to it and to that advocated by Drs. Thornwell and Alexander. In a word, it is admitted on all hands that this kind of evidence is at best only corroborative. It may deepen, but it cannot of itself ground a conviction of the canonicity of a book.

It only remains, then, to consider the "testimony of the church" and the testimony of the Spirit. Here we may very properly inquire into the meaning of the terms employed, and also into the relative weight ascribed to each kind of testimony.

Let us turn, therefore, and examine what is meant by "the testimony of the church," and what is said of it.

Now, as soon as we begin to try to fix the meaning of the expression "the testimony of the church," we find that the words are beset with an ambiguity which makes the use of them in the statement under consideration scarcely less than criminal. The gravity of the offence is not at all diminished by the fact that the expression seems to be borrowed from the Confession of Faith, and apparently professes in this connection to echo the sentiments of that venerable document. If we attend merely to the sound of the words and their meaning as used in the Confession, we would not unnaturally suppose that the phrase, "the testimony of the church," referred to the consensus of opinion existing among

ecclesiastical persons, or to the consensus of the official decisions of ecclesiastical courts and councils. But the sound here is evidently misleading. This phrase, as used in the passage cited above, was designed, as will appear when we examine it in the light of other statements from the same pen, to include all *historical evidence* coming to us through ecclesiastical channels. Things so different should not be confounded. An opinion is one thing, evidence is another and quite a different thing. The former is the answer to the question, What do you *think*? The latter to the question, What do you *know*? When we ask for the opinion of another with a view to making that a rule of conduct for ourselves, we virtually hold our own judgment in abeyance and act upon that of another. When we ask for evidence, it is with a view to forming an intelligent and independent opinion for ourselves. To turn to ecclesiastical persons or councils for their opinion might look like we stood at their bar and recognized in them some right to impose their opinions upon us. But to collect the evidence furnished by ecclesiastical persons or councils is to seat ourselves upon the judgment seat and call them before our bar to be examined and cross-examined as witnesses. To be controlled by the opinions of ecclesiastical persons or councils, no matter how perfect the unanimity or how great the antiquity of such opinions, might squint towards a surrender of the right of private judgment; but to demand evidence is usually and properly regarded as an assertion of this valued right. I say again, then, that things so different as a mere *consensus of opinion* and *historical evidence* ought not to have been confounded. If one did not feel that the distinction between them was too important to have been intentionally obscured, he would be apt to say that it is too palpable to have been unintentionally obscured. However this may be, the fact is that it has been obscured. Hence the importance of noticing the fact that the phrase, "the testimony of the church," as used by Dr. Briggs, covers and was designed to cover all *historical evidence coming to us through ecclesiastical channels*. It would have been clearer, then, had the paragraph quoted read: Historical evidence, "going back by tradition and written documents to primitive times, presents probable" proof "to all men that the

Scriptures" are "of divine authority and canonical." For, as we will see, this is the real position of this theory.

The next point in this connection is the weight allowed in this statement to historical testimony. It is said to furnish "*probable* evidence" of canonicity, nothing more. This is not only the furthest actual, but the "furthest possible limit" to which "human testimony" can attain. It may confirm us in convictions otherwise produced, but it is in itself powerless to produce conviction. If left to this we could not be sure of the canonicity of a single book in the Bible.

This is surely a startling position. It simply amounts to this, that no line of historical evidence, however complete, can establish the canonicity of a writing. It may extend back to the times of the apostles, it may connect a writing with one of these authorized and inspired founders and expounders of the Christian system, but it will be of no avail so far as establishing its claim to be a rule of faith and life. It follows from this that the questions of canonicity and authorship are not only distinct, but wholly dis severed from each other. To prove that a given writing is the official production of an inspired man does not prove that it is inspired and canonical.

If any one questions the correctness of this construction put upon the language we have been passing under review, it can be abundantly confirmed. Thus Dr. B. B. Warfield says: "It is also clear that prophetic and apostolic origin is the very essence of the authority of the Scriptures."<sup>1</sup> Upon which the writer before quoted comments as follows: "If this is the 'very essence of the authority of the Scripture,' that essence is not strong enough to sustain the strain of criticism, and to bear the weight of a world demanding infallible evidence for its faith."<sup>2</sup> Now this criticism is equivalent to a strong denial of the assertion that "prophetic and apostolic origin is the very essence of" canonicity.

Again, Dr. Alexander says:

"As to the proper method of settling the canon of the New Testament, the same course must be pursued as was done in respect to the Old. We must have

<sup>1</sup> *Presbyterian Review*, Vol. X., p. 506, quoted in *Whither*, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Whither*, p. 87.

recourse to authentic history, and endeavor to ascertain what books were received as genuine by the primitive church and early fathers. The contemporaries and immediate successors of the apostles are the most competent witnesses in this case. If among them there is found to have been a general agreement as to what books were canonical, it will go far to satisfy us respecting the true canon, for it cannot be supposed that they could easily be deceived in a matter of this sort. A general consent of the early fathers and of the primitive church, therefore, furnishes conclusive evidence upon this point, and is that species of evidence which is least liable to fallacy or abuse. The learned Huet has therefore assumed it as a maxim, *'That every book is genuine which was esteemed genuine by those who lived nearest to the time when it was written and by the ages following in a continued series.'*"

It is not for me to pause here to point out the correct interpretation of Dr. Alexander's language. Its general meaning is manifest and manifestly sound. But Dr. Briggs, commenting on this, says:

"Dr. A. Alexander thus gave himself unreservedly into the hands of the learned Jesuit without seeing the trap into which he had fallen. Those following him have all fallen into the same error. They have abandoned the principle of the Scriptures as maintained by Luther, Calvin, Knox, Cartwright, the Reformed Confessions, and the Westminster divines, and have tried to find the rock of our faith in the shifting sand of human tradition."

Without pausing to bemoan the blindness of Dr. Alexander or to admire the penetration and fairness of his critic, it is enough to say that this criticism is tantamount to the assertion that no line of historical evidence, even though it reach back to the very days of the apostles, can be conclusive as to the canonicity of a given writing. Such evidence, in the estimation of our critic, furnishes no more stable foundation for confidence in the canonicity of a book than shifting sand furnishes for the foundation of a house.

One more quotation from Dr. Briggs' own pen. He says:

"The question as to the authenticity of the Bible is whether God is its author; whether it is inspired. This cannot be determined by the higher criticism in any way, for the higher criticism has only to do with human authorship, and has nothing to do with the divine authorship, which is determined on different principles."<sup>1</sup>

Now it must follow from this that the answer to the question, Who was the human author of this writing? gives no light as to whether or not it is of canonical authority. To prove that the inspired Apostle Paul was the author of the Epistle to the Romans

<sup>1</sup> *Biblical Study*, p. 228.

does not upon this theory prove that Romans is of "divine authority and canonical."

Both of the points just made will stand out more clearly, if possible, when we examine the doctrine of this theory in regard to the testimony of the Holy Spirit and its relations to the evidences of canonicity. This we must now proceed to do as briefly as possible.

In laying down "the principles on which the canon of Scripture is to be determined," Dr. Briggs, having relegated the evidence for canonicity derived from the contents of the writing and from "human testimony" to the category of merely "probable evidence," adds: "The Spirit of God bears witness by and with the particular writing, or part of writing, in the heart of the believer, removing every doubt and assuring the soul of its possession of the truth of God, the rule and guide of life."<sup>1</sup>

One may, I hope, without impropriety express the wish that there was a less manifest ambiguity about these words. This would tend greatly to the comfort of the reader, to say nothing about the credit of the writer. I venture to offer the following as a just summary of the teachings of this paragraph, viz.: It teaches, (1,) That the *testimony of the Spirit* to the inspiration of a writing is the *ultimate test* of its canonicity; (2,) That this testimony is not outward, in the form of miracles, but wholly inward, purely and entirely subjective; (3,) That in the case of one and the same writing, this testimony may be given to parts of it and withheld from other parts of it; (4,) That this testimony is invariably limited in its power and influence to single individuals; (5,) That it is given only to believers, who alone, therefore, have sufficient reasons for accepting the statements of Scripture as true and of binding authority—from which the necessary inference is, that to expect others who have no satisfactory evidence of the divine authority and canonicity of Scripture to receive and obey them as a rule of faith and life would be not only most unreasonable, but unjust; (6,) That this testimony is delivered "*by and with the particular writing or part of writing*" that may be under consideration; (7,) That it is not only an ultimate, but also the sole, test of canonicity.

Such is the doctrine of this paragraph. Passing by, for the

<sup>1</sup> *Biblical Study*, p. 136.

present, some of its features, we may embody in the following proposition so much of it as it is necessary for us to consider at this stage of our discussion, viz., The ultimate, only and alone test of the canonicity of a writing as a whole, or any part thereof, is that testimony which the Holy Spirit may inwardly deliver to its inspiration. That this is the only correct interpretation of this paragraph is manifest, first, from the connection in which it occurs. The object of the statement as a whole is professedly to lay down principles for the determination of the canon of Scripture. This being true, we have but three alternatives among which to choose: either (*a*), the writer forgot the very thing he started out to do, and has laid down no test, which may be dismissed; or (*b*), the test laid down is complex and not simple, which, as we will see, is excluded by other statements; or (*c*), the test is simple, and consists in the single principle just announced. That the last is the true and only interpretation is manifest, in the second place, from what is said on this point in other connections. Let the following, from among other statements that might be quoted, serve as an illustration.

Dr. Archibald Alexander, with his usual sobriety and discrimination, says: "It is certain that the influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary to produce a true faith in the word of God; but to make this the only criterion by which to judge of the canonical authority of a book is certainly liable to strong objections."<sup>1</sup> Upon this the following comment is made by the writer whose test of canonicity we are examining: "In this passage Dr. Alexander throws himself against the Gallican Confession, as he acknowledges; but he probably did not realize that he was going against the unanimous testimony of the Reformed Confessions, the Westminster standards, and the entire body of Continental Protestants and British Puritans; and certainly he did not apprehend the peril of his departure from the fundamental principle of the Reformation."<sup>2</sup> Now, admitting the justice of the concessions so generously made here to Dr. Alexander's ignorance, and trying to preserve due composure under the alarming tone of bravado which

<sup>1</sup> *Canon of the Old and New Testaments*, pp. 114-116, cited in *Whither*, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Whither*, p. 78.

pervades this passage, you will observe that this language is equivalent to a strong affirmation that "the *only* criterion by which to judge of the canonical authority of a book" is the testimony of the Holy Spirit to its inspiration.

We have now passed under a careful review the several parts of this theory. If our examination has been prolonged, it has been due to the character of the witness with whom we have had to deal. He has shown himself to be an apparently reluctant witness. A close cross-examination has been necessary, therefore, to compel him to lay aside his reluctance and to testify to the real nature of his theory. If the attempt has been successful, two considerations will go far to compensate us for the time it has taken: First, We may feel sure that our view of the theory is correct, inasmuch as it has been derived from the statements of one of its advocates; and, second, We need not tarry long upon its refutation, for this is one of those cases where a clear statement of a theory is almost equivalent to a refutation of it.

Our examination, then, has shown that the leading features of this theory may be reduced to three. Of these two are negative in character, and one positive. The negative features may be thus stated:

1. No kind or amount of human testimony can establish the canonicity of a writing.
2. The inspiration of a writing would not be established even if it should be proven to be the official production of an inspired man.

The positive thus: The ultimate, only and alone test of the canonicity of a writing, or of any part of it, is the testimony of the Holy Spirit to its inspiration; which testimony is delivered in the heart of the believer.

The first stricture which I have to offer upon this theory is, that, let its advocates deny and attempt to disguise the fact as they may, it is nevertheless true that this doctrine of canonicity is liable to all the objections of mysticism, and, like mysticism, must sooner or later lead to fanaticism. It is simply another illustration of the saying that extremes meet. Here we have rationalism run to seed in irrationalism. Let us see. What is the evidence

of canonicity upon which we are invited to repose our faith? Is it not, after all that can be said, simply and solely a subjective impression produced upon the mind of the inquirer? This subjective impression, it is true, purports to be from the Holy Spirit. But what is there to certify the inquirer that he is not the dupe of a heated or disordered fancy, or, worse still, of a wicked spirit? It may be said that the Holy Spirit is just as able to assure individuals now that he is speaking to them as he was to do the same in the case of apostles and prophets. This is granted. But how did he assure apostles and prophets that he spoke to and by them? Was not the internal voice invariably confirmed and corroborated by some external sign? Moses first sees the bush burning without being consumed, hears an audible voice, witnesses a number of miracles, and then, and not until then, he goes to Israel and to Pharaoh, and says, "Thus saith the Lord." Paul speaks of the signs of an apostle. These were doubtless signs to the apostle himself as much as to others. It seems perfectly safe to say that in every case where the Holy Spirit spoke, in this special way, to one or by one, his voice was either preceded, accompanied or followed by miraculous evidence addressed to the senses. It seems safe to say, that wherever communication is opened *de novo* between God and a man there is a necessity for miracles. As soon as we come into possession of God's written word this necessity in a manner ceases; for in the word itself we have the safeguard we need. By it we can try the spirits whether they be of God. It may be granted, then, that the Spirit who gave the word is able to bear such testimony to it as his word as will leave no shadow of doubt upon the mind. The question is not what the Spirit can do, but what he does. It would be preposterous to assert that, in addition to witnessing to the word in the heart, he works miracles in order to assure men of the canonicity of this, that or the other book of Scripture. But without these miracles, how can men be assured that they are not following an *ignis fatuus*? Let us suppose that some one has deposited five thousand dollars in bank to the credit of Mr. A. B., an individual not personally known to any of the officials of the bank. Shortly after it has been deposited, in steps a man, who draws a check in these terms: "Pay to self or

order," and signs it "A. B." He steps up to the desk and passes his paper over to the cashier. The cashier, of course, will wish the signature identified. Suppose, now, the man who has just drawn the check says, "I will identify it." Would not the cashier very promptly respond, "But, my dear sir, who will identify you?" We are told by the advocates of this theory that the Spirit of God will identify his own writings. But, we make bold to ask, who will identify the one claiming to be the Spirit of God? Reason demands that when we have so much at stake we should only act under the protection of every possible safeguard. The Scriptures recognize and ratify this demand; but the theory we are considering utterly ignores it. To all intents and purposes it makes the whole Bible, and each part of it, a new revelation to each individual. The authority of this stupendous revelation rests solely upon a subjective impression, for the Holy Spirit no longer accompanies the word with "signs and wonders following." The fruit of such pernicious doctrine it is easy to see.

It may be proper to add at this point, that the writer is not alone in seeing the virus of mysticism in this theory. Long ago the venerable Dr. Archibald Alexander uttered his warning against even that modified form of the theory which appears in the Gallican Confession, and based that warning upon the inherent tendency of the theory to the errors of mysticism. Later, this is the view of the theory which has arrested the attention of the clear and vigorous mind of Francis L. Patton, president of Princeton College, who says of it: "It does not tend in the slightest degree to reconcile us to these opinions to say that the Reformers entertained them. It would not be strange if, in their opposition to the claims of the church of Rome, they went to the opposite extreme and were in danger of falling into the errors of the mystics."

It has been alleged, however, that the theory is clearly distinguished from mysticism and guarded against error from that quarter by the fact that the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit is delivered "by and with the particular writing or part of writing" which happens to be under investigation.

(a.) My first comment upon this position is, that its plausibility

lies wholly in the fact that the language used is similar in sound to language used in the Confession of Faith, in a materially different connection and with a totally different sense. The advocates of this theory will find that the mere form of sound words will fail to hide its nakedness and ugliness from thoughtful minds.

(b.) My next comment is, that the terms used, when viewed in the connection in which they are used, are confused and confusing. They convey no very distinct idea of any kind. Let it be remembered that the question to be decided is: Is this particular writing inspired? And we are told that the Spirit establishes its inspiration by testifying "by and with" the writing itself. But if the writing is the channel through which the testimony of the Spirit is delivered, then surely it would seem to be necessary in some way to connect the channel through which the testimony comes with the source from which the testimony is said to proceed. If A. B., being unable to attend court, sends a written deposition, before it can be received in evidence the court must be certified that it proceeds from A. B. If it be said that A. B. is surely competent to certify that a certain document proceeded from him as its author, this is granted. But observe, this implies that A. B. himself is present and has been duly identified. If so, then the question might arise, why testify by and with the writing when he is on hand to speak for himself to all points mentioned in the document? Moreover, let it be carefully observed that in this case we would not have two independent converging mutually corroborative lines of testimony resulting in cumulative evidence, but a mere repetition of testimony.

(c.) But we are told, by way of explaining the terms, that "It is one thing to say that the Spirit teacheth us by the Scripture, and another thing to pretend the Spirit's teaching besides, beyond, or contrary to the Scripture; the one is a divine truth, the other is vile *montanism*."

Upon this I remark first, that it is difficult to see how the Spirit can teach us by the Scripture before we are in possession of the Scripture. The very core of our inquiry is, Is this writing Scripture? Until this is settled the Holy Spirit has no Scripture with which to teach us anything. In a word, the naked testimony

of the voice claiming to be the voice of the Spirit must establish the fact that certain writings are Scripture before the Spirit is in a position to teach anything by the Scripture; otherwise he has no Scripture by which to teach.

But, in the second place, if those who offer this explanation mean that the Spirit does not deliver his testimony apart from, or independently of, the particular writing or part of writing which happens to be under examination, then I remark that they have deceived themselves with a bald and meaningless truism. For, as a matter of course, if the Spirit testifies to a writing, then the writing itself must be before the eye of the body or that of the mind. And if they mean that he testifies simply and solely by the written words themselves as opposed to a voice, or vision, or mere inward impression, however produced, then I reply that there is no evidence that the Spirit of God is testifying at all. They have in effect fallen back upon the internal evidence presented by the writing itself, which evidence they formerly rejected. The fact is that, let them twist and squirm as they may, let them use language as a means of concealing their meaning as much as they may, they will after all find themselves compelled to rest, even by their own showing, under the charge of "*vile montunism.*"

3. But, again, it will help us to form a just estimate of this theory if we consider briefly some of the consequences which naturally and necessarily flow from it. Let it be remembered, then, that according to the doctrine we are considering, the question of origin, or authorship, is wholly distinct from that of canonicity. The fact that the apostolic authorship of a writing is proved by a chain of unimpeachable historical witnesses settles nothing. It is, therefore, not only needless, but useless, to associate any book by a chain of historical evidences with Christ or the apostles. Their *imprimatur* is worthless. It may secure for a writing reverent esteem, but can invest it with no authority. A book having no connection whatever with the authorized and inspired founders and expounders of the Christian system may nevertheless become a rule of faith and life to those living under that system. And, on the other hand, a book proved by the most unquestionable evidence to have proceeded from John or Paul, and

claiming upon its face to be a rule of faith and life, has not necessarily any authority whatever. If this be denied, it can only be upon the ground that the Holy Spirit will in every such case as that first mentioned refuse to testify by and with the writing in the heart of the believer, and in every such case as last-mentioned, will invariably testify by and with the writing. But to say this is simply to surrender the theory. If, on the contrary, the consequence be admitted, then the theory may be subjected to a simple and decisive test. Doubtless it was just as true for the Galatians as it is for us that authorship could not determine canonicity. Let us ask, then, when Paul's letter came to them duly attested, did it, or did it not, demand and deserve their immediate acceptance and obedience? Did they have to wait for a special, direct, supernatural, miraculous confirmation of its authority by the Holy Spirit? If Paul's name as an inspired apostle was a sufficient guarantee of the canonicity of the epistle in the first instance, then how can the mere lapse of time have affected its sufficiency as a guarantee to us?

But further, in this same connection, let it be remembered, that according to the view we are examining there is no process by which the canonicity of a writing as a whole can be established. So jealous are its advocates for the right of private judgment, and withal so humble and devout is their temper of mind, that they must be certified by the Holy Spirit of the canonicity, not of the writing as a whole merely, but also of its several parts. They do not believe in the inerrancy of the very autograph which came from the hands of the apostles. Hence they need a special revelation in connection with each paragraph and every sentence. They do not believe in verbal inspiration. Hence the Holy Spirit must disentangle the thought from the words, and certify to them that such and such disembodied thoughts, so to speak, were designed when the writer used such and such words. Let us see, then, whereunto this doctrine if admitted must grow. Here we have the Epistle to the Romans. It is all from one hand. It claims to be sanctioned in every part by one authority. But, notwithstanding these facts, it would be entirely possible upon this theory that the Holy Spirit might certify chapters i.-viii., and

decline to certify chapter ix. If this is denied, it is hard to see upon what ground. It cannot be upon the ground that the Holy Spirit will always bear witness by and with what he himself has in the first instance inspired; because this assumes that this chapter was in the first instance inspired by the Holy Spirit. This, however, is the point in question. But if it be admitted that chapter ix. is not canonical, or might not receive the attestation of the Spirit, then observe what follows. Paul unquestionably regarded himself as speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit in the ninth chapter as truly as in chapters i.-viii. But he was mistaken, or may have been mistaken. And if he may have been mistaken in regard to the ninth chapter, why may he not have been mistaken in regard to chapters i.-viii.? And if he was, or may have been, mistaken, notwithstanding all the evidence that he had that he was truly under the guidance of the Spirit, what guarantee can we have that we are not mistaken when we fancy we hear the voice of the Spirit in our hearts bearing witness by and with a particular writing, or part of writing? This theory is a road losing itself in intellectual quagmires and swamps, where the traveller may temporarily rejoice in the light of a jack-alantern, but must eventually land in a bog.

4. But the radical and revolutionary character of the theory will probably appear most clearly when it is shown that it invalidates the miraculous and historical evidence upon which the Christian system has been supposed to rest. Let us examine this allegation.

It has been the boast of a long line of Christian apologists that it is a distinguishing feature and a distinguishing excellency of Christianity, as contrasted with all other religions, that every one of its leading doctrines is so rooted in a historical fact that to establish the fact is to establish the doctrine. Thus, given the facts of Christ's life, and we have of necessity the doctrine of the incarnation; given the facts of his death, and we have of necessity the doctrine of the atonement; given the fact of his resurrection, and we have the doctrines of his divinity and of the trinity. Now, it will be observed, that the inspiration of the writings of the apostles, for instance, is as much a doctrine of Scripture and of the Chris-

tian system as any of those just named. What, then, are the historical facts in which this doctrine roots itself? The answer ordinarily has been, the fact that those who wrote them and claimed for them inspiration did works "which no man could do except God were with him." The inspiration of the writings, therefore, follows as a necessary inference from the inspiration of the writers; and that, in turn, follows necessarily from the miracles they wrought. Paul's epistles rest their authority upon his authority as an apostle, and this, in turn, rests upon the signs of an apostle which he wrought wherever he went. If, then, neither canonicity nor inspiration can be established by external evidence, it must be either because we have no sufficient, satisfactory historical evidence connecting these writings with the authorized and inspired founders and expounders of the Christian system; or because there is no sufficient evidence that the writers did work miracles; or because miracles do not furnish satisfactory evidence of a divine commission. To accept either of the former alternatives is to make shipwreck of the Christian system, by asserting that the facts upon which it professes to rest are incapable of being verified. To accept the last alternative is to make shipwreck of it again, by asserting that, granting the facts, they furnish no ground for the doctrines of the system. In a word, if it be impossible to establish the inspiration of a writing by any kind or amount of external evidence, then it is impossible to establish the inspiration either of a writing or a writer by miracles, for they unquestionably fall in the category of external evidence.

There are other points in connection with the theory we have been considering which might be noted, but which must be passed by in order that we may glance at the attempt that has been made to foist it upon the Confession of Faith.

This attempt derives all of its plausibility from the mere sound of the language used by the Confession, in utter disregard of its connection and manifest sense. The language referred to is as follows: "Yet, notwithstanding our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof," *i. e.*, of the Scriptures, "is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts." Does the Confession

then commit itself to the doctrine that the canonicity of a writing cannot be established by any kind or amount of external evidence? Does it teach that the ultimate test of canonicity is the testimony of the Holy Spirit by and with the particular writing or part of writing which happens to be under consideration? Not at all. The question of canonicity, properly speaking, was not before the minds of the framers of the Confession when they wrote these words. Canonicity is an intrinsic quality of certain writings. It belongs to them, whether those to whom they come will hear or whether they will forbear. Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of a writing, however much it may affect our conduct and concern our welfare or our woe, has nothing to do with its canonicity. This, as the Confession says in the paragraph just preceding that from which the words above quoted were taken, depends upon the authority with which God has invested it. The question as to whether God has or has not invested a writing with authority as a rule of faith and life is by no means identical with the question, How do men come to a full persuasion of the infallible truth and divine authority of this rule? It is a question which rests upon its own proper and independent evidence: evidence which would hold were all men to refuse to recognize the infallible truth and divine authority of the rule; evidence which would compel the assent of the understanding, and bring the conscience under obligations, even though it failed to secure the confidence of a corrupt heart and the obedience of a rebellious will. Now, any one who will read the Confession carefully will find that it is dealing, not with a question of Christian evidences, but with a question of Christian experience; not with the question, What is there to show that this writing has been invested by God with authority as a rule of faith and life? but, How is its acceptance at the hands of man secured? To this the answer is, its full and complete acceptance is only secured by an inward operation of the Spirit, persuading and enabling the heart and will to yield to the overwhelming external evidence furnished by the origin and contents of the books. The case may be illustrated by what we speak of as historical and saving faith. Surely no one will make Christ's claims as prophet, priest and king de-

pend upon "the inward work of the Holy Spirit." These claims rest upon their own proper evidence. This evidence may, and frequently does, compel the assent of the understanding, even when the person so convinced refuses to believe with the heart. How great a perversion would it be of the teachings of the Confession to say that, because it declares that "faith is a saving grace," therefore it teaches that the validity of Christ's claims rests upon an inward operation of the Holy Spirit. It is equally perverse to wrest the language we have been considering into meaning that the only evidence of the canonicity of a writing is the testimony of the Holy Spirit by and with it in the heart.

But it is time to leave this theory. Taking a parting glance at it as we turn away, we find that its claims are in curious contrast with its real character. For instance, it poses as the persecuted and disowned heir of our Puritan fathers and the Reformers. Doubtless, could they rise from their graves, they would be surprised at the company this descendant of theirs is keeping. It claims to do special honor to the Holy Spirit, and yet it opens the door of the heart for every lying spirit that may choose blasphemously to impersonate him. It pretends to stand alone in recognizing the claims of the reason and religious feelings. But it deprives the former of its primary, proper, and well-nigh sole function in matters of religion, by refusing to permit it to sift the historical evidences of Christianity, and making it the dupe of every inner voice or light which human fanaticism or Satanic cunning may ascribe to the Holy Spirit, and at the same time it deprives the religious feelings of their only norm and safeguard, by virtually making them sit in judgment upon the claims of the word. It professes to give the only ground for certitude in regard to the canon, but as a matter of fact invests every book and every paragraph of Scripture, from the first chapter of Genesis to the twenty-second chapter of Revelation, in uncertainty. It professes to be the great bulwark and protection of the Christian system, when, in fact, it saps the system at its foundations, by calling into question the validity of the historical and miraculous testimony upon which it rests, and substituting for these a line of evidence which at best must, in the end, rank it, among intelligent men, along with the systems of Swedenborg and Joe Smith.

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