The Concept and Importance of Canonicity

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen in *Antithesis* I:5 (Sept./Oct., 1990)

Scripture as Final Authority

The Christian faith is based upon God's own self-revelation, not the conflicting opinions or untrustworthy speculations of men. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (I Cor. 2:5).

The world in its own wisdom would never understand or seek God (Rom. 3:11) but always suppress or distort the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18, 21). So Paul concluded that "the world in its wisdom did not know God" (I Cor. 1:21), and he set in sharp contrast "the words which man's wisdom teaches" and those which "God revealed unto us through the Spirit" (I Cor. 2:10, 13). In light of that contrast, we need to see that the apostolic message did not originate in persuasive words of human wisdom or insight (I Cor. 2:4). The light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ was, as they said, "of God and not from ourselves" (II Cor. 4:6-7). Paul thanked God that the Thessalonians received his message "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (I Thess. 2:13). As Peter wrote, "no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:21). Paul said of the sacred writings which make us wise unto salvation that every one of them is "God-breathed," inspired by God (II Tim. 3:15-17).

It is for this reason that the Scriptures are profitable for our doctrine, correction, and instruction. We must pay attention to the message which is divine – and all of it, as Jesus said: "Man shall live... by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). But God's people must *not* submit to uninspired words of men. "Thus says Jehovah of hosts, Hearken not unto the word of the prophets… speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of Jehovah" (Jer. 23:16). Nor should God's people allow their faith to be compromised by any philosophy which is "after the tradition of men... and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). Christ Himself condemned those who "have made void the word of God because of [their] tradition" (Matt. 15:6). Human philosophy and human traditions have no place in defining the Christian faith.

The message of the Christian faith is, therefore, rooted in and circumscribed by God's own revealed word — not the authoritative words of men. Where is *God's Word* found? "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). God verbally revealed Himself in many ways: from His personal address to Adam or Abraham to the inspired preaching of Jonah, Amos, or Ezekiel. He also sent His word *in writing* to His people: from the tablets of the Mosaic law to the written message of Isaiah or Jeremiah. Even the word of God which was originally delivered orally needed to be reduced to writing in order for us to know about it and for it to function as an objective standard for faith and obedience. The word of false teachers was to be exposed by the previously inscribed law (Deut. 13:1-5) or written testimony (Is. 8:20).

The grandest expression of God's Word was found in the very person of Jesus Christ, who is called "the Word of God" (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13). Again, what we know of Christ is dependent upon the written word of the gospels by men like Matthew and Luke. Christ commissioned certain men to act as His authorized representatives, His apostles. He inspired them with His word (John 14:26), so they spoke for Him (Matt. 10:40). It is noteworthy, however, that the oral preaching and teaching of the apostles were to be tested against the *Scriptures,* as we see from Paul's commendation of the Bereans (Acts 17:11). What the apostles themselves wrote was to be accounted as the very word of the Lord (I Cor. 14:37). Their written epistles came to have for the church the same authority as "the other scriptures" (II Pet. 3:16).

A key work of the apostles was precisely that of revelation: their confessing Christ, testifying to Him, interpreting and applying His person and work for the church (Matt. 16:18; John 15:27; 16:13; Acts 1:8, 22; 4:33; 10:39-41; 13:31). They did not speak by flesh and blood or according to human instruction, but rather by revelation of the Father and Son (Matt. 16:17; Gal. 1:11-12), being taught of the Spirit (John 14:26). In virtue of this revelatory work, Christ builds His church upon the foundation of the apostles (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20; cf. 3:5).

The teaching of the apostles was received as a body of truth which was a criteria for doctrine and life in the church; because this teaching was passed down to the church and through the church, it was called the "tradition" (what had been "delivered") or the "deposit" (to be distinguished from the uninspired traditions of men which the Bible elsewhere condemns (e.g. Col. 2:8; Matt. 15:3). The apostolic deposit or tradition formed a "pattern of sound words" for the church (II Tim. 1:13-14) which was to be guarded (I Tim. 6:20-21) as the standard for Christian life (II Thess. 3:6; II Pet. 2:21) and for all future teaching in the church (II Tim. 2:2). This apostolic tradition was found in both oral instruction and written epistle (II Thess. 2:15); obviously only the latter is available to us today.

In the very nature of the case, apostolic revelation did not extend beyond the apostolic generation, the "foundational days" of the church.[1] Thus Jude in his day could speak of "the faith" — meaning the teaching content of the Christian faith — as now "once for all delivered to the saints" (v. 3). About this verse, F.F. Bruce comments: "Therefore, all claims to convey an *additional* revelation... are false claims... whether these claims are embodied in books which aim at superseding or supplementing the Bible, or take the form of extra-Biblical traditions which are promulgated as dogmas by ecclesiastical authority."[2]

The Question of the Canon

As we have seen from the Scriptures themselves, "the faith which has once for all been delivered to the saints" must be defined and circumscribed by God's revelation as it is found particularly in the written Word, from the law of Moses to apostolic deposit. The Christian faith is defined by all of Scripture, but only Scripture. From the Scriptures we may not add or subtract anything (Deut. 4:2; e.g. Rev. 22:18-19), lest our doctrine and conduct be governed by a defective standard. This, then, brings us to the question of what literary works ought to be recognized as the word of God – the question of "the canon." The word "canon" denoted a rod used for measuring (defining) things. In the context of theological discussion, "the canon" is the term used to name that established list of authoritative writings which are the rule of faith and life for God's people.

The idea of a canon — a set of writings bearing unique, divine, authority for God's people — goes back to the very beginning of Israel's *history.* A covenant document which defined the proper understanding of God, redemption, and life was placed in the ark of the covenant in the Holiest Place of the tabernacle, thus setting it apart from the words and opinions of men. Moreover, the notion of a canon is at the *theological* foundation of the Christian faith. Without revealed words available to God's people, there would be no exercise

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[1] The theological error of believing that special, verbal revelation or quasi-revelation continued beyond the time of the apostles is made equally by Roman Catholics (imputing inspired authority to papal "interpretations" and unwritten tradition) and Charismatics (teaching tongues and prophecy as gifts to be expected throughout the life of the church). Both the office of Apostle and the gifts which accompanied the ministry of the apostles (cf. II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4) were intended to be temporary, confined to the founding of the church. To be an Apostle, it was required to be a witness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; e.g. I Cor. 9:1) and to be commissioned directly by Him (Gal. 1:1), thus restricting the apostolic office to the first generation of the church. Paul indicated that he was the last of the apostles (I Cor. 15:7-9); his successor, Timothy, is never given that title. By the later New Testament epistles we have no further mention or discussion of revelatory gifts like tongues and prophecy, for with the completing (bringing to its end or "perfection") of that which was "partial" – namely, the process of revelation – the temporary revelatory gifts of tongues and prophecy had to "cease" (I Cor. 13:8-10).

[2] Bruce, F.F., The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 80.

by God of Lordship over us as servants, and there would be no sure promise from God the Savior to save us as sinners.

Nature of Canonicity Distinguished from Its Recognition

What books properly make up the canon for the church? In answering this question, it is imperative that we not confuse the nature of the canon with the recognition of certain writings as canonical. The legitimate authority of canonical books exists independently of their being personally acknowledged as authoritative by any individual or group. The nature (or grounds) of canonicity is thus logically distinct from the history (or recognition) of canonicity.

It is the inspiration of a book that renders it authoritative, not human acceptance or recognition of the book. If God has spoken, what He says is divine in itself, regardless of human response to it. It does not "become divine" through human agreement with it.

Accordingly, the canon is not the product of the Christian church. The church has no authority to control, create, or define the Word of God. Rather, the canon controls, creates and defines the church of Christ: "...having been begotten again, not by corruptible seed, but by incorruptible, by the word of God which lives and abides forever.... And this is the word of good news which was preached unto you" (I Peter 1:23-25).

When we understand this, we can see how erroneous it is to suppose that the corporate church, at some council of its leaders, voted on certain documents and constituted them the canon. The church cannot subsequently attribute authority to certain writings. It can simply receive them as God's revealed word which, as such, always has been the church's canon. Authority is inherent in those writings from the outset, and the church simply confesses this to be the case.

The Canon Not Identical with Special Revelation

In order for a book to be accounted canonical, it is necessary that it be inspired. However, while inspiration is a necessary condition of canonicity, it is not a sufficient one. Otherwise all of God's special (verbal) revelation would constitute the canon of the church; yet this is not the case, as we can see for a couple of reasons.

First, remember that not all special revelation was given in written form or subsequently committed to writing (e.g., many discourses by Jesus while on earth, John 21:25; private

revelations to the apostles, II Cor. 12:4,7; Rev. 10:4; unpublished messages from New Testament prophets, I Cor. 12:28).

Second, we must note that not all of those inspired messages which were reduced to writing have been preserved by God's providence for use by His people through history, such as "The Wars of Jehovah," "The Book of Asher," Paul's previous letter to the Corinthians, etc. (c.f., Num. 21:14; Josh. 10:13; II Chron. 9:29; 12:15; I Cor. 5:9; II Cor. 2:4; 7:8). Therefore, we should say more precisely that the canon of the Christian church is constituted by those inspired writings which God has preserved for His people in all subsequent ages.

Inspiration is Self-Attesting and Self-Consistent

Scripture teaches us that only God is adequate to witness to Himself. There is no created person or power which is in a position to judge or verify the word of God. Thus: "when God made promise to Abraham, since He could swear by none greater, He swore by Himself…" (Heb. 6:13).

Accordingly, men are not qualified or authorized to say what God might be expected to reveal or what can count as His communication. That is why Scripture draws such a sharp distinction between "words which man's wisdom teaches" and those "which the Spirit teaches" (I Cor. 2:13). The wisdom of man cannot be relied upon to judge the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:20-25). Indeed, in its natural condition, man's mind will always fail to receive the words of God's Spirit: "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God...he cannot know them because they are Spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14).

Only God can identify His own word. Thus God's word must attest to itself – must witness to its own divine character and origin. "And you do not have His word abiding in you, for whom He sent you believe not. You search the scriptures..., and these are what bear witness of Me" (John 5:38-39).

Throughout the history of redemption God has directed His people to find His message and words in written form. Indeed, God Himself provided the prototype of written revelation when He delivered the tablets of law upon Mount Sinai. And when God subsequently spoke by His Spirit through chosen messengers (II Peter 1:21), their words were characterized by self-vindicating authority. That is, it was evident from their message that they were speaking for God – whether the claim was *explicit* (e.g., "Thus saith the Lord…") or *implicit* (the arresting power or demand of their message as a word from the Lord of the covenant: e.g., Matt. 7:28-29).

Moreover, their messages were of necessity coherent with each other. A genuine claim to inspiration by a literary work minimally entailed consistency with any other book revealed by God, for God does not lie ("...it is impossible for God to lie," Heb. 6:18) and does not contradict Himself ("But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no," II Cor. 1:18). A genuine word from God could always be counted upon, then, to agree with previously given revelation – as required in Deut. 13:1-5, "If there arises among you a prophet..., saying 'Let us go after other gods…,' you shall not hearken unto that prophet....You shall walk after Jehovah your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice…."

The Old Testament Jews had to beware of false prophets, and caution was likewise necessary in the early days of the New Testament church because of misleading messages from false teachers – words which were not revealed by God. For instance, Paul says "If any man preaches to you any gospel other than that which you received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9). Spurious "apostolic" letters sometimes circulated and troubled the early church, as we see from Paul's words: "...be not unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report, or letter supposedly having come from us" (II Thess. 2:2).

It was necessary to instruct the church to "believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). And the criterion for judging was consistency with previous revelation – whether the Old Testament (e.g., "Now these were more noble than those at Thessalonica, in that they received the word [of Paul] with all readiness of mind, examining the [Old Testament] scriptures daily, whether these things were so," Acts 17:11) or the teaching of the apostles (e.g., I John 4:2-3; Gal. 1:9).

The Spirit's Persuasion

The self-attestation of Scripture as God's Word makes it objectively authoritative in itself, but such authority will not be subjectively received without an internal, spiritual change in man. The Holy Spirit must open our sinful eyes and give personal conviction concerning the Scripture's self-witness: "Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God" (I Cor. 2:12).

We must be especially careful not to confuse this with subjectivism, which is ultimately relativistic. The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit does not stand by itself or operate in a vacuum; it must be teamed with the objective self-witness of the Scriptures themselves.

Moreover, this work of the Spirit is not an individual or idiosyncratic matter, as though the internal testimony operated uniquely upon one person by himself. Thus it is the corporate church, not mystical religious mavericks, which recognizes — through the Spirit's gracious, internal ministry — that the objective self-witness of the Scriptures is genuine.

The Canon Historically Settled Under God's Providence

Those works which God gave to His people for their canon always received immediate recognition as inspired, at least by a portion of the church (e.g., Deut. 31:24-26; Josh. 24:25; I Sam. 10:25; Dan. 9:2; I Cor. 14:37; I Thess. 2:13; 5:27; II Thess. 3:14; II Peter 3:15-16), and God intended for those writings to receive recognition by the church as a whole (e.g., Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:4). The Spiritual discernment of inspired writings from God by the corporate church was, of course, sometimes a drawn-out process and struggle. This is due to the fact that the ancient world had slow means of communication and transportation (thus taking some time for epistles to circulate), coupled with the understandable caution of the church before the threat of false teachers (thus producing dialogue and debate along the way to achieving one mind).

Historical evidence indicates that, even with the difficulties mentioned above, the Old and New Testament canons were substantially recognized and already established in the Christian church by the end of the second century.[3] However, there is adequate Biblical and theological reason to believe that the canon of Scripture was essentially settled even in the earliest days of the church.

By the time of Jesus there existed a well-defined body of covenantal literature which, under the influence of the Old Testament prophets, was recognized as defining and controlling genuine faith. When Jesus or the apostles appealed simply to "the Scriptures" against their Jewish opponents, there is no suggestion whatsoever that the identity and limits of such writings were vague or in dispute. Confirmation of the contents of the Jewish canon is found toward the end of the first century in the writings of Josephus (the Jewish historian) and among the rabbis of Jamnia.

The New Testament church acknowledged the canonical authority of this Old Testament corpus, noting that "...not one jot or tittle" (Matt. 5:18) of "the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms" (Luke 24:44) was challenged or repudiated by our Lord. His full submission to that canon was evident from the fact that He declared "the Scripture cannot

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[3] For a good discussion of the evidence, see Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament,* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987).

be broken" (John 10:35). As Paul later said: "whatever things were previously written were written for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4).

The traditional Jewish canon was divided into three sections (Law, Prophets, Writings), and an unusual feature of the last section was the listing of Chronicles out of historical order, placing it after Ezra-Nehemiah and making it the last book of the canon. In light of this, the words of Jesus in Luke 11:50-51 reflect the settled character of the Jewish canon (with its peculiar order) already in his day. Christ uses the expression "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah," which appears troublesome since Zechariah was not *chronologically* the last martyr mentioned in the Bible (cf. Jer. 26:20-23). However, Zechariah is the last martyr we read of in the Old Testament according to Jewish *canonical* order (cf. II Chron. 24:20-22), which was apparently recognized by Jesus and his hearers.

As for the New Testament, the covenantal words of Christ — which determine our lives and destinies (e.g., John 5:38-40; 8:31; 12:48-50; 14:15, 23-24) — have been, through the power of the Holy Spirit, delivered faithfully to us by Christ's apostles: "But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (John 14:26; cf. 15:26-27; 14:16-17; 16:13-15).

The very concept of an "apostle" in Jewish jurisprudence was that of a man who in the name of another could appear with authority and speak for that other man (e.g., "the apostle for a person is as this person himself," it was said). Accordingly, Jesus told His apostles, "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent me" (Matt. 10:40). And through these apostles He promised to "build My church" (Matt. 16:18).

We know that in this way there came about a body of New Testament literature which the church, "being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20), came to recognize as God's own word, being the canon of their covenantal relation with Him. This recognition traces from the days of the apostles themselves, who either identified their own works as canonical (e.g., Gal. 1:1, 11-12; I Cor. 14:37), or verified the canonical authority of the works by other apostles (e.g., II Peter 3:16) and writers (e.g., I Tim. 5:18, citing Luke 10:7).

But whether or not each was given particular written attention by an apostle, the individual books of the New Testament came to be seen for what they were: the revelation of Jesus Christ through His chosen messengers. It is in this body of literature that God's people discern the authoritative word of their Lord — as Jesus said: "My sheep hear My voice, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

To recapitulate: we know from God's Word (1) that the church of the New Covenant recognized the standing canon of the Old Testament, and (2) that the Lord intended for the New Covenant church to be built upon the word of the apostles, coming thereby to recognize the canonical literature of the New Testament. To these premises we can add the conviction (3) that all of history is governed by God's providence ("...according to the plan of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His own will," Eph. 1:11). So then, trusting Christ's promise that He would indeed build His church, and being confident in the controlling sovereignty of God, we can be assured the God-ordained recognition of the canon would be providentially accomplished – which, in retrospect, is now a matter of historical record.

To think otherwise would be, in actual effect, to deprive the Christian church of the sure word of God. And that would in turn (a) undermine confidence in the gospel, contrary to God's promise and our spiritual necessity, as well as (b) deprive us of the philosophical precondition of any knowledge whatsoever, thus consigning us (in principle) to utter skepticism.

Application of Canonicity

In terms of the previous discussion, then, what should we make of the Roman Catholic decision in 1546 (the Council of Trent) to accept as canonical the apocryphal books of "Tobit," "Judith," "Wisdom," "Ecclesiasticus," "Baruch," "I and II Maccabees"?

Such books do not claim for themselves ultimate divine authority. Consider the boldness of Paul's writing ("if anyone thinks he is spiritual, let him acknowledge that what I write is the commandment of the Lord" – I Cor. 14:37-38; if anyone "preaches any other gospel that what we preached to you, let him be accursed" – Gal. 1:8). Then contrast the insecure tone of the author of II Maccabees: "if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do" (15:38). Moreover, when the author relates that Judas confidently encouraged his troops, that boldness came "from the law and the prophets" (15:9), as though this were already a recognized and authoritative body of literature to him and his readers. (This is also reflected in the prologue to Ecclesiasticus.) I Maccabees 9:27 recognizes the time in the past when "prophets ceased to appear among" the Jews.

The ancient Jews, to whom were entrusted the "oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2), never accepted these apocryphal books as part of the inspired canon – and still do not to this day.[4] Josephus speaks of the number of Jewish books which are divinely trustworthy, not leaving a place for the apocryphal books. Josephus expressed the common Jewish perspective when he said that the prophets wrote from the time of Moses to that of Artaxerxes, and that no writing since that time had the same authority. The Jewish Talmud teaches that the Holy Spirit departed from Israel after the time of Malachi. Now, Artaxerxes and Malachi both lived about four centuries before Christ, while the books of the Apocrypha were composed in the vicinity of two centuries before Christ.

When Christ came, neither He nor the apostles ever quoted from the apocryphal books as though they carried authority. Throughout the history of the early church, the acceptance of the Apocrypha was no better than spotty, inconsistent, and of ambiguous import – the bottom line being that the books never gained universal respect and clear recognition as bearing the same weight and authority as the very Word of God.

The first early Christian writer to address explicitly the question of an accurate list of the books of the Old Covenant was Melito (bishop of Sardis, about 170 A.D.), and he does not countenance any of the apocryphal books. Athanasius forthrightly rejected Tobit, Judith, and Wisdom, saying of them: "for the sake of greater accuracy... there are other books outside these [just listed] which are not indeed included in the canon" (39th festal letter, 367 A.D.).[5]

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[4] Fragments of three Apocryphal books are among extant Qumran texts, with no evidence that they were considered canonical even by the sect that produced them. Philo shows no sign of accepting them either. Sometimes appeal is made to the Greek version of the Old Testament (the "Septuagint") to suggest "the canon of the Alexandrian Jews was more comprehensive." F.F. Bruce goes on to say, "There is no evidence that this was so: indeed, there is no evidence that the Alexandrian Jews ever promulgated a canon of scripture" (*Canon,* pp. 44-45). Indeed, the Septuagint manuscripts we possess were produced by Christians much later, and extant manuscripts differ between themselves, some excluding books of the Apocrypha which Rome accepted, while others included apocryphal books which *even* Rome denied.

[5] Those who study the history of canonicity will trip themselves up badly if attention is not paid to the varying and unsettled use of terms at this point in church history (late fourth century). For instance, the term "apocrypha" itself carries different import between Athanasius and Jerome. Athanasius spoke of three categories of books: canonical, edifying, and "apocryphal" – meaning heretical works to be avoided altogether. Jerome on the other hand, used the term "apocryphal" for the second category of books, those which are edifying (and Rufinus termed them "ecclesiastical," since they could be read in the church). The same is true of the early use of the term "canon." Athanasius appears to be the first to use it in the strict sense that we do today; naturally, such usage was not immediately inculcated by all writers. Sometimes "canonical" was used broadly and indiscriminately to include what other authors more carefully delineated as the books of highest, inspired authority (the church's standard – "canon") *as well as* the edifying or "ecclesiastical" books which could be read in the church. We see this, for instance, at the provincial (non-ecumenical) Third Council of Carthage in 397, which explicitly identifies "the canonical writings" with what "should be read in the church" – and includes the works deemed "edifying" by Athanasius or "apocryphal" by Jerome. Contemporary Roman Catholic scholars recognize the varying use of the term "canonical" by speaking of the apocryphal books as "deuterocanonical."

The scholar Jerome was the main translator of the Latin Vulgate (which Roman Catholicism later decreed has ultimate authority for determining doctrine). About 395 A.D., Jerome enumerated the books of the Hebrew Bible, saying "whatever falls outside these must be set apart among the Apocrypha." He then lists books now accepted by the Roman Catholic church and categorically says they "are not in the canon." He later wrote that such books are read "for edification of the people but not for establishing the authority of ecclesiastical dogmas." Likewise, many years later (about 1140 A.D.), Hugo of St. Victor lists the "books of holy writ," adding "There are also in the Old Testament certain other books which are indeed read [in church] but are not inscribed...in the canon of authority"; here he lists books of the apocrypha.

The apocryphal books were sometimes highly regarded or cited for their antiquity or for their historical, moral, or literary value,[6] but the conceptual distance between "valuable" and "divinely inspired" is considerable.

Thus the 1395 Wycliffe version of the Bible in English included the Apocrypha and commends the book of Tobit in particular, yet also acknowledges that Tobit "is not of belief" – that is, not in the same class as inspired books which can be used for confirming Christian doctrine. Likewise, the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1562) names the canonical books of Scripture in one separate class, and then introduces a list of apocryphal books by saying: "And the other books the Church doth read for example of life... by yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine."[7] This is likewise the attitude of most Roman Catholic scholars today, who regard the books of the Apocrypha as only "deuterocanonical" (of secondary authority).[8]

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[6] Roman Catholic apologists sometimes jump to canonical conclusions from the simple fact that the books of the Apocrypha were copied and included among ancient manuscripts or from the fact than an author draws upon them. But obviously a writer can quote something from a work which he takes to be true without thereby ascribing diving authority to it (for instance, Paul quoting a pagan writer in I Cor. 15:33).

[7] Roman Catholic apologists often misunderstand the Protestant rejection of the Apocrypha, thinking it entails having no respect or use for these books whatsoever. Calvin himself wrote, "I am not one of those, however, who would entirely disapprove the reading of those books"; his objection was to "placing the Apocrypha in the same rank" with inspired Scripture ("Antidote" to the Council of Trent, pp. 67,68). Likewise, Luther placed the Apocrypha in an appendix to the Old Testament in his German Bible, describing them in the title as "Books which are not to be held equal to holy scripture, but are useful and good to read."

[8] The preceding history and quotations concerning the canon can be pursued in F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture, passim.*

The Protestant churches have never received these writings as canonical, even though they have sometimes been reprinted for historical value. Even some Roman Catholic scholars during the Reformation period disputed the canonical status of the apocryphal books, which were accepted (at this late date) it would seem because of their usefulness in opposing Luther and the reformers – that is, for contemporary and political purposes, rather than the theological and historical ones in our earlier discussion.

Finally, the books of the Apocrypha abound in doctrinal, ethical, and historical errors. For instance, Tobit claims to have been alive when Jeroboam revolted (931 B.C.) and when Assyria conquered Israel (722 B.C.), despite the fact that his lifespan was only a total of 158 years (Tobit 1:3-5; 14:11)! Judith mistakenly identifies Nebuchadnezzar as king of the Assyrians (1:1, 7). Tobit endorses the superstitious use of fish liver to ward off demons (6:6-7)!

The theological errors are equally significant. Wisdom of Solomon teaches the creation of the world from pre-existent matter (7:17). II Maccabees teaches prayers for the dead (12:45-46), and Tobit teaches salvation by the good work of almsgiving (12:9) – quite contrary to inspired Scripture (such as John 1:3; II Samuel 12:19; Hebrews 9:27; Romans 4:5; Galatians 3:11).

The conclusion to which we come is that the books of the Roman Catholic Apocrypha fail to demonstrate the characteristic marks of inspiration and authority. They are not self-attesting, but rather contradict God's Word elsewhere. They were not recognized by God's people from the outset as inspired and have never gained acceptance of the church universal as communicating the full authority of God's own Word. We must concur with the Westminster Confession, when it says: "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings" (I, 3).