

ON THE RULE OF FAITH.

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With the Catholics, the Protestants acknowledge that Sacred Scripture is the most certain, firm, infallible, and necessary rule of faith, which has received its authority from God by inspiring His word to the prophets, apostles, and canonical authors. But the question arises: Is Sacred Scripture the only rule of faith, so that nothing else should be recognized as a rule? The Protestants deny that anything else should be admitted; the Catholics affirm it.

The Protestants cannot prove from Sacred Scripture that the Bible is the sole rule of our faith, excluding any other. On the contrary, the Catholics prove that the unwritten word of God must also be admitted as a rule, as the Apostle says: "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or by our letter."

However, since this question depends entirely on the subject of Traditions, we will not elaborate further here.

RESPONSE.

I. The words of Bellarmine have been expressed: that the proper and principal end of the Scriptures was not to be the rule of faith, but a useful reminder to preserve and promote the doctrine received through preaching. Bellarmine's work on controversies was published with the following approval: that it explains the controversies

copiously, **orthodoxly**, learnedly, and **solidly**. Furthermore, according to the common doctrine of the pontiffs, Scripture by itself is not the rule of faith, because by itself it does not oblige us to believe, but only when proposed by the Church and with its explanation. For the rule of faith, just as it cannot be conceived without relation and authority concerning the faith that must be examined according to it, so too it cannot be conceived without relation and authority concerning those whose faith must conform to it and believe in accordance with it. Therefore, according to the pontiffs, Scripture by itself is not the rule of faith but a Lesbian rule. But if Scripture by itself is not the rule of faith, then it is not a rule at all. We do not measure with a rule by means of another rule. Nor can anyone in the Roman Church truly say: "I believe this because Scripture says it" or "because the Church teaches it in accordance with Scripture." For whether Scripture says this or whether the Church teaches it in accordance with Scripture, one does not know it from Scripture itself but from the testimony of the Church, in which one must trust. Therefore, it is not Scripture but the Church that is the rule. I now remain silent about the addition the Roman Church makes to Scripture through tradition, which likewise strips it of the name and dignity of a rule—a matter to be discussed later.

II. That part of Scripture, even the greater part, which until now has not even been explained by the Church in the way the pontiffs say it can be done (that is, as our authors explain: either in a general council confirmed by the Pope or by the universal practice of the Church), is useless for fulfilling the office of the rule of faith. Since nothing certain can be known about its meaning by any means, neither can it be

believed with divine faith. All their explanations are recommended only by probability, under which falsehood may lie.

III. That according to the doctrine of the Roman Church, Scripture is not the most certain, firm, and infallible rule of faith is evident because (as our authors say more cautiously) it is not the sole rule; or as Bellarmine states more clearly: it is only a partial rule, though even here it is not its principal end, with unwritten traditions constituting the other part of the rule. For first, being only a part of the rule, at least it cannot be the most certain, firm, and infallible rule for all faith in general or for all assent or all dogmas of faith. Take, for example, some dogma of faith that consists solely in unwritten tradition and examine it according to the rule of Scripture. Certainly, concerning that dogma, Scripture will not be the most certain, firm, and infallible rule. Nor will it be permissible to argue thus: "This dogma cannot be proven by Scripture; therefore, it is not a dogma of faith." According to their hypothesis, it could be proven by unwritten tradition.

Bellarmino teaches us this again shortly after what was cited earlier: "I say secondly that although Scripture was not made principally to be the rule of faith, nevertheless it is a rule of faith—not total but partial. For the total rule of faith is the word of God or the revelation made to the Church, which is divided into two partial rules: Scripture and tradition. And certainly, because it is a rule, it must be that everything it contains is necessarily true and believable, and everything opposed to it is necessarily false and rejectable; but because it is not a total but a partial rule, it happens that it does not measure all things, and thus

there is something of faith that is not contained in it."

Furthermore, a partial rule is not even a rule, and absurdly is distinguished in this point between a sole rule of faith and one that does not measure alone but together with another (or likewise between a total and partial rule). For a rule must be adequate to that of which it is the rule. And it pertains not only to a rule of faith that we accept as believable everything it contains (as Bellarmine judges and doubtless also our authors), but also that we examine according to it everything others propose for belief (which always comes first in order) and that we do not accept as believable (even while explaining its meaning) everything it does not contain. For this is the end of every rule: to measure something and approve or disapprove as fitting or unfitting. This can no longer be done if the rule is inadequate. How can a rule measure what exceeds it? "The rule and level," says Theophylact, "admit neither addition nor subtraction."

IV. Nor does it help for Scripture to be a suitable rule of faith to say that at least Scripture recommends unwritten traditions. For, assuming this to be the case, it clearly demonstrates an inadequate rule: since whenever the rule is inadequate, another is required, whereas a suitable one alone suffices. And that teacher confesses his imperfection who wants his disciple to learn from another what he himself cannot teach. But we will address this point expressly later.

V. Concerning the necessity of Scripture, the Pontificians commonly confuse the necessity of writing with the necessity of the written doctrine itself: equating orally transmitted doctrine with the very act

of transmission. Meanwhile, they diminish the necessity of writing and of written doctrine for the same purpose, to exalt unwritten traditions. They minimize the necessity of writing when they think that doctrine was preserved sufficiently intact by preaching itself or by the oral tradition of the Church, and thus Scripture was less necessary; and that the sacred writers wrote more by occasion than by command, if indeed even by command. On this, Eck says: Christ wrote no book, nor commanded His disciples or Apostles to write (note that he absolutely denies the command to write), but He did command many things concerning the Church, so when sending the Apostles to found the Church, He did not say, "Go and write," but "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Therefore, the Law was written on tablets of stone, but the Gospel in hearts. Bellarmine says similar things: If Christ and the Apostles had intended to limit and restrict the word of God to Scripture, first Christ would have clearly commanded it, and the Apostles would have testified somewhere that they wrote by the Lord's command, just as they taught throughout the world by the Lord's command; but we read this nowhere. Here, Bellarmine seems to speak somewhat more moderately than Eck, denying that Christ explicitly commanded writing; however, what follows shows that he added these words not to distinguish but only to explain, where without distinction he denies that the Apostles testify anywhere that they wrote by the Lord's command, as they taught by the Lord's command. Yet, the Apostles could have done so if they had had any command whatsoever; for which reason we also believe they did, and John clearly testifies in Revelation, whose reason for fulfilling his office was the same as that of the other Apostles; moreover, many

of the inscriptions of the Apostolic Epistles sufficiently indicate this, in which the sacred authors commonly call themselves Apostles or servants of God for no other reason than to give authority to their epistles, as if they had written them as Apostles, servants of God, and thus by divine command. Furthermore, Bellarmine's ugly contradiction must be noted, which he commits shortly after. His purpose was to show greater necessity for traditions than for Scripture, as seen in his entire discussion; yet later he says that the Apostles only applied themselves to writing moved by some necessity. He teaches that for Matthew this necessity was that, preparing to go from the Hebrews to the Gentiles, he considered it insufficient to leave them only his physical presence without some memorial of his doctrine and preaching; for Mark, that he wrote his Gospel compelled by the entreaties of the Romans; for Luke, because he saw that many others had dared rashly to write down things they did not perfectly know (which he relates of these three based on Eusebius); and for John he adds, according to Jerome, that then arose the heresy of the Ebionites, so that if Ebion's heresy had not existed, perhaps we would not have John's Gospel. Therefore, if after having already preached the doctrine, the Evangelists and Apostles were still compelled by some necessity to write—and this because it would be useful for the Hebrews and Romans to have a memorial of their doctrine after their departure, because others narrated many falsehoods, and finally because of emerging heresies—it is clear that there was greater necessity...

The Scriptures were more than traditions (for the latter would not have necessitated recourse to the Scriptures), and the Apostles and Evangelists considered that doctrine preached without writing would

not be free from forgetfulness or corruption by false narratives and heresies.

VI. The adversaries belittle the necessity of written doctrine under unwritten traditions, while denying that we can be certain of both the divinity and the true meaning of written doctrine unless it is through the tradition of the Church (Our authors say: We suppose that the knowledge of Sacred Scripture we possess cannot be obtained without tradition, and in no way do we affirm that anyone can grasp the true sense of necessary articles without the Church's explanation).

Furthermore, they claim that we have many things through traditions outside of written doctrine which, as Bellarmine says, cannot be ignored, even though they are not contained in the Scriptures. On this point, the words of Pierre Charron cited by the illustrious Rivet are notable: Tradition is the true perpetual word of God, before, without, and with Scripture; through it, as the elder and firstborn sister, Scripture is approved, given authority and interpretation, and Scripture itself, as the younger, is guided by tradition and attains a certain dignity and place. Therefore, when our authors proclaim that Scripture is a necessary rule, they understand its necessity in the minimal degree, both as to its writing and to the written doctrine itself.

VII. According to the pontificals, all the authority of Scripture does not stem from the inspiration given to the prophets and apostles, as can be inferred from what has been said earlier. Its authority concerning us depends on the infallible testimony of the Church. Only in this way do

we know it was divinely inspired, and without this knowledge, it holds no authority among us. Hence Eck says rather bluntly: Scripture is not authentic without the authority of the Church. And further: Thus it is clear that the Church precedes Scripture, and that Scripture is not authentic except by the authority of the Church. And Pighius adds: All authority of Scripture that we now possess among us necessarily depends on the authority of the Church. Bellarmine, explaining such expressions from his own side, says: If at times Catholics say that Scripture depends on the Church or the Council, they do not mean this regarding its authority in itself but regarding its explanation and concerning us. However, those writers also speak expressly about its authority, at least concerning us. And I believe it is the same to say: Scripture concerning us depends on the Church, as Bellarmine speaks along with others, and that the authority of Scripture concerning us depends on the Church. Certainly, with the distinction between the authority Scripture has in itself and that which it has concerning us, along with its varying dependence according to this distinction, Volusius, among the more recent writers—and as if it were the genuine opinion of his Church—does not conceal that in his book, even Lord Petrus de Walenburch gave his approval: "The authority," he says, "of Scripture and its *αὐτοπιστία* (self-credibility), according to the mind of the Catholic Church, even concerning us, is not suspended from the testimony or attestation of the Church in such a way that, if by impossibility or possibility the Church denied it, thereby something of the divine authority of Scripture in itself would diminish." What he adds further—and indeed expressed more emphatically in his book—seems to suggest as if even the authority of Scripture in itself were

suspended from the testimony of the Church. I remain silent on how Scripture, unless accompanied by the testimony of the Church, often appears to pontificals as no more authoritative than Livy's histories, Aesop's Fables, or even the Quran itself—the first defended by Cardinal Sfondrato, the second when mentioned by a certain Brother and objected to by Brentius by Cardinal Hosius, and the third judged worthy of defense by Cardinal Bellarmine—not to mention many others now. See among our own Whitaker, Chamier, Rivetus.

VIII. Concerning whether Holy Scripture is the sole rule of faith in such a way that nothing else should be recognized as a rule, we must observe that by Scripture we mean what is written in it insofar as it was written by men inspired by God's Spirit—not strictly and simply insofar as it is written. For we acknowledge that these same things existed unwritten before and were then also a rule of faith.

2. We acknowledge that only Scripture is the rule of faith in such a way that from it alone can and must be demonstrated the truth of faith—that is, of those things believed by divine faith and insofar as they are so believed—as well as the sense and conscience of those who discuss them; without excluding secondary norms such as confessions or consensus in faith.

3. In this sense, we affirm that only Scripture is the rule of faith, excluding in the same sense any other rule, whether total or partial—a distinction we earlier took from Bellarmine.

Finally 4., by faith we mean all those things proposed by God to be believed in such a way as to perpetually bind the Church—whether wholly or concerning some of its members (e.g., ministers of the Church)—and the assent of those who discuss them. We add this distinction about the Church from our Authors, who say that Holy Scripture certainly contains all that is absolutely necessary for each and every one but not all that is necessary for the Church; which, God willing, we will discuss more extensively in the future.

IX. It is indeed an unjust demand to insist that Protestants must prove Holy Scripture is the sole rule of our faith to the exclusion of any other. Catholic authors say: "Protestants deny that anything else should be admitted; Catholics affirm it. And yet proof is demanded from Protestants." But I believed that the burden of proof lies with those who affirm.

The blessed Paul demonstrated the truth of the Gospel, which he desired others to believe, by appealing to the consciences of men. According to the method of the [Catholic] authors, Paul could have spared himself that effort and instead demanded that men prove that the truth he proclaimed was not actually true, much less divine truth. No one is obliged to accept as truth what is imposed upon them without proof.

X. If it suffices for our adversaries to say that Protestants cannot prove their position without examining any of the proofs they present, it would likewise suffice for us to assert the opposite and refer the reader to Protestant books. Nevertheless, for the sake of abundance [of

arguments], we will summarize our reasons here once more.

XI. We therefore prove that Scripture, in the sense explained, is the sole rule of faith, excluding any other, by the following arguments:

a. By those passages that expressly forbid adding anything to the written Word, or thinking beyond what is written, or accepting a gospel different from what was preached to all the Galatians. And by this very fact (according to the hypothesis of our adversaries—see Thesis VIII and compare it with the words of Bellarmine cited and also praised by our authors in the indicated place), all these things were written by the apostles as necessary for all, and they themselves proclaimed them publicly before everyone. Therefore, these passages contain an explicit exclusion of any other rule.

b. By those texts that affirm the perfection and sufficiency, whether of Scripture in general or of Moses and the Prophets—that is, the writings of Moses and the Prophets (since even our adversaries acknowledge no unwritten tradition originating from Moses or the Prophets)—to instruct all men indiscriminately (not only the ministers of the Church) in what is necessary, according to each one's condition, both to avoid the penalty of hell and to attain salvation. For the reason our adversaries deny that Scripture is the sole rule is because—according to them—it does not contain everything that, at least according to our authors, is necessary for some. But if this reason is refuted by Scripture itself, then Scripture remains as the sole rule.

c. By the celebrated passage that affirms the sufficiency of Holy Scripture to thoroughly instruct the man of God—that is, the minister of the Church—in all things necessary for him to be perfect and equipped for every good work, and thus also for the full exercise of his ministry. For our Catholic authors deny that everything necessary for ministers is contained in Scripture.

d. By those passages where unwritten traditions are explicitly condemned, and this:

- without any distinction ("you transgress the commandment of God for your tradition"), which condemns all traditions, not just this or that one;

- even those which, in themselves and directly, were not contrary to the written law, such as the tradition of washing hands before eating bread;

- simply because they are human doctrines.

Thus, every other rule is excluded. If all unwritten traditions are condemned—even those not directly opposed to the written law—and are condemned for being doctrines of men, then there can be no other divine rule besides Scripture.

And if at that time Scripture was the sole perfect rule, why would it not also be so now, even after the incorporation of the books of the New Testament? It falls to the pontiffs to give us reasons for this.

These four classes of arguments should suffice for now, and the

arguments they contain have been drawn from no other source than Holy Scripture, just as Catholic authors demanded.

XII. After Catholic authors assert—without proving it—that Protestants cannot demonstrate from Scripture that the Holy Bible is the sole rule of our faith, they present only a single passage from Scripture as their entire defense of their position and refer the reader to the topic of traditions. When they later address that topic in what follows, they do not even repeat that passage or show how it proves their thesis, much less provide additional passages. This, undoubtedly, is a sign of a weak argument.

XIII. The cited passage does not help the authors at all. The Apostle says: "Brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, whether by our word or by our letter." What can be inferred from this? That the Apostle taught some things to the Thessalonians orally and others by letter. Those oral teachings are not written in any book, neither in those already published nor in later ones. As if no other books of Scripture existed apart from the first letter to the Thessalonians. And even if some traditions passed down orally by the Apostle were never written, how does it follow that such traditions perpetually bind the Church or that they are the traditions of the Roman Church? This is precisely what is under debate. Since the authors do not wish to elaborate here, claiming that the matter depends on traditions, we too shall move forward.