

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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## Original Manuscripts, the Majority Text, and Translations

W. Gary Crampton

In the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:8) we read:

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of Old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

According to the Westminster theologians, the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament were "immediately inspired by God." These inspired words were "kept pure in all ages." The Greek and Hebrew copies of the original manuscripts that we possess today are "authentic," and they are the Word of God.

A pseudo-problem, which the *Westminster Confession*, by its focus on words, not documents, avoids altogether, is that none of the original manuscripts (*autographa*) is extant. What we have are copies (*apographa*). But, as we will see, although we do not possess the original manuscripts (that is, the physical documents), it does not follow that we do not have the original words in the copies. The good copies which we have, as a whole, can, and do, contain the very words of God.

A Biblical view of Scripture makes no assertion that no errors have crept into any of the copies. God never claims to have infallibly inspired translators and copyists<sup>1</sup> (albeit He does promise to keep His Word pure throughout the ages; *Isaiah* 40:8). Mistakes in the original manuscripts would attribute error to God, but defects in the copies attribute error only to the copyists. It is only the original authors that were inspired by God to write without error (2 *Peter* 1:20-21; *Exodus* 32:15-16; 2 *Samuel* 23:2; *Jeremiah* 1:9), and copies are the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God only to the degree that they reflect the original words.

### Edward J. Young

E. J. Young wrote:

If the Scripture is "God-breathed," it naturally follows that only the original is "God-breathed." If holy men of God spoke from God as they were borne by the Holy Spirit, then only what they spoke under the Spirit's bearing is inspired. It would certainly be unwarrantable to maintain that copies of what they spoke were also inspired, since these copies were not made as men were borne of the Spirit. They were therefore not "God-breathed" as was the original.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is the mistake of some of those who hold to the "King James only" view, when they advocate that God inspired the translators of the 1611 *King James Version* of the Bible. This view of post-canonical inspiration of translators is not the position espoused by Biblical Christianity. See Frank Carmical (Secretary of the Majority Text Society), "What is the Difference Between the 'King James Only' and Majority Text Position?" ([www.majoritytext.org/archive.htm](http://www.majoritytext.org/archive.htm)).

<sup>2</sup> Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (Eerdmans, 1957), 55-56.

## Francis Turretin

Francis Turretin was of the same opinion:

Although we give to the Scriptures absolute integrity, we do not therefore think that the copyists and printers were inspired (*theopneustos*), but only that the providence of God watched over the copying of the sacred books, so that although many errors might have crept in, it has not so happened (or they have not so crept into the manuscripts) but that they can be easily corrected by a collation of others (or with the Scriptures themselves). Therefore the foundation of the purity and integrity of the sources is not to be placed in the freedom from fault...of men, but in the providence of God, which (however men employed in transcribing the sacred books might possibly mingle various errors) always diligently took care to correct them, or that they might be corrected easily either from a comparison with Scripture itself or from more approved manuscripts. It was not necessary therefore to render all the scribes infallible, but only so to direct them that the true reading may always be found out. This book far surpasses all others in purity.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the autographs, copies may not be free from error. The branch of study known as textual criticism, which really had its beginning in the sixteenth century, undertakes the careful comparison and evaluation of the copies to determine, as far as it is humanly possible, the original readings. As one might imagine, textual criticism, as Gordon Clark commented, "is a very difficult and delicate procedure."<sup>4</sup>

Even though the Roman Catholic Church (wrongly) adds to the Old Testament parts of the Apocrypha, as far as the Christian church is concerned, there is really no controversy regarding the Old Testament. There is only one text, and that is the Masoretic Text, and it consists of 39 books.<sup>5</sup> Old Testament scholar Robert Dick Wilson stated that we are virtually "certain that we have

substantially the same text that was in the possession of Christ and the apostles."<sup>6</sup>

The real controversy concerns the New Testament (more will be said on this below). But, as we will see, this should not be. There are presently over 4,700 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament extant. There are also a number of translations of the early church, along with some 2,200 church lectionaries (that is, Bible study material or readings for the church's weekly worship services), which are based on portions of the New Testament. Then there are some 85 papyri which contain fragments of the New Testament texts. There is no other piece of literature in all of antiquity that is as well documented as the New Testament. John Warwick Montgomery wrote: "To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament."<sup>7</sup>

## Benjamin Warfield

As B. B. Warfield pointed out, we are not to understand the Westminster theologians as teaching that every copy is without error, but that the genuine text has been "kept pure" in the multitude of Hebrew and Greek copies. The pure text would not necessarily be perfectly reproduced in any one copy, but it has been preserved within the whole body of documents, due to God's providential watchcare over the transmission of His Word. The doctrine of inerrancy, then, applies in the strictest sense only to the *autographa*; it was "immediately" inspired. But it also applies to the *apographa* in a derivative sense, because we do have the words of the original manuscripts in the copies.<sup>8</sup> The doctrine of divine inspiration (2 *Timothy* 3:16-17), implies the preservation of the infallible, inerrant Word of God. Jesus confirmed this in *Matthew* 4:4, when He affirmed the inspiration of the *autographa* by stating that Scripture "proceeds from the mouth of God," and affirmed the authority of the *apographa* (the written Word) by stating that it is the standard by which "man shall...live."<sup>9</sup>

## John Owen

<sup>3</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, translated by George Musgrave Giger, edited by James T. Dennison, Jr. (P&R Publishing, 1992), I:72-73.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism* (The Trinity Foundation, 1986), 9.

<sup>5</sup> In his *Biblical Theology* (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), 495-533, John Owen argued that the original writings included, not only the Hebrew consonants, but also the Hebrew vowels (or vowel-points). He argued that consonants without vowels are not words, and God spoke to His people in words. See also John Gill, *A Dissertation Concerning the Antiquity of the Hebrew Language, Letters, Vowel-Points and Accents* (The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1999), who argues that the Masoretes did not claim to be the originators of the vowel-points, but "considered it as of a divine original" (9).

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Wayne Jackson and Bert Thompson, "Questions and Answers," *Reason and Revelation* (Apologetics Press, September 1989), 33.

<sup>7</sup> John Warwick Montgomery, cited in Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Here's Life Publishers, 1972, 1979), 40.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Still Waters Revival, 1991), 236ff.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas M. Strouse, "Every Word: Matthew 4:4," *Thou Shalt Keep Them* (Pillar and Ground Publishing, 2003), edited by Kent Brandenburg, 35.

John Owen, who was a contemporary of the Westminster Assembly, said it this way:

The sum of what I am pleading for, as to the particular head to be vindicated, is, that as the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were *immediately and entirely* given out by God Himself, His mind being in them represented unto us *without the least interveniency* of such mediums and ways as were capable of giving change or alteration to *the least iota or syllable*; so, by His good and merciful providential dispensation, in His love to His Word and church, *His whole Word, as first given out by Him, is preserved unto us entire in the original languages*; where, shining in its own beauty and lustre (as also in all translations, so far as they faithfully represent the originals), it manifests and evidences unto the consciences of men, without other foreign help or assistance, its divine original and authority.<sup>10</sup>

### The Preservation of the Words

It should not surprise us that God has kept His Word pure throughout the ages, or that the present-day copies which we possess are so accurate. The Bible itself affirms the perpetuity of God's Word. *Psalm* 119, for example, declares: "Forever, O LORD, Your Word is settled in heaven....Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever....The entirety of Your Word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (verses 89, 152, 160). In *Isaiah* 40:8 we read: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever." Then too, Jesus Himself claimed that "till Heaven and Earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (*Matthew* 5:18). Regarding this latter verse, significantly, the "jot" is the smallest Hebrew letter, and the "tittle" is the tiny stroke on certain Hebrew letters. Hence, what Jesus is teaching here "is equivalent to saying that even the dotting of the 'i's, and crossing of 't's will stand."<sup>11</sup> Commenting on this verse, John Calvin averred: "There is nothing in the law that is unimportant, nothing that was put there at random; and so it is impossible that a single letter shall perish."<sup>12</sup> Each of these passages argues for the divine, everlasting preservation of the Word of God.

*Deuteronomy* 4:12; 12:32; and *Proverbs* 30:6, as well as *Revelation* 22:18-19, tell us that one must not add to or delete from the original Word of God. (It should not be forgotten that tampering with the Word of God was one

ploy of Satan to bring about the fall [*Genesis* 3:1-7].)<sup>13</sup> *Revelation* 22:18-19 are especially strong:

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

In *Jeremiah* 36, after wicked king Jehoiakim destroyed the prophet's original document, Jeremiah was told to make another copy. In *Deuteronomy* 17:18, we read that a copy of the law was to be made (the original was in the ark of the covenant: *Hebrews* 9:4), and given to the king so that he would know how to conduct his affairs according to Biblical law. And in *Colossians* 4:16, the Apostle Paul tells the members of the church at Colosse that after this letter had been read in their hearing, that they should make copies to send on to other churches.<sup>14</sup> Accurate copies, then, are attested to and approved by Scripture itself.

The accuracy of transmission is also attested to in the Bible. Jesus, for instance, preached from a copy of *Isaiah* 42 (*Matthew* 12:18-21) and 61 (*Luke* 4:16-21), and told others to search the Scriptures (*John* 5:39). The Scriptures of Jesus' day were surely copies of the original manuscripts. They contained the original words inspired by God. In 2 *Timothy* 4:13, Paul asks that the "parchments" (obviously copies) be brought to him so that he might study the Word of God in his prison cell. He also commends the Bereans for searching their copies of the original Old Testament manuscripts (*Acts* 17:11). And in *Proverbs* 25:1 we read of Solomon's original "proverbs" being copied by the "men of Hezekiah"; and the copies are the Word of God.

Regarding the matter of transmission of Scripture, Warfield concluded that the New Testament "has been transmitted to us with no, or next to no, variation; and even in the most corrupt form in which it has ever appeared, to use the oft-quoted words of Richard Bentley, 'the real text of the sacred writers is competently exact...nor is one article of faith or moral precept either perverted or lost...choose as awkwardly as you will, choose the worst by design, out of the whole lump.'"<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), XVI:349-350. Italics added.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Lyons and Dave Miller, "Biblical Inerrancy," *Reason and Revelation* 24 (6):60.

<sup>12</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary* on Matthew 5:18.

<sup>13</sup> In *Genesis* 3:1, Satan added to the Word of God ("Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat from every tree of the Garden?"; compare 2:16-17), and in 3:4 he subtracted from it ("You will not surely die"; compare 2:17).

<sup>14</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Colossians* (The Trinity Foundation, 1989), 131-132.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 44.

## Accurate Translations also Are the Word

It is also noteworthy that the frequent use of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) by the New Testament authors speaks highly, not only of the importance of and general accuracy of the transmission of the text, but also of the need for translations into the “vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship [God] in an acceptable manner; and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.” As the *Confession* teaches, all persons are enjoined, “in the fear of God, to read and search” the Scriptures, thus requiring that they be able to read and hear the Bible in their native tongues. This doctrine is taught in a number of passages in the Bible: *Deuteronomy* 31:11-12; *Jeremiah* 36:6-7; *Matthew* 28:18-20; *John* 5:39; *Romans* 15:14, just to list a few. In this manner, persons of all nations would come to know the way of salvation (*John* 20:31; *Romans* 1:16-17; 10:7), and be able to protect themselves against the evil one and his minions (*Ephesians* 6:10-18).

This same principle is taught in *Nehemiah* 8, where we read of the Word of God being read in the original language by Ezra, but being translated into the language of the auditors by the Levites. Further, in His earthly ministry Jesus taught the people in their native tongue (*Matthew* 5-7). His apostles and disciples did the same. On the day of Pentecost, persons from all over the world heard the Gospel preached in their own languages (*Acts* 2). And on their missionary journeys, Paul and his companions preached the Word of God in language that their auditors were able to understand (*Acts* 13-28). This implies, among other things, that propositional revelation is not only adequately and accurately expressed in the original languages, but in other human languages as well. Human language *per se* is a gift of God, and is an entirely adequate and suitable vehicle for expressing divine truth accurately and literally. Far from being an impediment to communication between God and man, language, speech, the human word, is the exclusive vehicle of such communication.

## Francis Turretin

It is not just the essential doctrines which are preserved, it is the wording of the text as well. Francis Turretin said it this way:

Unless unimpaired integrity characterize the Scriptures, they could not be regarded as the sole rule of faith and practice, and the door would be thrown wide open to atheists, libertines, enthusiasts, and other profane persons like them for destroying its authenticity...and overthrowing the foundation of salvation. For since nothing false can be an object of

[saving] faith, how could the Scriptures be held as authentic and reckoned divine if liable to contradictions and corruptions? Nor can it be said that these corruptions are only in smaller things which do not affect the foundation of faith. For if once the authenticity...of the Scriptures is taken away (which would result even from the incurable corruption of one passage), how could our faith rest on what remains? And if corruption is admitted in those of lesser importance, why not in others of greater? Who could assure me that no error or blemish had crept into fundamental passages? Or what reply could be given to a subtle atheist or heretic who should pertinaciously assert that this or that passage less in his favor had been corrupted? It will not do to say that divine providence wished to keep it free from serious corruptions, but not from minor. For besides the fact that this is gratuitous, it cannot be held without injury, as if lacking in the necessary things which are required for the full credibility...of Scripture itself. Nor can we readily believe that God, who dictated and inspired each and every word to these inspired...men, would not take care of their entire preservation. If men use the utmost care diligently to preserve their words (especially if they are of any importance, as for example a testament or contract) in order that it may not be corrupted, how much more, must we suppose, would God take care of His Word which He intended as a testament and seal of His covenant with us, so that it might not be corrupted; especially when He could easily foresee and prevent such corruptions in order to establish the faith of His church?<sup>16</sup>

Yet, all copies are just that: copies. And they are to be corrected, where necessary, by the originals. In *2 Kings* 22 and *2 Chronicles* 34 we read of the finding of the “original” book of the law of Moses by the priest Hilkiah (the literal reading of *2 Chronicles* 34:14 is “by the hand of Moses”). Albeit the men of that day had copies of the law (which is obvious from their carrying out the work required by the law in *2 Chronicles* 34:1-13), there were apparently certain teachings which were not found in the copies which were in the originals. Israel had been guilty of not doing all that God had required (verses 19-21). Thus, obedience of the people had to be governed by the Word as it was originally given “by the hand of Moses” (verses 29ff.). Therefore, the appropriate corrections were made.

<sup>16</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I:71.

## Accurate Translations

The question arises: How are we to know which translation is the most accurate?<sup>17</sup> As noted above, the controversy here is not over the Old, but the New Testament, at least as regards the textual issues. Just in the last century there have been numerous new translations, including the *American Standard Version*, the *Revised Standard Version*, the *New American Standard Version*, the *New International Version*, the *English Standard Version*, and the *New King James Version*. Most of these new translations (the *New King James Version* being an exception) are based upon a Greek text of the New Testament, known as the Alexandrian Text or Critical Text,<sup>18</sup> that differs from the Greek text underlying the *King James Version* (and *New King James Version*), known as the Received Text (*Textus Receptus*), in over 5000 ways. Most newer translations rely heavily on a handful of early Greek manuscripts (particularly two: *Codex Sinaiticus*<sup>19</sup> and [especially] *Codex Vaticanus*) that were discovered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The theory that these documents (the alleged “neutral” text) are to be favored, primarily due to their greater age, was promulgated by B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort.<sup>20</sup> If it were true that the earlier codices are to be considered as the most trustworthy, then it would seem that they ought to differ the least among themselves. But this is not the case; even among these few manuscripts, there are numerous differences.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Translation theory is extremely important on this question as well. But space prohibits the study of this matter in this article. For more on this, see William O. Einwechter, *English Bible Translations: By What Standard?* (Preston-Speed Publications, 1996), 13-24.

<sup>18</sup> Technically, there is a slight distinction between the Alexandrian Text and the Critical Text, but for the purpose of this article, they are considered to be basically the same.

<sup>19</sup> *Codex Sinaiticus* also includes two non-canonical books: the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Shepherd of Hermes*.

<sup>20</sup> B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek* (Hendrickson, 1988). Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1977), 31-40. See also Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971, 1975), xiii-xxxi.

<sup>21</sup> Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions of Robert L. Dabney* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 1:364. Some textual critics who have rejected the Westcott-Hort “neutral text” theory have opted for an “eclectic text” theory. This group claims to have no preferred text-type, but considers the readings of all of them without positing a favorite. The fact of the matter is, however, that the majority of scholars in this group do share the views of Westcott-Hort that the Received or Byzantine Text is an inferior text. See Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 23.

The Westcott-Hort theory further maintains that some 85-90 percent of Greek manuscripts represented by the Received Text, which, unlike the Alexandrian Text, are in substantial agreement, underwent a radical editing process in the fourth century. Hence, they are unreliable. Other studies, however, have shown that this is simply not the case. “History is completely silent,” wrote Harry Sturz, “with regard to any revision of the Byzantine [Received] Text.”<sup>22</sup> As a matter of fact, there is evidence to show that the Alexandrian manuscripts were the ones tampered with, and these deliberate changes are the reason that these documents are so dissimilar.<sup>23</sup> As William Einwechter commented: “Due to this nearly total rejection of the value of the Byzantine [Received] Text as a witness to the original autographs, the scholars have established the MCT [Alexandrian Text] on the basis of only 10-15% of the available manuscripts.”<sup>24</sup>

## The Majority Text

Another group of New Testament scholars argues that the readings of the majority of manuscripts are to be preferred to the readings of a few older manuscripts. This is referred to as the Majority Text or Byzantine<sup>25</sup> Text theory. Because this text has been handed down and preserved by the church through the centuries, it is also referred to as the Traditional Text or Ecclesiastical Text. The Received Text belongs to the manuscripts of the Majority Text, but is not perfectly identical with it.<sup>26</sup> As far as this article is concerned, the Received Text and the Majority Text are used as generally synonymous terms. As stated by E. F. Hills: “The *Textus Receptus* is practically identical with the Byzantine text found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts.”<sup>27</sup>

According to the Westcott-Hort theory, manuscripts are to be weighed, not counted. After all, it is alleged, all of the Byzantine Text came from one related family. Hence, the great number of them carries little weight. According to the Byzantine Text theory, on the other hand, greater age is not nearly so important as number. First, one text being older than another in no way implies that it is superior. The older text itself could be errant. Too, the weight of textual

<sup>22</sup> Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism*, 122.

<sup>23</sup> Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, 58-62, 107-110.

<sup>24</sup> Einwechter, *English Bible Translations: By What Standard?* 30.

<sup>25</sup> The Byzantine Text is so called because the majority of its manuscripts come from the eastern Greek-speaking church in the Byzantine Empire.

<sup>26</sup> See Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, editors, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985).

<sup>27</sup> E. F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (The Christian Research Press, 1956), 121.

evidence now reveals that the Byzantine Text readings go back at least to the time of *Codex Vaticanus* and *Codex Sinaiticus*. Contrary to the teachings of Westcott-Hort, wrote Harry Sturz, “distinctively Byzantine readings of every kind have been shown to be early.” They are attested to by early papyri and several of the church fathers.<sup>28</sup> In the words of William Einwechter, it is virtually certain that “this text [TR] was in continuous use in the Greek church from at least the 4<sup>th</sup> century until the time of the Reformation when Erasmus made this text the basis for the first printed edition of the Greek NT.”<sup>29</sup> The fact that we do not possess any early copies of the Byzantine Text is easily explained: (1) the climate in Egypt, where the early Alexandrian Text manuscripts were found, is more arid, thus any text would last longer there; (2) the Egyptian manuscripts were probably not used, due to their corrupt nature, and therefore lasted longer, whereas the majority of manuscripts was frequently used and these manuscripts “wore out.”<sup>30</sup>

Second, if numbers of similar manuscripts have a single ancestor, as is alleged to be the case with the Byzantine Text, it does not necessarily mean that the greater number carries little weight. It may well imply that the copyists of that day believed that ancestor to be the manuscript most faithful to the original. The manuscripts that are fewer in number were in all probability rejected by copyists; their scarcity indicates their corrupt nature.<sup>31</sup> Further, it is not the case that the numerous manuscripts of the Byzantine Text have all come from one common parent. Indeed, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Byzantine Text documents come from numerous parts of Christendom, and are not related genealogically.<sup>32</sup>

Third, the churches in the East used the Byzantine Text for over 1000 years prior to the Reformation. The churches of the Reformation used the same text for another 350 years, and some still continue to use it. As stated by E. F. Hills, the Byzantine text

was the Greek New Testament text in general use throughout the greater part of the Byzantine period (312-1453). For many centuries before the Protestant Reformation this Byzantine text was the text of the entire Greek church and for more than three centuries after the Reformation it was the text of the entire Protestant church. Even today it is the text which most

Protestants know best, since the *King James Version* and other early Protestant translations were made from it.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, there is every reason to believe that this same text was preserved “throughout the second and third centuries and down into the fourth century.”<sup>34</sup> If the scholars who have followed Westcott-Hort theory in opting for the Alexandrian Text are correct, then the church, in many cases, has been without the most authentic text of the New Testament for nearly two millennia. This in itself does not indicate that God has “by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages” the New Testament text.<sup>35</sup> This erroneous approach to textual criticism is more rationalistic than Biblical. It is highly subjective, rather than Biblically objective. It even has an Hegelian flair to it, supposing that somehow there must be a “progressive” element to textual criticism.<sup>36</sup>

#### Is the Canon Closed?

Worse, if the Alexandrian Text theory were true, then we would have to ask ourselves if the New Testament canon will ever be closed, a fact admitted by Westcott and Hort.<sup>37</sup> Why? Because if new (and older) manuscripts continue to be found (which is possible), then we would have to re-evaluate the New Testament text every time a new manuscript is found. We would never be able to recover the actual New Testament text. To cite E. F. Hills: “If God has preserved the New Testament in such a way that it is impossible to obtain assurance concerning the purity of the text, then there is no infallible New Testament today, and if there is no infallible New Testament today, it may very well be that there never was an infallible New Testament.”<sup>38</sup>

One place where this problem is most noticeable is at the end of the *Gospel of Mark*. The versions following the Alexandrian Text bracket verses 9-20 as not part of the original, because they are lacking in *Codex Vaticanus* and *Codex Sinaiticus*. But most of the other Markan manuscripts contain the verses. A common theory adopted by proponents of the Alexandrian Text theory is that somehow the original ending of *Mark* has been lost, and verses 9-20 were added by a later redactor.<sup>39</sup> The advocates of this theory would actually have us believe (although they would not state it this way) that God was

<sup>28</sup> Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism*, 130, 79, 95.

<sup>29</sup> Einwechter, *English Bible Translations: By What Standard?* 27.

<sup>30</sup> Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, 124ff.; David J. Engelsma, *Modern Bible Versions* (Protestant Reformed Churches, 1988), 27.

<sup>31</sup> Clark, *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism*, 13-16.

<sup>32</sup> Engelsma, *Modern Bible Versions*, 27-28.

<sup>33</sup> Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 40.

<sup>34</sup> Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Engelsma, *Modern Bible Versions*, 32-33.

<sup>36</sup> This insight was given to the present writer by Dr. Charles H. Roberts, pastor of Ballston Center Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, in Ballston Spa, New York.

<sup>37</sup> Webb, “Not One Jot or One Tittle,” *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 48.

<sup>38</sup> Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 141.

<sup>39</sup> Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 122-126.

either unable or unwilling to prevent the mutilation of the text of Holy Scripture. And certainly these advocates could not reasonably say that God has providentially “kept pure” this portion of His Word “in all ages.” In fact, we may go so far as to say that if *Mark* 16:9-20 is lost, then the statement of Jesus in *Matthew* 5:18 (“I say to you, till Heaven and Earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled”) is erroneous.<sup>40</sup>

### **Romanism and Rationalism**

As noted, textual criticism actually began in the sixteenth century. The Reformers and the later Puritans were very much aware of this discipline. Believing in the principle of *sola Scriptura*, they were strong advocates of the belief that God has preserved His Word in the majority of Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, which manuscripts were in basic agreement. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, used a handful of copies in which numerous variants existed in an attempt to refute the principle of *sola Scriptura*. Without an infallible church to tell us what is and what is not the actual Word of God, said Rome, one can never be sure of the true text of Scripture. Romanism favored a few manuscripts with numerous differences, over the majority of manuscripts that were in basic agreement, whereas the Reformers and the Puritans, for the most part, took the opposite stand.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, textual criticism over the last century has followed the principles used by Rome (and Enlightenment Rationalism), not those of the Reformers and Puritans. And that practice has led the church astray. We have been told that a few texts upon which the new translations are based are better than the majority of texts upon which the *King James* and the *New King James Versions* are based. As this article has shown, however, this is not true. The Westcott-Hort theory is not dependable. As Pickering wrote, it is unproved at every point.<sup>42</sup>

### **Who Preserves the Word?**

Scripture not only tells us that God will preserve His Word, it also tells us that He will use His elect people (not a group of “text scholars”) to preserve it. Under the Old Testament administration, God “committed the oracles of God” to Israel, His chosen nation (*Romans* 3:2). Under the New Testament era, the same responsibility has been given to the church, which is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (*1 Timothy* 3:15). The church has a responsibility to “test all things; [and] hold fast what is good” (*1 Thessalonians* 5:21); to “test the spirits, whether they are

of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (*1 John* 4:1). And the church must be very careful how it handles the text of Holy Scripture.

Jesus claimed that He had given His apostles the same infallible, inerrant words which His Father had given Him, and that “they have received them” (*John* 17:8). These are the very words which He taught “will by no means pass away” (*Matthew* 24:35). “The Scripture,” He taught, “cannot be broken” (*John* 10:35). And “it is impossible for [Him] to lie” (*Hebrews* 6:18). At the same time, however, Paul warned against faulty documents in *2 Thessalonians* 2:2, and Peter cautioned the church against those who would “twist” the Scriptures in *2 Peter* 3:16. In writing to Timothy, Paul stated that “if anyone...does not consent to wholesome [that is, Scriptural] words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing...[he is] destitute of the truth” (*1 Timothy* 6:3-5). Any other words will lead “to no profit, the ruin of the hearers.” We must “shun [such] profane and vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.” If not checked, these unwholesome words “will spread like cancer” (*2 Timothy* 2:14-17). These passages remind us that this subject is no small matter. We are dealing with the Word of God. It is not enough that the translations be accurate; the Greek text underlying the translations must be the correct one. The new translations use an incorrect Greek text. The Byzantine Text theory, which fully adheres to the doctrine of divine providential preservation of the Scriptures, provides a superior text, and translations should be based upon it, not upon the Alexandrian Text.

The doctrine of divine inspiration of the original writings, implies the doctrine of the divine preservation of Scripture. And the doctrine of divine preservation of Scripture demands the adoption of the Byzantine Text theory rather than the Alexandrian Text theory. This does not mean, as E. F. Hills averred, “the Byzantine Text is an absolutely perfect reproduction of the divinely inspired original text.” Rather:

All that is intended by this expression [that the Byzantine Text is to be considered as the Standard text], is that the Byzantine Text, found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts, represents the original text very accurately, more accurately than any other text which survives from the manuscript period, and that for this reason it is God’s will that this text be followed almost always in preference to the non-Byzantine texts found in the minority of the New Testament manuscripts and in most of the ancient versions.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> For a thorough study of this matter see John W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark* (Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1959).

<sup>41</sup> Einwechter, *English Bible Translations: By What Standard?* 34, 62-63, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, 91-92.

<sup>43</sup> Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 122.

The church, then, needs to do its duty. It needs to recognize the hand of God's providence and confess the Byzantine Text to be the "authentic" text. Just as the church has made a definitive statement regarding the 27 books of the New Testament, it should also make a definitive statement on the extant New Testament text.

### **Scripture Alone**

Once again we see how important the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is, in this case having to do with our understanding of how we should judge which translations are best. Here the two major doctrines are the verbal and plenary inspiration of the *autographa*, and the providential preservation of the inspired words.<sup>44</sup> That is, God has not only "immediately inspired" the original writings, but He has also "kept pure in all ages" the *apographa* so that they are "authentic."

According to the Word of God, as summarized in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (14:2), by saving faith "a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein." In His Word God tells us that He will providentially preserve His Word unto all generations. The matter of the authenticity of the inspired text in a majority of the Hebrew and Greek copies is not an option. The Alexandrian Text, which implicitly denies this, must be rejected, and the Received Text accepted. As stated by E. F. Hills: "Because the Reformation Text (*Textus Receptus*) is the true text of the Greek New Testament, it shall always be preserved by the special providence of God and held in high honor by those Christians who do think consistently."<sup>45</sup>

### **Recommended Reading:**

Jakob van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*  
John W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark*  
Gordon H. Clark, *God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics*  
Gordon H. Clark, *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism*  
W. Gary Crampton, *By Scripture Alone*  
Louis Gaussen, *God-Breathed: The Divine Inspiration of the Bible*  
Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*  
Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*  
Harry Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism*  
B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*  
Edward Young, *Thy Word Is Truth*

<sup>44</sup> Einwechter, *English Bible Translations: By What Standard?* 5-12, 44.

<sup>45</sup> Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 133.