

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. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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Email: tjtrinityfound@aol.com Website: www.trinityfoundation.org Telephone: 423.743.0199 Fax: 423.743.2005

Bart D. Ehrman & Daniel B. Wallace in Dialogue: The Reliability of the New Testament Edited by Robert B. Stewart Review and Analysis by W. Gary Crampton, Th.D.

The book under analysis, *Bart D. Ehrman & Daniel B. Wallace in Dialogue: The Reliability of the New Testament*,¹ is the publication of a dialogue/debate² sponsored at the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum in Faith and Culture, held on April 4 and 5, 2008 at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The purpose of the debate was to present a theological dialogue between an evangelical (a Christian) and a non-evangelical (a non-Christian). Dr. Wallace, Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary and one of the foremost New Testament text critics of our day, represented the evangelical viewpoint. Dr. Ehrman, a former evangelical turned non-evangelical and the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, represented the non-evangelical viewpoint. As we will see in our analysis, however, neither debater is overly favorable toward the New Testament text. In the words of Jeffrey Riddle, "The two men actually appear to agree more than they disagree when it comes to specific disputed New Testament texts."³

The book contains an Introduction and eight chapters authored by ten different "contributors." The last three of these chapters are essays by those who were not a part of the Forum. Then there are three sections on "Notes," "Subject Index," and "Scripture Index." As indicated in the title, the main focus in the book is on the dialogue between Drs. Ehrman and Wallace in chapter two: "The Textual Reliability of the New Testament: A Dialogue" (13-60).

In his "opening remarks" Dr. Ehrman candidly admits that he does not believe that God is the primary author of the Bible. He maintains that the New Testament is "the best attested book from the ancient world" and then goes on to contend that we possess over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, some of which can be reliably dated to the early second and third centuries. But he also avers that *Mark* 16:9-20, *John* 7:53-8:11, and *1 John* 5:7 are not part of the original writings, and that the numerous differences we find in the manuscripts assure us that we can never have certainty regarding what was originally written. If we ask the question "is the text of the New Testament reliable? [then] the reality is that there is no way to know" (13-27). Elsewhere Ehrman mocks the evangelical viewpoint concerning the inspiration of the original writings when he states: "What good is it to say that the autographs (*i.e.*, the originals) were inspired? We don't have the originals! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently in thousands of ways" (86). (This errant way of thinking will be discussed below.)

¹ Robert B. Stewart, editor, *Bart Ehrman and Daniel Wallace in Dialogue: The Reliability of the New Testament* (Fortress Press, 2011). The pagination found in the body of this analysis is from this book.

² Although the editor claims that this presentation "is intended to be more a dialogue rather than a debate" (xv), in the view of this writer this is a "distinction without a difference."

³ *Bart Ehrman & Daniel Wallace in Dialogue: The Reliability of the New Testament*, reviewed by Jeffrey T. Riddle (*The Reformed Baptist Trumpet*, Volume 2, No. 4; October-December, 2011, edited by Jeffrey T. Riddle), 24. Dr. Riddle's review has been most helpful in the writing of the present analysis.

From the beginning of his “opening remarks” Dr. Wallace is expressive of his respect for the erudition of Ehrman. He tells us that his fellow debater “has done the academic community a great service by systematically highlighting” the many “alterations” found in the Biblical text (41). His praise for his opponent is effusive, and this (sadly) for a man who denies the orthodox view, as taught by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:8),⁴ that all sixty-six books of the Bible are “immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, [and] are therefore authentical.” It is one thing to respect the scholarship of a person; it is another thing to praise a “scholar” who later (in the “questions and answers” section) claims “that most of the Biblical authors did not think Jesus was God” (56).

As it turns out, Wallace too denies that “there is a doctrine of preservation [of Scripture]” taught in the Bible (51-52). God’s Word has not been providentially “kept pure in all ages.” He agrees with his opponent that *Mark* 16:9-20, *John* 7:53-8:11, and *1 John* 5:7 are not of apostolic origin. Allegedly, they are “additions of orthodox scribes...who changed the New Testament text to bring it more into conformity with their views” (28-29). Such comments from an evangelical scholar are quite disturbing.

There is, however, an important point in which these two scholars disagree. To his credit Wallace does believe that although we will never have absolute certainty concerning the original writings (the *autographa*), through the copies that we do possess (the *apographa*) we are able to reconstruct a text which is close to the originals (38-39). Commendably he states that “there is no ground for wholesale skepticism about the wording of the original text” (46). Ehrman, as we have noted, demurs on this point. He is convinced that our textual critical work will never enable us to know what the original text said.

The rest of the contributors are equally divided on the subject matter discussed. Some deny the doctrine of preservation in their words, others (with one possible exception) by their theory of textual criticism (which will be discussed below). But ultimate skepticism to one degree or another concerning the

reliability of the New Testament canon is the norm. Michael Holmes, with Ehrman, believes that the New Testament “is better attested than any other text from the ancient world.” But he also contends that the preservation of the original readings cannot be “sustained in detail” (61, 67). Dale Martin displays shades of Neo-orthodoxy when he writes that “the Bible isn’t Scripture simply in and of itself. It is Scripture, the Word of God, when it is read in faith by the leading of the Holy Spirit.” He also denies that there is a “doctrine of the Trinity [taught] in the New Testament,” and assures us that “Paul’s Christology is clearly subordinationist and would have been heretical by later standards of Christian orthodoxy” (87, 91).

David Parker is even more forthright than Ehrman regarding the reliability of the New Testament canon. He avers that “textual criticism...never has had the goal of recovering a text which has the supposed authority of the Author [God].” For him “the textual reliability of the New Testament...is of only limited importance” (103-104). William Warren is more conservative than some of his co-contributors when he writes “I would say that our [New Testament] text almost certainly represents a form that is almost identical to the original documents,” but he then gives us the disclaimer that this “is a probability statement” (122). After a lengthy discussion concerning “the stability of the transmitted texts of the New Testament,” Martin Heide concludes that “it can certainly be said that the reconstruction of the ‘original Greek’ on a formal level...remains a phantom” (159).

Although he doubts that the ending of Mark’s *Gospel* and the Johannine text concerning the woman caught in adultery are authentic, Craig Evans displays a more orthodox viewpoint in his assertion that “given the evidence, we have every reason to have confidence in the text of Scripture. This does not mean that we possess 100% certainty that we have the exact wording in every case, but we have good reason to believe that what we have preserved in the several hundred manuscripts of the first millennium is the text that the writers of Scripture penned” (162-163, 172). The final chapter is by Sylvie Raquel (the one possible exception mentioned above). In it she gives us the proverbial breath of fresh air.⁵ She debunks Ehrman’s

⁴ All references to the Westminster Standards, comprised of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, are from *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994). The English has been modernized.

⁵ This statement is not to be interpreted to commend the fact that (apparently) Dr. Raquel is an ordained minister and a Professor at the University level (she has earned an M.Div. as well as a Ph.D. from New Orleans Baptist

teaching in her analysis of textual criticism. "I also have studied New Testament textual criticism," says Raquel, "and, by contrast with Ehrman, have found confirmation about the validity of the text." She goes on to write that "by defective reasoning, misuse of evidence, and a misconception of inerrancy, Ehrman fails to build a case for the unreliability of the New Testament text as a sacred and inspired text" (173, 185).

What is evident in this book is that there are two main problems involved in the area of textual critical studies today. First, there is what Jeffrey Riddle refers to as a "seismic shift" in the field of textual criticism. "Mainstream academic scholars are, by and large, abandoning the effort to reconstruct the original autograph."⁶ In this writer's opinion, the second major problem facing current day textual criticism consists in an even greater "seismic shift," and that is that the textual critics have abandoned the Majority Text / Received Text theory of textual criticism adhered to by the Reformers and Puritans, and have opted for the Critical Text and / or the Eclectic Text theory (what editor Robert Stewart refers to as "reasoned eclecticism" [2]). The balance of this analysis will address this issue.

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,⁷ 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 5,000 ways. Most newer translations rely heavily on a handful of early Greek manuscripts (particularly two: *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*) that were discovered (mainly in Egypt) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

Seminary [xi-xii]) in contradiction to the teaching of Paul regarding women ministers and teachers in *1 Corinthians* 14:34; *1 Timothy* 2:12; 3:2; and *Titus* 1:6. See my "The Bible and Women Teachers" (*The Trinity Review*, May 2008).

⁶ Riddle, Review of *Ehrman and Wallace*, 23.

⁷ 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.

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.⁸ 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.⁹

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 not the case. "History is completely silent," wrote Harry Sturz, "with regard to any revision of the Byzantine [Received] Text."¹⁰ 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.¹¹ As William Einwechter appropriately 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."¹²

⁸ B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek* (Peabody, 1988). Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1977), 31-40. See also Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971, 1975), xiii-xxxi.

⁹ Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions of Robert L. Dabney* (Edinburgh: 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 of scholars alleges 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* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 23.

¹⁰ Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism*, 122.

¹¹ Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, 58-62, 107-110.

¹² William O. Einwechter, *English Bible Translations: By What Standard?* (Mill Hall, Pennsylvania: Preston Speed Publications, 1996), 30.

Drs. Ehrman and Wallace both deny (and at least most of the other contributors) the Majority Text / Received Text view adopted by the Reformers and the Puritans, as expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:8):

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 the 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 divines, only the original Biblical manuscripts (the *autographa*) were “immediately inspired by God.” The Greek and Hebrew copies which we possess today are to be considered “authentic,” and they are the Word of God; but in the strictest sense, only the *autographa* may be said to be “immediately” inspired.

A seeming problem is that none of these original manuscripts is extant. What we have are copies of copies (*apographa*). But even though we do not possess the autographic codex (*i.e.*, the physical document), it is a non sequitur to assume that we do not have the autographic text (*i.e.*, the words) in the *apographa*. The good copies which we have, as a whole can and do retain the latter without the autographic text.¹³

Biblical orthodoxy recognizes that errors are in the text of the individual copies we possess. God never claims to have inspired translators and copyists (albeit He does promise to keep His Word pure throughout the ages; *Isaiah* 40:8). Whereas mis-

takes in the *autographa* would attribute error to God, defects in the individual 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 the individual copies are to be considered the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God only to the degree that they reflect the original Word.

Therefore, unlike the autographs, our extant copies are not 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.”¹⁴

This is why the *Westminster Confession of Faith* properly distinguishes between the *autographa* and the *apographa*. Only the originals are “immediately inspired by God.” But the copies of the original writings which we possess have “by His singular care and providence [been] kept pure in all ages, [and] are therefore authentic.”

According to the *Confession*, while it is true that the pure text would not necessarily be perfectly reproduced in any one copy, it has been preserved within the whole body of documents, due to God’s providential watch-care 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 *autographa* in the *apographa*. The doctrine of divine inspiration (2 *Timothy* 3:16-17),¹⁵ demands 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 in *Matthew* 5:18 where He affirmed the authority of the *apographa* (the written Word) by stating that “one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” Scripture is the standard by which man shall live.

¹⁴ Gordon H. Clark, *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism* (The Trinity Foundation, 1986), 9.

¹⁵ Since Timothy did not possess the original manuscripts, 2 *Timothy* 3:16 implies that the *apographa* has been preserved in a manner equivalent to inspiration.

¹³ Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the *Autographa*,” *Inerrancy*, edited by Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 172.

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. *Psalms* 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."¹⁶ Commenting on this verse, John Calvin stated: "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."¹⁷ Each of these passages forcefully 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].)¹⁸ *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.

¹⁶ Eric Lyons and Dave Miller, "Biblical Inerrancy," *Reason and Revelation* 24 (6):60.

¹⁷ *Commentaries*, Vol. I-XXII (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), *Commentary on Matthew* 5:18.

¹⁸ 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).

Textual criticism over the last century has moved away from the textual critical principles of the Reformers and Puritans that was grounded in the doctrines of inspiration and preservation, and 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 critical text is not dependable. As Pickering wrote, it is unproved at every point.¹⁹ Neither the Westcott-Hort theory nor the Modern Critical Text theory of eclecticism (often called "reasoned eclecticism") can rationally claim to believe that God has providentially preserved His Word throughout the centuries. Any view that disclaims passages such as *Mark* 16:9-20, *John* 7:53-8-11, and *1 John* 5:7 (which have been "received" as a part of the New Testament for centuries) shows this to be the case. When God tell us that He will preserve His Word for us from generation to generation, as He does in *Psalms* 12:7; 119:152, 160; and *Isaiah* 40:8, then He will do so, because He "is not a man that He should lie" (*Numbers* 23:19).

Scripture not only tells us that God will preserve His Word, it also tells us that He will use His ordained institution (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*

¹⁹ *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, 91-92.

3:16. In writing to Timothy, Paul stated that “if anyone...does not consent to wholesome [i.e., 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 that adds to and subtracts from the Word of God in numerous places. The Byzantine Text theory, which fully adheres to the doctrine of divine providential preservation of the Scriptures, provides a superior text that is based on the majority of Greek manuscripts and the use of the creedal endorsement of the church, and translations should be based upon it, not upon the Modern Critical Text (which has been fabricated by modern textual critics).

The doctrine of divine inspiration of the original writings demands 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 or the eclectic text of modern textual 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.²⁰

The church of today needs to do its duty. It needs to recognize the hand of God’s providence and confess the Byzantine text to be the canonical text just as the Reformers did in the *Helvetic Formula Consensus*, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*, and the *Savoy Declaration*. Just as the church has made a definitive statement regarding the authentic 27 books of the New Testament, it must also make a definitive statement on the authentic New Testament text. True and full canonicity calls for both.²¹

Once again we see how important the Reformation 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 Scripture.²² 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 taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (14:2), a saving faith is one wherein “a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaks therein.” In His Word God tells us that He will providentially preserve His Word unto all generations. We need to “believe” this and act upon it. The question about the authenticity of the *apographa* is not an option. The Alexandrian Text and the modern eclectic text, which implicitly deny 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.”²³

Conclusion

Is *Bart D. Ehrman & Daniel B. Wallace in Dialogue: The Reliability of the New Testament* a valuable book, one that may benefit the Christian church? In one sense the answer is yes, but in another sense no. If we mean readers are able to gain further insight into the way God has, according to His promise, providentially preserved His word through the centuries, then the answer is no. The opposite is the case. In general, the book denies that this is the

²⁰ E. F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended!* (Des Moines: The Christian Research Press, 1956), 122.
²¹ My thanks to William Einwechter for making this point.
²² Einwechter, *English Bible Translations: By What Standard?* 5-12, 44.
²³ *The King James Version Defended!* 133.

²⁰ E. F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended!* (Des Moines: The Christian Research Press, 1956), 122.

case. On the other hand, the book does give us a helpful warning against the “seismic shift” we see taking place in New Testament textual criticism. Dr. Riddle aptly summarizes this matter:

The Ehrman—Wallace interaction, in particular, demonstrates the degree to which mainstream evangelical text critics, like Wallace, have embraced ‘reasoned eclecticism.’ The two men appear to agree more than they disagree when it comes to specific disputed New Testament texts.... Despite Wallace’s protests, one wonders if evangelical text critics will also eventually follow the trend toward abandoning the reconstruction of the text of Scripture in its original form as the goal of text criticism. What impact will this shift have down the line on the way of evangelical Christian scholars, who have embraced the modern critical text of reasoned eclecticism, view the reliability of Scripture, the doctrine of inerrancy, and the authority of Scripture in general? (23-24).

The words of J. Gresham Machen are a fitting conclusion:

Certainly when we take the world as a whole, we are obliged to see that the foundations of liberty and honesty are being destroyed, and the slow achievements of centuries are being thrown recklessly away.

In such a time of kaleidoscopic changes, is there anything that remains unchanged? When so many things have proved to be untrustworthy, is there anything that we can trust?

One point, at least, is clear – we cannot trust the church. The visible church, the church as it now actually exists upon this earth, has fallen too often into error and sin.

No, we cannot appeal from the world to the church.

Well, then, is there anything at all to which we can appeal? Is there anything at all that remains constant when so many things change?

I have a very definite answer to give to that question. It is contained in a verse taken from the prophecy of *Isaiah* [40:8]: “The grass withers, the flower fades: but the

Word of our God shall stand forever.” There are many things that change, but there is one thing that does not change. It is the Word of the living and true God. The world is in decadence, the visible church is to a considerable extent apostate; but when God speaks we can trust Him, and His Word stands forever sure.²⁴

Presbyterian Church in America Update

Both the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) have held their General Assemblies, and it is business as usual for those teaching damnable heresy in those denominations. Neither the OPC nor the PCA have seriously dealt with Shepherdism or Gaffinism (see *The Emperor Has No Clothes* by Stephen M. Cunha) or the Federal Vision. In fact three presbyteries in the PCA all cleared known Federal Visionists of teaching the Federal Vision. In fact this year’s PCA General Assembly (GA) was held in Louisville, Kentucky in the Ohio Valley Presbytery (OVP), which is a Federal Vision safe haven in the PCA. Not surprisingly, the Federal Vision was not a topic for discussion at the PCA GA. Instead, there was some debate and a postponement and a decision for “further study” on the teaching and practice of paedocommunion. A close vote on amending the Book of Church Order 58-5 by adding the sentence: “Intinction, because it conflates Jesus’ two sacramental actions, is not an appropriate method for observing the Lord’s Supper” was narrowly approved 348 to 334. This proposed change now goes to the presbyteries for confirmation, which will take two-thirds of the presbyteries voting in favor of it and another majority vote at next year’s GA to be put into effect. Additionally, there was a seminar by a known advocate of theistic evolution, with no rebuttal seminar provided. Further, theistic evolution and the historicity of Adam and Eve were topics of debate, with three overtures coming to the GA, two of which asked for a statement on record by the GA rejecting all evolutionary origins of Adam. The third overture basically said to look at the PCA’s standards, especially *Westminster Larger Catechism* question 17 for the PCA’s stand on theistic evolution

²⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1937] 1984), 13-14.

and the historicity of Adam and Eve. The first two were rejected and the last one approved by a vote of 60% to 40%.

Meanwhile in Metropolitan New York Presbytery, there is a pastor, Dr. Ron Choong, who is teaching theistic evolution, especially in his book *The Bible You Thought You Knew*, in which Choong argues the following according to Rachel Miller who reviewed it:

1. Moses didn't write Genesis; Genesis was written as a polemic against the Babylonian gods; Genesis does not teach *ex nihilo* creation.
2. Genesis does not speak to how the universe began or where humans came from; Adam is best understood as a group of hominids adopted by God to be *imago dei*; Adam and Eve were not created with perfect morality.
3. Paul's Adam wasn't necessarily the singular progenitor of the human race.
4. Noah's flood was an adopted Ancient Near Eastern story retold for Israel's purposes.
5. The Tower of Babel doesn't explain the origin of languages.
6. Interpreting the Bible literally can be dangerous.

Source:

<http://adaughterofthereformation.wordpress.com/2012/06/12/dr-ron-choong-and-project-timothy-the-bible-you-thought-you-knew/>

Not surprisingly, Metro NY Presbytery refused to investigate any charges against Dr. Choong, after all he has a book table (and has often taught) in Redeemer Church, pastored by Timothy Keller, who this year hosted BioLogos' Theology of Celebration III Conference in March.

Additionally, there is a new alliance and website – "The Reformed Communion is a growing collective of pastors committed to deepening our ministry through shared encouragement, resources, wisdom, experience and vision. Though we come from various denominational backgrounds, we share a robust commitment to the Reformed tradition as it participates in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

Further, we seek to minister and live out this faith and tradition in ways that transform our congregations, our communities and even the broader culture." Who is represented in this new alliance? The Christian Reformed Church (CRC), The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and the Reformed Church in America (RCA). What do the CRC, EPC, and RCA have in common? Among other things they ordain women to church office.

Source: <http://www.reformedcommunion.org/about-us>

Finally, PCA Pastor Jason Stellman of Exile PCA in the Seattle, Washington area tendered his resignation letter to the Pacific Northwest Presbytery (PNW) of the PCA on May 31, 2012. What were his reasons? He no longer believes in *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide*. From his letter to the PNW:

In keeping with this solemn vow [his ordination vow], I feel duty-bound to disclose some changes to my views which have developed over the past few years, relating to the issues of *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide* specifically.

Concerning the former, I have begun to doubt whether the Bible alone can be said to be our only infallible authority for faith and practice, and despite my efforts (and those of others) to dispel these doubts, they have only become more pronounced....

Regarding *Sola Fide*, I have become convinced that the teaching that sinners are justified by a once-for-all declaration of acquittal on God's part, based upon the imputation of Christ's righteousness received by faith alone, is not reflective of the teaching of the New Testament as a whole....

Stellman was the prosecutor in the PNW's trial of Peter Leithart. The PNW cleared Leithart of all charges of teaching the Federal Vision. Stellman had the honesty to resign. When will the Federal Visionists do the same?

Source:

<http://www.creedcodecult.com/2012/06/heartfelt-farewell-to-pca.html>