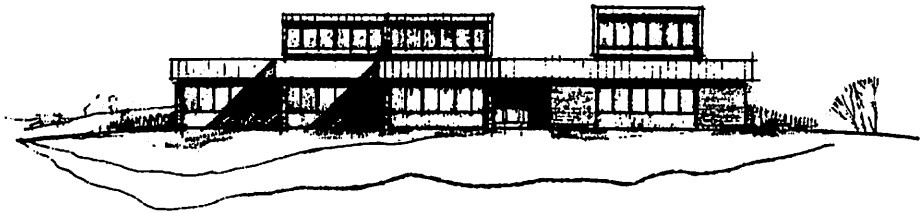


# **PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL**

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## EDITORIAL NOTES. . .

Two of the articles which appear in this issue of the *Journal* are papers which were delivered at an Officebearers' Conference held in the Protestant Reformed Church of Randolph, Wisconsin on March 2. This Conference was sponsored by a committee of Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The two papers deal with related subjects and, therefore, complement each other to some extent. As might be expected, there was a great deal of discussion among the ministers and elders present concerning this subject, and, as is the case with Conferences, there were no decisions taken which would officially state the position of those who were present and participated. There was difference of opinion concerning the issues involved, although, surprisingly enough, the difference of opinion was not over the central issue. As far as could be detected by the discussion, there was near unanimity of opinion on the need to restore the M-text to a place of importance and to retain the King James Version of the Bible as the version to be used in our churches, homes, and schools. The differences of opinion, somewhat reflected also in differences of emphases between the two papers, were mainly concerning the question of how much reliance ought to be placed on the M-text. There were those who argued that the M-text ought to be the only text used with all other available MSS ignored. This would, of course, mean the end to the whole science of textual criticism and would make the whole task of the minister much easier.

But it is apparent that the question is not yet clearly resolved and further discussion of the matter could lead to more definite conclusions. We submit these papers to our readers in the hopes that it will help them understand the problem and encourage them to join in the ongoing debate.

The third article is a term paper prepared by one of the Senior Seminary students in our Theological School. From time to time we have published such worthwhile papers and we consider this paper also to be significant, both because it deals with an interesting part of Church History and because it deals with a perplexing and difficult problem which has troubled the church throughout her history.

We send this issue of the *Journal* out with the prayer that God will bless these efforts richly so that the cause of His truth may prevail to the praise and glory of His blessed Name.

## THE TEXTUAL PROBLEM OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Professor Herman Hanko

### INTRODUCTION

From the time of the monumental work of Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, the field of textual criticism has been in a state of flux. Up to the nineteenth century, the so-called *Textus Receptus* (TR), upon which the King James Version of the Bible was based, was practically the only recognized text. Westcott and Hort (W-H) changed all that and textual criticism has not been the same since. If W-H could boast that they overthrew with their work "that vile *Textus Receptus*," their boast was not, it would seem, an exaggeration. J. Harold Greenlee bows to this boast when he says: "With the work of Westcott and Hort, the *Textus Receptus* was at last vanquished."<sup>1</sup>

But the field is in a state of flux. Voices have been raised and arguments have been advanced which contradict these loud claims and the TR seems to be staging something of a comeback. Once again the argument is going on and we do well to pay attention to it.

What is all the argument about? Who are Westcott and Hort? What is the TR? What are all these people fighting about? What, after all, is textual criticism? To these questions we must give some answers so that the debate can be understood in the light of the history of the argument and in the light of the true problem.

We are all aware of the fact that the documents which were written by those men, whom God ordained and appointed to be the means of the recording of His infallible Word, have long since disappeared. These documents, called *Autographa*, were undoubtedly used by the church or churches to which they were sent and were carefully preserved, since the church immediately recognized in these documents the Word of God; they were not interesting and nice letters which apostles had written; God was speaking to the church through them. But they did not last. And soon they disappeared.

But, quite understandably, these documents were copied. They were copied both because other churches than the ones to which they were addressed and for whom they were written wanted them, and they were copied

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<sup>1</sup> Greenlee, J. Harold, *Introduction to New Testament Criticism* (Eerdmans, 1972), p. 77.

because, as they wore out, the church wanted to preserve this divine record of the Word of God.

But it was in this copying that the problem arose. There were no printing presses in those days and no possibility of making thousands of identical copies of the same manuscript. Each copy had to be made painstakingly by scribes who labored over the work, often with poor light, under adverse conditions, copying from poor manuscripts, which were often difficult to read, and so preserving the ancient text of Scripture. It stands to reason, however, that these scribes made mistakes in copying with the result that their copies were not, in all points, similar to the *Autographa*. But these copies too wore out and other copies had to be made from them. The scribes who did this copying not only made mistakes on their own, but carried on in their copies the mistakes of the copy they used for masters. All this makes things very complicated. More than one copy was made from each master, but no two copies agreed. The manuscripts available to us today are often copies of copies of copies. . . . Each has the mistakes of its master copy and mistakes of its own.

To complicate matters still more, some scribes, when copying, used more than one master. When they came to a place where the two or three copies in front of them did not agree, they had to make a choice between the two or three with the result that their copy was often not a copy of one master, but of two or even three.

The task of textual criticism is to examine these copies and determine, if possible, what is the correct reading of the *Autographa* which were written by the infallible inspiration of God.

The material used in this work consists chiefly of five kinds. There are first of all the so-called papyrus manuscripts which are the oldest of all manuscripts, but which contain only part of Scripture. Some contain several books, others only a few verses. Most of them date from the third and fourth centuries, with a few perhaps from the second. Secondly, there are the uncial manuscripts called such because they were written in capital letters, often without breaks between the words, without any form of punctuation and without any paragraph divisions. The uncial manuscripts date from the fourth century through the ninth. Thirdly, there are the cursive manuscripts which were called such because they were written in a more flowing hand with capitals and small letters. These date from about the seventh century on, although the majority come from the tenth century and continue until the time of the inventing of the printing press in the fifteenth century. Fourthly, there are the so-called lectionaries, which were written for use in the churches, sometimes for general Scriptural reading, sometimes for special church holidays. Finally, the material

of textual criticism used the quotations which appear in the writings of the church fathers and in the translations of the Scriptures which were made throughout the New Testament period.

One can readily see that there is a mass of material. Without counting the lectionaries, translations and quotations from the church fathers, the available manuscripts of the New Testament number over 5,000, although only a few have the whole Scripture or even the whole New Testament. But no two of these manuscripts agree completely and, in fact, the variations number over 200,000.

This abundance of manuscripts is both a treasure and a problem. It is a treasure because the many manuscripts give abundant material with which to work in attempting to determine what the *Autographa* read; but it is a problem because hard decisions have to be made between the many different readings. No wonder that the great scholar Constantin Tischendorf called this multiplicity of manuscripts a "splendid distress."

It is here, however, that we must introduce a word or two of caution. One could very well get the impression that with so many manuscripts which differ from each other in so many instances it is no longer possible to determine what the Scriptures as given by the hand of God actually say. This is far from the truth. Actually, the Scriptures have been remarkably preserved by the great providential care of our God. It has been estimated (even by W-H) that all the manuscripts agree in seven-eighths of their contents; that where they do not agree, the differences are minor and trivial involving such things as word order, the use of the singular or plural, the use of the first or second personal pronoun, and such like minor matters. These variations in no way affect the meaning of the text. Furthermore, in the one-eighth part of the New Testament where there are differences in readings, it is possible without much difficulty to determine the reading of the *Autographa* simply because far and away the majority of manuscripts agree while only a few, often unimportant, manuscripts differ. But even then the whole story has not been told. Of those differences concerning which there may be some doubt, actually estimated at less than one-sixtieth of the total, almost none affect any important doctrine of Scripture; and the very few which do involve a doctrine of Scripture do not involve a doctrine which is not clearly taught in other parts of God's holy Word. It is clear from this that the people of God need not doubt that they have access to the very Word of God, that God, by a marvelous act of His providence, wonderfully preserved the Scriptures, and the faith of the child of God cannot be, in any sense of the word, affected by this work of textual criticism. We agree with the statement found in the Helvetic Consensus Formula which in Article 1 states:

1. God, the Supreme Judge, not only took care to have His word, which is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care ever since it was written up to the present time, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore the Church justly ascribes it to His singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have to the end of the world, a "sure word of prophecy" and "Holy Scriptures" (II Tim. 3:15), from which, though heaven and earth perish, "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass" (Matthew 5:18).

In this connection, another word of caution and warning must be made. Many times the whole subject of textual criticism has been raised to a level of importance which is out of keeping with its place in the field of Biblical studies. This is true of those who spend a great deal of time pondering the problem and studying the available material, some even giving their entire lifetime to this field. In the nature of the case they act as if textual critical studies are the be-all and end-all of theological work. They write as if the existence and well-being of the church itself rests upon their conclusions and as if nothing is quite as important as whether the reading of A and C or the reading of Aleph and the M-text is correct in Revelation 12:7. All other matters of doctrine and life are relegated to the background in their earnest pursuit of the correct reading. They are like the man who worries whether his tie is properly knotted while his house is burning to the ground.

But the same can be said for the on-going battle between defenders of the Neutral Text and the defenders of the TR. The bitterness of the battle, the insults hurled back and forth, the criticisms of theories and conclusions, the ferocious defenses raised in support of a given position, all leave the impression that there is an importance to this subject which transcends all other questions concerning Biblical teaching. Such is not the case. We must be careful that we do not emphasize the importance of textual criticism out of due proportion. Let us approach the subject with some measure of common sense and with a conscious effort to retain our spiritual balance.

All of this is not to say that the subject is not important. It has its own place and its own interest. Surely it is worth our while and effort to determine as much as possible what the *Autographa* actually contained. Our unswerving faith in the infallibility of the Scriptures, in their verbal inspiration ought to be enough incentive to prompt us to have some knowledge of the field. And insofar as this whole question of the text does have importance for exegesis, for Bible translations and for determining the correct reading in important



passages, we do well to have some general guidelines which we can safely follow in our work.

All of this brings up one other important matter which must be included here by way of introduction. It is obvious that the work which we are able to do (and perhaps interested in doing) can never be original work. If any one were to do original work in this field, examine firsthand the material which is involved, and come to independent conclusions, he would have to abandon his labors in the church of Christ, fly off to distant cities and lands, and spend a lifetime poring over ancient manuscripts. We are not in a position to do this, nor are we, for the most part, I think, interested in this kind of labor. There are more pressing matters to attend to. But all of this implies, nevertheless, that we shall have to depend on the work of others and weigh and evaluate this work so that we can come to some conclusions concerning who has the best of the argument. We shall be content with this, for we are ministers of the Word of God and elders in the church of Christ, not scholars in the field of textual criticism.

## THE MAIN PROBLEM

Without going into detail in our description of the history of textual criticism, some remarks have to be made concerning this in order to put the whole perplexing problem in its proper light.

The work of textual criticism, to all intents and purposes, did not begin until approximately the time of the Reformation. Cardinal Ximenes and Desiderus Erasmus were really the first to do this work and make a critical edition of the New Testament. Their work, along with the work of Beza and Stephanus, formed the basis for the work of the Elzevir brothers, printers in the Netherlands, who prepared no fewer than seven critical editions of the New Testament. It is the second edition from which the words *Textus Receptus* are derived: *Textum ergo habes nunc ab omnibus receptum in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus.* (Therefore, you now have a text received by all in which we present nothing corrupted or altered.) This work of the Elzevir brothers was the text used in the translation of the KJV of the Bible. And this text, along with the KJV, was used almost exclusively from the time of the Reformation until the work of W-H. W-H have the distinction of turning the textual-critical world upside down.

Before we enter into their views in the field of textual criticism, two or three matters have to be mentioned.

In the first place, it will not have escaped the notice of the thoughtful reader that almost no mention has been made thus far of the Old Testament.

There is reason for this. Although there are a few matters of textual criticism which involve the Old Testament Scriptures, the text of the Old Testament has come down to us almost unscathed. This is partly due to the fact that the Jews, just prior to the coming of Christ, determined the proper text and burned all other copies. These are the Scriptures which have the tacit approval of the Lord. Further, the Old Testament text was remarkably preserved because of the diligent and faithful labors of the Jews who, because of their views of interpretation, made special work of copying exactly these Scriptures and destroying all copies which did not agree with approved texts. The result is that the text which we possess is substantially the so-called Masoretic text which was prepared somewhere in the sixth or seventh century. While this text has also come under the sharp scrutiny and severe criticism of more modern textual scholars, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has proved a remarkable support for it. This is striking because the Dead Sea Scrolls, insofar as they contain books of the Old Testament, date back to a time prior to the incarnation of our Lord. For this reason, we are not devoting any part of this paper to Old Testament textual questions.

In the second place, it must be remembered that between the work of the Elzivir brothers and the work of W-H, a large number of other manuscripts of Scripture have been discovered. The point here is that W-H did their work in the light of many manuscripts which were not known to those who labored at the time of the translation of the KJV.<sup>2</sup>

In the third place, although W-H did original work in the field of textual criticism, their work was preceded by the work of such men as J.A. Bengel (1734) who first suggested the grouping of manuscripts into families. Nevertheless, the work of W-H prevailed and it is their view which has dominated almost completely the field of textual criticism. To their views we now turn.

W-H spun out a rather elaborate theory concerning textual transmission taking into account the various manuscripts of Scripture which were available to them. Somewhat briefly, their theory goes like this.

All the MSS which are available to textual scholars can be divided into three or four groups or families. The reason why this can be done is to be found

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2 This assertion has been challenged by some defenders of the TR, who maintain that the KJV translators did have access to some representatives of other classes of documents and consciously rejected them, believing that the MSS of the TR were the better ones. But there is no substantial proof for this, other than the conscious rejection of the Vulgate translations used in the Roman Catholic Church. Waite, D.A., *The Case For the King James Version of the Bible*, (The Bible for Today, 1971), pp. 31, 32.

in the fact that the church of Christ was spread throughout the entire Mediterranean world in the apostolic and post-apostolic period, and the various segments of the church had only limited contact with each other. Roughly, the church world can be divided into an Antiochan part which includes Asia Minor and the area around Antioch of Syria; the Western part which includes the church of Italy and North Africa; the Egyptian part which is pretty much limited to Egypt and its immediate environs; and the Caesarean segment which includes Palestine and the area immediately north of it. Within these areas different groups of manuscripts developed. Usually, so Hort argued, there was one manuscript, which was either the *Autographa* itself or an immediate descendant of the *Autographa*, used in the area. From this basic manuscript all the other manuscripts were copied and a textual tradition was developed in each area by means of a group of manuscripts which are all very similar to each other, but which differ from other groups which developed in other areas.

Obviously the oldest parent manuscript is no longer available to us any more than the *Autographa*. So W-H spoke of a particular text which, while not itself available, is represented by the manuscripts which were copies of it and which, among themselves, have such remarkable similarities.

These basic texts are four in number: 1) The Western text – represented by D, the Old Latin Manuscripts, an old Syriac translation, and a few cursives; 2) The Neutral text – represented by Aleph, B, cursive 33 and a Bohairic translation; 3) The Syrian or Antiochan Text which is represented by a late mass of uncials and cursives, by a Syriac translation and by some of the later fathers; 4) An Alexandrian Text – not found in pure form in any one MS, but reflected in Aleph, C, L, cursive 33 and a Bohairic translation.<sup>3</sup>

We might note at this point that, although this was the grouping into families suggested by W-H, subsequent scholars have altered and revised that basic scheme – although without fundamentally altering W-H's main point. For example, Streeter proposed a slightly different scheme. The Syrian or Antiochan text of W-H was called Byzantine by Streeter in light of the fact that it was predominantly used in the old Byzantine Empire. The Neutral Text of W-H was called Alexandrian in something less than humble recognition of the validity of the criticism which had been leveled against that term. Hort had called the text used in Egypt "Neutral" because he was convinced that it alone was a pure text, without corruptions of any significant kind. But this proved

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<sup>3</sup> Uncial MSS are designated by a capital letter or by the word "aleph" and are the MSS which are the oldest and written in capitals; cursive MSS are the later MSS and are written in a free-flowing hand.

to be a bit too much of a boast, and it was thought best to alter the name. Streeter rejected altogether W-H's Alexandrian text and divided W-H's Western text into four sub-families: 1) A Western Text which was subdivided into a) a text from Italy and Gaul represented by D, a, b; b) a text from Carthage represented by k, c; 2) An Eastern Western text subdivided into: a) a text from Antioch represented by a couple of Syriac translations; b) a text from Caesarea represented by Theta and Cursive 565.<sup>4</sup>

Since the time of Streeter some other, less important, suggestions for change have been made, but they need not concern us here.

As far as the relationship and relative worth of these families are concerned, W-H were of the opinion that the Western text is the oldest of all texts and perhaps lies behind the others, at least in some measure. However, because the Western text was prepared at a time when scribes played fast and loose with their copies and introduced into the text innumerable mistakes, the Western text is not very reliable and is of little worth in textual criticism. The Neutral text, which developed in Egypt, is far and away the purest text. Its parent goes back to the first part of the second century and perhaps even into the first. It was especially preserved from error and it is exceptionally reliable. The readings of the Neutral text must nearly always be accepted as the correct reading.

The Byzantine Text, however, (or Antiochan Text, as Hort called it)<sup>5</sup> was the least trustworthy of all the texts. It was the least trustworthy because it was a text which was probably prepared by a church father named Lucian between the years 300 and 350. Hort theorized that there were many different copies floating around at about that time. To give some uniformity to the copies of the New Testament, Lucian prepared a copy which was subsequently approved by the churches in that area and which gradually gained more general approval as its advantages were seen. It was, however, a poor text because the many "rough" sentences were smoothed out and if there were two different readings in a given place in the available masters, both readings were included in the text to become what is known as "conflate readings." Hort considered this text to be the worst of all and referred to it as that "vile *Textus Receptus*."

It is particularly this family of MSS which became known as the TR and which lies behind our KJ translation of the Bible.

The question we now face is this: how did W-H divide the MSS into

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4 In this division the small letters such as "k" and "c" represent old Latin translations.

5 Many different names have been given to this family including these two: Syrian text, Majority text, *Textus Receptus*. Henceforth we will refer to it as M-text or Majority text.

families? What *principium divisionis* did they use? And what was the determining element in their evaluation of the different groups?

The answer to the first question is, very simply, similarity between documents. Those documents which show a certain amount of identity and certain similarities especially in places where they differ from other documents were, on the basis of these similarities, grouped together into one family. While this seems like a reasonable way to do things, it nevertheless remains a fact that there is no unanimity of opinion on Hort's thesis concerning division of MSS; and, in fact, the whole idea has become so extremely doubtful that the new Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek New Testament no longer uses this classification (except in the Byzantine text, which it calls the Majority Text) but lists the MSS individually even though the text itself is basically the text preferred by W-H.

The answer to the second question is much more important, for it leads us into the very heart of the debate. There were really two grounds that W-H used in deciding which text is the best text. The first ground is the antiquity of the MSS. Notice, I used the word "Manuscripts" here. This was deliberately done. There really is no definite way to determine the antiquity of the *text* which lies behind the available MSS. Hort speculated that the text behind Aleph and B, i.e., the Neutral text, goes back to the first part of the second century and perhaps even earlier. He also speculated that the text behind the MSS which form the TR is a late text, a so-called Lucian Recension. But while we must examine these matters further a bit later, the fact remains that the antiquity of the *text* is a matter of speculation. The value of the various texts is determined by the antiquity of the MSS which represent that text. Hence, Hort considered the Neutral text to be superior because the MSS Aleph and B (the chief representatives of the Neutral text) both date from the fourth or fifth century. Most MSS of the Majority Text are of a later date. So, although the MSS of the Neutral family are far fewer in number than the MSS of the Byzantine family, antiquity makes them better.

Secondly, W-H favored the Neutral text on the grounds of internal evidence. This involves several different points. In the first place, W-H reasoned that usually the shorter of two readings is the correct one because a scribe, wanting to smooth out the text (or clarify a passage that seemed to him obscure, or harmonize a passage with another), would be more inclined to add to the text than take away from it. In the second place, Hort reasoned that the reading which best fit the context, i.e., which best fit the thought, style and word usage of the author was the correct reading. This argument was based simply on stylistic consistency. Thirdly, Hort reasoned that that reading was to

be preferred which best explained the alternate reading. If, e.g., it could be shown that one reading in the text was due to the fact that a scribe jumped over a complete line and omitted in his copy a complete line, then the reading which omitted that line could be explained and the alternate reading would be the approved one. The point is that, taking these judgments into account, that reading was to be preferred which made the best sense, which took into account the errors a copyist was likely to make and which could best explain the other reading.

Applying these criteria to the various families of MSS, Hort came to the conclusion that the Neutral text was far and away to be preferred, while the M-text was a relatively poor text which ought to be rejected when it conflicts with MSS from the Neutral family.

Thirdly, Hort argued the superiority of the Neutral text on the grounds that no Syrian or Byzantine readings are found in the writings of the Ante-Nicene fathers, that therefore the text did not exist that early.

It was not difficult to understand why the best text survived in Egypt, the home of the Neutral text. Egypt was isolated from the empire for the most part and therefore would not have as much trouble keeping its transmission of texts pure and unaffected by other lines of transmission. And Egypt had a tradition of textual accuracy of transmission.

These theories of W-H prevailed in the world of textual criticism. In fact, they prevailed so completely that the whole field was dominated by their theories. This is not to say that there were not those who raised their voices of protest; but the fact remains that every modern translation of the Bible, beginning with the Revised Version of 1881 up to and including the New International Version, is based upon the W-H text. So completely have these theories dominated that there is not even a critical edition of the New Testament available at present which makes use of another text than that of W-H.

Nevertheless, the theories of W-H have not gone unchallenged. Already at the time these men were doing their work, their views were sharply criticized and the TR was defended by John W. Burgon, better known as Dean Burgon. Although his works and writings were, for the most part, ignored by the majority of textual critics, these works have become the cornerstone of many modern defenses of the TR and the KJV. Notable among the defenders of Burgon's views are Edward F. Hills, D.A. Waite and The Trinitarian Bible Society. In more recent years, two outstanding scholars have also written in defense of the TR and KJV who, although leaning somewhat on the work of Burgon, have nevertheless also made original contributions to the debate. I refer to the works of Wilbur N. Pickering and Jakob Van Bruggen. These latter have written

without the sometimes shrill and overstated arguments which characterize other defenders of the TR and have stated the case for the TR in persuasive and scholarly fashion.

The debate has increased in intensity in recent years and has forced us to take a new look at the arguments. So much is the whole question once again in a condition of turmoil and unrest that Van Bruggen argues that the only reason the W-H text is still used today is because no other text can be agreed upon.<sup>6</sup>

And so we can pinpoint the essential elements in the debate.

The debate centers in the accuracy and integrity of the Neutral or Alexandrian Text over against the M-text. The former is chiefly represented by Aleph and B; the latter by a large number of uncials and cursives which all agree with each other to a remarkable degree.

Notice that very little mention is made of the so-called Western text in this connection, represented chiefly by D and various Latin translations. This text is usually ignored in the debate because all participants, on whatever side they line up, agree that the Western family is an unreliable text. Neither the defenders of the Alexandrian text nor the defenders of the TR want a great deal to do with it. Yet even Hort was prompted to say concerning D that it represented a very ancient and good text; and in recent years D has staged something of a comeback and scholars are studying it once again. But we cannot in this paper go into this question, which deserves another study.

## THE ISSUES IN THE ARGUMENT

Having now defined the problem, we turn to the arguments which have been raised on both sides of the issue to try to evaluate them and come to some conclusions about them.

A few introductory remarks must first be made.

In the first place, we shall concentrate in this section on the arguments which are raised in support of the TR since we have already discussed the arguments of W-H in support of their theories.

In the second place, the debate has often become rancorous and the language exchanged between the two camps sharp and ill-considered. This is chiefly due to the fact that the defenders of the Alexandrian text have often considered the TR to be a seriously flawed text and unworthy of use. Many have agreed with Hort that it is a "vile" text. On the other hand, the defenders of the TR have often done the same and made charges against the Alexandrian text which simply will not hold up. They consider the Alexandrian text to be

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6 *The Ancient Text of the New Testament* (Premier), p. 10.

corrupted deliberately, to be the product of heretics, to be a deliberate attempt to erase from the Scriptures key doctrines of the Christian faith including the truth of the deity of Christ. They have, in their words, cast doctrinal suspicions on any one who makes any use of any other text than that of the TR and consider the TR to be itself divinely inspired. With these sharp exchanges we disagree.

In the third place, there have been certain arguments raised over the years in defense of the TR which we ought briefly to notice, but which we put in the class of those arguments which are so poor that they do more harm to the cause of the truth than good arguments against the truth.

To these latter we turn first of all.

There have been some defenders of the TR who have argued that the continuous use of the M-text from the fourth or fifth century to the sixteenth is proof of its integrity. They reason that if the Alexandrian text were a pure and uncorrupted text, it would have been the text used in the church. The continuous use of the text by the church, therefore, guarantees that it is pure.

Now this argument is based on two assumptions. The first is that the Alexandrian text is not only a corrupt text, but that it was deliberately corrupted. While we shall look a bit closer at this question in a moment, this has not been satisfactorily proved. The second assumption is that the TR approaches an infallible text. Now it is true that not all defenders of the TR would go to this extreme. But, nevertheless, it is a position suggested by many and is an integral part of the argument. Waite, e.g., writes:

Hills, quoting Burgon, tied in the unbroken chain of USE of the Traditional, Received, Majority, Byzantine Text with the doctrine of "DIVINE INSPIRATION AND PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE." He wrote: "The Byzantine Text, he maintained (that is, Burgon), is the TRUE TEXT because it is that form of the Greek New Testament which is known to have been used in the Church of Christ in UNBROKEN SUCCESSION FOR MANY CENTURIES, first in the Greek Church and then in The Protestant Church. And all orthodox Christians, all Christians who show due regard for the DIVINE INSPIRATION AND PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE, must agree with Burgon on this matter. For in what other way can it be that Christ has fulfilled His promise always to preserve in His Church the true New Testament Text?"<sup>7</sup>

While we certainly agree with the truth of divine inspiration and firmly believe that this inspiration is verbal, infallible and inerrant, and while we too

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7 See *Which Bible?*, edited by D.O. Fuller, (International Publications), p. 110.



stand in awe with gratitude before the wonder of God's providential preservation of the text, the fact nevertheless remains that it is dangerous and harmful to say or even suggest that the TR or M-text is an infallibly inspired text. Only the *Autographa* are so inspired.

A second group of arguments in favor of the TR centers in the question of whether the Alexandrian text contains deliberate corruptions. Many defenders of the M-text insist that this is so. There are three or four lines of argumentation which are followed and which we ought to notice.

The argument is that there exists evidence that the Alexandrian text was deliberately corrupted by heretics in the first 200 years of the Church's existence. The proof points first of all to the fact that there did exist heretics in the early church who denied the truth. Some of the heretics pointed to are Marcion, Justin Martyr, and Origen. Marcion especially is said to be a cuplrit because he, admittedly, played fast and loose with the Scriptures and altered them to suit his fancy.

While we admit that these heretics existed and while we also agree with the evaluation of Marcion, nevertheless the proof is not conclusive. It is an unwarranted jump to argue from the presence of heretics in the church to the corruption of the Alexandrian text. Even the instance of Marcion is not conclusive proof because the heresy of Marcion and his damage to the Scriptures would have left a Scriptural text far and away more mutilated than any Scriptural MS now in existence.

In support of this position reference is made to Eusebius' *The History of the Church*. In Book V, paragraph 28 Eusebius speaks of men who corrupted and distorted the text of Scripture in defense of their heresies.<sup>8</sup> The difficulty with this quote is that Eusebius also tells us in that paragraph that the church of his time knew that these corruptions existed and had condemned them. But Eusebius was a contemporary of the Council of Nicea (325) and lived earlier than the preparation of Aleph and B. It would be strange in the extreme, therefore, that the scribes of Aleph and B used texts already disapproved by the church. This is the more true if it is correct that Aleph and B are the survivors of the 50 copies of the Bible ordered made by Constantine the Great.

Secondly, the argument is raised that if Aleph and B constitute the purest text, then the Bible was lost for fifteen hundred years because these MSS were not used in the church at large until they were discovered in modern times. But this argument too, hinges on the additional argument that either the M-text or the Alexandrian text is the true Scripture while the other is a horrible corruption. This we deny.

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8 Penguin Classics Edition, 1967, pp. 237, 238.

In the third place, the argument is raised in support of deliberate corruption of the text that the Alexandrian text is considerably shorter than the M-text and that this is due to the fact that the Alexandrian text has been tampered with in efforts to erase from it several important doctrines, chief of which is the doctrine of the divinity of Christ.

In support of this a number of instances are cited. There are three remarks which can be made about this. 1) If the corrupters of the Alexandrian text really wanted to take from their MSS references to the divinity of Christ, they failed utterly because this doctrine can be maintained on the basis of the Alexandrian text as strongly as on the basis of any other. 2) The references to individual texts are often not conclusive. For example, many texts are referred to which in the M-text have the name "Lord" along with "Jesus Christ" where this name is absent in the Alexandrian text. 3) There are at least a few places where the Alexandrian text has stronger support for the divinity of Christ than the reading of the M-text. I refer, e.g., to John 1:18 where the M-text reads, "the only begotten Son," while Aleph, B and C read: "only begotten God."

In connection with this whole matter of the corruption of the Alexandrian class, several other very weak and sometimes mistaken arguments are made. We mention a few.

Edward Hill, in connecting the pure transmission of the text with the determination of the Canon, argues that just as the church was guided by the Spirit in determining the Canon of Scripture, so it was guided in the transmission of the text. He writes:

First, God gave to His Church the twenty-seven New Testament books through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and then through the Spirit also He began to lead the Church into a recognition of these books as her canonical New Testament Scripture. During the second century, however, Satan endeavored to confuse the Church by raising up deceitful men who wrote pseudonymous works, falsely claiming to be apostolic. These satanic devices hindered and delayed the Church's recognition of the true New Testament canon but could not prevent it. Soon after the beginning of the fifth century the opposition of the devil was completely overcome. Under the leading of the Holy Spirit the Church was guided to receive only the twenty-seven New Testament books as canonical and reject all others.

Dean Burgon believed that the history of the New Testament text was similar to the history of the New Testament canon. . . .<sup>9</sup>

The trouble with this argument is that: 1) The decisions concerning the

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9 D.O. Fuller, *Op. cit.*, pp. 98, 99.

Canon were made in the later part of the fourth century at the Councils of Carthage and Hippo; 2) That while these Councils listed the same books we include in the Canon, they also included the Old Testament Apocrypha; 3) That listing was preserved unchanged in the Church till the time of the Reformation.<sup>10</sup>

Still in connection with this same matter, defenders of the TR are often wont to prove the inferiority of the Alexandrian text on the ground that W-H who approved it, were themselves heretics and higher critics of Scripture. While there may be some truth to this allegation, the trouble is that these same defenders also praise Erasmus, who was so influential in the formation of the TR, for his commitment to the truth.<sup>11</sup> But Erasmus, the prince of the humanists, could no more be considered a faithful son of the church than Westcott and Hort. If W-H's work is suspect because of their heretical leanings, the same must be said of the TR.

Finally, the vendetta against the Alexandrian text carries some into strange reasonings concerning Scripture. Sir Robert Anderson gives an instance of "reckless and erroneous alteration of the text" by referring to Luke 2:14. He writes:

The instance I select is "the Herald Angels' song," and I choose it not only as being thoroughly typical of the methods of the Revisers, but also because of its importance and interest attaching to it. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men": for these words, which hold such a place in the memory and heart of every English-speaking Christian, the miserable substitute offered us is, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased." This one piece of mutilation might suffice to discredit the work of the Revisers.

Two questions are here involved, the altered text, and the translation of that text. The English of the Revisers, says one of the most eminent of their own number, "can be arrived at only through some process which would make any phrase bear almost any meaning the translator might like to put upon it." "'Men in whom He is well pleased,'" says the editor of *The Speaker's Commentary*, "seems to me impossible as a translation of their text. I do not know whether those Greek words have *any* meaning, but if they have they must designate men of a certain quality or character." Then, as regards the text, the whole difference is the addition of the letter *s* to the word *eudokia*; and the manuscript authority for this addition is the reading of four ancient Greek MSS, *every other known copy of the Gospels being against it*.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. III, p. 609.

11 Cf. Fuller, *op. cit.*, pp. 225, 275.

12 *Ibid*, pp. 121, 122.

The trouble here is that, apart from the fact that the MS evidence is greater than just four ancient MSS, this is called a corruption of the text which even introduces a senseless reading, while the fact of the matter is that the reading rejected by Anderson is, whether supported by the best MSS or not, a powerful and general Scriptural truth: God gives His peace to men in whom He is well-pleased.

But enough of this. We ought now to turn to other arguments, more serious and more persuasive.<sup>13</sup>

We will treat some of the less important arguments first which nevertheless carry some weight in the consideration of the question.

A great deal of weight was placed by W-H on the division of MSS into families. Yet this has proved to be a highly risky and speculative work. Within the last few years W-H's efforts have been almost completely abandoned, even by those who rely heavily upon the textual evidence of Aleph and B. So much is this true that even the new edition of Nestle-Aland recognizes only the M-text, and some even dispute this. W-H never produced any charts which show any evidence of work in comparing the MSS according to similarities; the theories of division have proved so varied, the traffic of people (and presumably MSS) between different parts of the church so extensive, that this whole theory is, at best, in a state of disarray, and perhaps even forgotten altogether. The only family recognized by almost all is the Byzantine family; and this only because it is clear from the objective data of history itself that one family was used in the church from at least the seventh till the sixteenth century.

There is no question about it that far and away the majority of the MSS belong to the M-text. Some estimate that between seventy-five and ninety percent of all MSS belong to this class. There is force to the argument that the evidence of hundreds of MSS must not be set aside in favor of four or five, even though the four or five may be older.

This point, however, warrants a bit more discussion. W-H were well aware of this, but argued that it was not the number of MSS which was important, but their quality. Although it is true that the M-text embraces perhaps as much as ninety percent of available MSS (and Van Bruggen claims that their number is increasing), the four or five MSS upon which W-H based their text are older. That is, apart from a few papyrus MSS, Aleph and B are the oldest MSS available. So oldness in this case means correctness.

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13 I will not always make specific reference to the places where these arguments are found. Most of them are taken from the works of Van Bruggen and Pickering cited in the Bibliography.

But this is not the whole story. There are other considerations which enter in. For one thing, not the antiquity of the MSS is the important thing, but the antiquity of the *text* which they represent. W-H argued that Aleph and B represented the oldest text. But this has never been proved. It may be, but it is just as likely that the M-text is the oldest. No one can tell.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, the fact that Aleph and B are older may simply be due to the fact that they were both from Egypt where the climate is dry enough to be suitable for the preservation of MSS. It is not difficult to see why MSS in Egypt would last longer than in Asia Minor.

Thirdly, some have raised other points to explain why the Byzantine MSS are not as old as Aleph and B. Among these are: 1) The uncials of the M-text may have been destroyed when copies were made of them. 2) Because they were more extensively used they wore out more quickly than Aleph and B. 3) In fact, it is possible that Aleph and B were not as extensively used just because they were not as accurate as the MSS of the M-text. 4) It would be reasonable to expect that the most accurate MSS would also be the most copied, while the least accurate would be the least copied. 5) Because persecution was intense in Asia Minor until A.D. 314 many MSS of the M-text may have been destroyed.

Now, these arguments are not always in themselves completely persuasive, but they do, taken together, suggest other explanations for the lateness of the M-text and the multiplicity of MSS which belong to this class. Whether you accept all the arguments or not, it is clear that they are as cogent as any W-H raised in defense of Aleph and B.

W-H asserted that one proof for the lateness of the text of Syria was the lack of readings from this text in the Ante-Nicene church fathers. He claimed that most church fathers used the Alexandrian text. But this has been sharply disputed by others and there seems to be conclusive proof that this claim of W-H is not true.

Pickering especially argues that the most reliable copies of the *Autographa* would be in the area where the *Autographa* were sent. This would be Asia Minor and Greece, while the least would have been sent to Egypt. But Asia Minor is exactly that area where the M-text originated while Egypt is considered to be the place where Aleph and B originated. Pickering argues that Asia Minor was the center from which a stream of transmission flowed into all the church.

It has been correctly pointed out that there is remarkable similarity between the documents of the M-text, while there are thousands of differences

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14 There are other considerations that enter here, but they will be treated presently.

between Aleph, A, B, C, and D. Waite claims there are over three thousand differences between Aleph and B alone. While this not only argues against forming a family of Aleph and B, it also points out that W-H's whole argument in support of the Alexandrian class was very weak.

But there are especially two arguments of W-H which we have not yet considered and which are probably the most important of all. They have been called the twin pillars in the temple of textual criticism.

The first has to do with W-H's method of working. In the work of dividing the MSS into families and in the evaluating of the MSS W-H relied heavily upon the internal evidence of the MSS. As we mentioned in an earlier part of this paper, this consists of especially two aspects: 1) What reading best fits in the context of the passage? 2) What reading best explains the others? Perhaps we can make this a bit clearer by simplifying the matter. Supposing a man had two documents before him of the same book, but the two did not always agree between themselves. Supposing further that this gentleman who is studying these documents does not know the age of the two, does not know which is the most accurate and certainly does not know which reading is the correct one where the two differ. All he knows is that they are both copies of another book. How will he have to go about trying to determine which is the most accurate? To find out the age might help, but not necessarily because the scribe of the later copy might have been more careful in his work. He must begin, W-H say, by seeing which reading, where the two differ, best fits the context and which reading best explains the other. If, e.g., the one reading can be explained as an understandable misspelling, then it is obvious that the other one is correct.

Now it ought to be evident to anyone who thinks about it a bit that this is an extremely subjective and highly speculative way to work. On the basis of this method it is almost impossible to come to any firm conclusions. And yet the whole theory of W-H is based on exactly this method.

The next argument is the argument based on the "Lucian Recension." If the arguments of internal evidence are the two pillars in W-H's temple, then this argument has got to be the cornerstone. Really all W-H's theory stands or falls on this basis.

What is this argument and what is the evidence for it? Hort argued that somewhere between A.D. 300 and 325 a MS was prepared under the direction of the church in the area of Syria or Asia Minor, perhaps by Lucian, which was intended to be an authorized text and which was to be prepared in the light of the fact that many different texts existed. The editor of this text had many different MSS before him and, in the preparation of his text, he sometimes combined the readings of one or more texts (conflate readings) and many times

smoothed out the rough spots in the text. The result is a sort of authorized text which was filled with conflate readings and changes to make a smooth and easy-flowing text. This is the main reason why the M-text is a late and untrustworthy text. And, indeed, if this theory can be proved, this is a powerful argument against the M-text.

The trouble is that this argument is also mostly speculation. It is based on two other arguments: 1) The internal evidence of the M-text and, 2) A few quotations from some church fathers.

As far as the internal evidence is concerned we notice the following: 1) It is as subjective and speculative as the internal evidence supporting the Alexandrian text. 2) While there are conflate readings in the TR, W-H pointed out only eight. There are not that many more, and at least that many conflate readings can be found in Aleph and B. 3) The smoothness of the text certainly cannot be an argument against its integrity. So this part of the argument in favor of the Lucian Recension simply will not do.

What is the evidence for a "Lucian Recension"? Metzger gives such evidence as there is in his book, *Chapters in the History of New Testament Textual Criticism*. We quote the following from him. He quotes Jerome as speaking of different editions of the Greek New Testament concerning which, "Constantinople to Antioch approves the copies (containing the text) of Lucian the martyr."<sup>15</sup> Jerome is also quoted as saying of Lucian that he was "so diligent in the study of the Scriptures that even now certain copies of the Scriptures bear the name of Lucian."<sup>16</sup> Again Metzger writes:

Information of the widespread use of Lucian's recension of the Psalter is contained in Jerome's letter to Sunnias and Fretula (about A.D. 403). These two Gothic churchmen had inquired of Jerome why his own Latin Psalter (the so-called Roman Psalter) differed so frequently from the Septuagint. In his reply Jerome points out that they have been misled by their edition of the Septuagint, which varied widely from the critical text of Origen given in the Hexapla and used by himself. Jerome writes: "You must know that there is one edition which Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea and all the Greek commentators call *Koinee*, that is common and widespread, and is by more people now called Lucianic; and there is another, that of the Septuagint, which is found in the manuscripts of the Hexapla, and indicates that the former met with such universal acceptance that it received the name of the Vulgate or common text."<sup>17</sup>

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15 page 4.

16 page 4.

17 page 5.

Metzger further refers to pseudo-Athanasius who said: "Using the earlier editions (i.e., of Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus) and the Hebrew, and having accurately surveyed the expressions which fell short of or went beyond the truth, and having corrected them in their proper places, he published them for the Christian brethren." He also quotes the Menacon<sup>18</sup> as referring to Lucian who "made a copy with his own hand of both the Old and New Testaments, written in three columns, which afterwards belonged to the Church of Nicomedia."<sup>19</sup>

These quotes certainly support the fact that Lucian was busy with the text of the Scriptures and that he apparently also worked at copying. But there is nothing in these quotes to support a recension on the order of W-H's theory. Even Metzger, an ardent supporter of the W-H text, admits as much.

By way of summarizing ancient testimonies concerning Lucian's textual work, we find that his contemporaries generally regarded him as an able scholar, entirely competent to undertake such a recension. As a native Syrian he could, of course, have consulted the Syriac version. . . . But we are told nothing as to the amount of revision which he undertook in either Old or New Testament text, the nature of the manuscripts which he consulted, the relation of his work to the Hexapla (of Jerome, HII), and other similar matters. For information bearing on such problems, we must turn to the manuscripts which have been thought to contain the Lucian recension.<sup>20</sup>

Zane C. Hodges goes so far as to say that the idea of a Lucian Recension has all but been abandoned, and, in a footnote to what he writes, he claims that even Metzger no longer speaks of it.<sup>21</sup>

All of this leaves very little of the theories of W-H and of the superiority of the Alexandrian text. The time has come, therefore, to restore the M-text to its original place of respect.

## CONCLUSIONS

From here, where?

Most of us, if not all, have been followers of the ideas of W-H and, as far as our practical work in textual criticism is concerned, have, generally speaking, given priority at least to B and certainly to Aleph and B when they stood together.

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18 A liturgical volume which includes short accounts of saints and scholars.

19 pages 5, 6.

20 pages 6, 7.

21 Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 32.



What now?

There are, of course, several alternatives.

We can, as many have done, become slavish devotees of the M-text and simply accept the M-text without any question in any place where other MSS disagree with it. But this will not quite do. There are several problems in this approach. It is a tacit acceptance of the argument that the M-text cannot err and that comes very close to saying it is inspired. Further, the M-text does not always agree within its own family. What then must be done? This is especially true of Revelation where even defenders of the M-text speak of two classes of documents within the M-text tradition.

On the other hand, we can weigh the evidence of all manuscripts, translations, lectionaries and church fathers giving all an equal hearing and considering all MSS of relatively equal integrity – given their age, pedigree, etc. This will result in what is called an eclectic text. Many are not satisfied with this and suggest that it is a compromise which, from a practical point of view, ends up with adopting W-H after all.<sup>22</sup>

Burgon, already at the time of W-H, suggested seven rules to determine the correct reading. For a reading to be authentic it must have: 1) Antiquity or primitiveness; 2) Consent of witnesses or number; 3) Variety of evidence or catholicity; 4) Respectability of witnesses or weight; 5) Continuity or unbroken tradition; 6) Evidence of entire passage or context; 7) Internal considerations or reasonableness. Pickering has substantially adopted these. He gives the following guide lines to help find the correct reading. The correct reading must be old, although this is not enough. It must have the support of the majority of witnesses. It must have a wide variety of witnesses from many geographical areas. It must have different kinds of witnesses such as MSS, fathers, versions and lectionaries. It must have continuity, i.e., support throughout the period of transmission. And it must be in agreement with the context of the passage.

It is clear from these suggestions that neither Burgon nor Pickering suggest a slavish following of the M-text. In fact, from a certain point of view, to follow these suggestions will result in some sort of an eclectic text, although their conviction is, of course, that in general the M-text best meets all the above requirements. Both also allow for internal considerations, although these are at the end of the list. As such they are acceptable.

We offer the following guidelines for your consideration, agreeing that the rules mentioned above are basically sound.

1) The whole idea of families must be abandoned with the exception of the M-text.

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22 Pickering, *op. cit.*, pp. 25ff.

2) No MS must be ruled out automatically on the basis of being corrupted. There just is insufficient evidence to prove this.

3) Generally speaking and for all practical purposes the older the MS the better it will be. But this argument must be used with caution since there is weight and value to the arguments explaining the greater antiquity of Aleph and B in relation to the M-text.

4) The variety of witnesses (different kinds and from different geographical areas) is more important than the number of witnesses.

5) The M-text must be considered an excellent text, no doubt even the best. But it cannot stand alone against all other MS evidence.

6) If internal evidence is used, several considerations must be kept in mind.

a) It must be kept strictly subordinate to external evidence. That is, it must be considered only after the external evidence has been weighed and it must be strictly supportive. No reading may be adopted only on the basis of internal evidence — as is often done in the W-H text.

b) The following rules do or do not apply:

1) The shorter text is not necessarily the better and the rule that it is ought to be abandoned.

2) Conflate readings need not necessarily be abandoned. The evidence for all three possibilities must be carefully considered.<sup>23</sup> It remains possible, however, that a conflate reading is exactly that and therefore must be rejected.

3) It is true that the reading which can best explain the others is usually preferable; but this rule is very difficult to put into practice, involves a great deal of subjective judgment and often can cut both ways in a reading. It ought to be used with caution.

4) In the gospels the variation from parallel passages is to be preferred.

In conclusion, however, let us once more remind ourselves that we must not give an importance to textual criticism which is out of proportion to its value. Let us be humbly thankful to God that we have the Scriptures and that He has graciously preserved them for us and for the church of all ages. And let us be confident that the text underlying the KJV is, after all, the single best text of Scripture.

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23 Notice that there is a "poisoning of the wells" in the very word "conflate." It presupposes what has to be proved, namely, that the "conflate" reading is a combination of two others found in different MSS.

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## THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Reverend David Engelsma

### INTRODUCTION

The subject of the English translation of the Bible becomes complicated, especially in the unavoidable area of textual criticism. There are some 5,000 manuscripts (MSS) of the Greek New Testament, each with its name, date, and contribution to the New Testament text. This field of study has its jargon ("genealogy"; "text-type"; "conflation"; etc.). The subject plunges us at once into controversy: the King James Version (KJV) versus the modern versions; the majority of MSS versus Vaticanus (B) and Sinaiticus (Aleph) MSS; Burgon versus Westcott and Hort (W-H). Besides, the material is voluminous. Books, pamphlets, and English Bibles multiply. Not only the layman, but also the pastor is inclined to throw up his hands in despair of ever coming to know the subject.

But the subject is obviously of great importance. It concerns the Bible that we use in the church and in our personal life — the very heart of our ecclesiastical and spiritual life.

Nor can we ignore the issue: which English Bible? Many new versions have been published and are clamoring for our acceptance. They demand acceptance on grounds that must be taken seriously: better MS basis; clearer translation; more helpful for the twentieth century church. The advocates of these versions make the sharpest criticisms of the KJV and of our continued use of the KJV. Our people, especially our young people, are affected by the modern versions and their claims. Some begin to use a modern version for private devotions; others carry a modern version to Bible study; and others ask whether it is proper for the family to use a modern version in family devotions.

A survey of the history of the English Bible shows that the KJV was the only English Bible from 1611 to the end of the nineteenth century. In 1881-1885, the Revised Version (RV) was published in England. (The American Standard Version is the American form of the RV, published in 1901). The publication of the RV was a turning point in the history of the English Bible. It was not merely a revision of the KJV, although seemingly this was the expressed intention. But it was a version based on different MSS in the New Testament than those used by the KJ translators. These were the newly

discovered MSS, B and Aleph. The men mainly responsible for the rejection of the MSS used by the KJ translators and for the adoption of B and Aleph were two English scholars, B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort. They were the heroes or the villains in the story of the English Bible from about 1870 to the present time. For the many versions that followed the RV basically adopted the Greek text of the New Testament proposed by W-H. These versions include the Revised Standard Version (RSV); the New English Bible (NEB); Today's English Version (TEV, also known as Good News for Modern Man); and the New International Version (NIV).

It must be noted from the outset, that those who promote the new versions criticize the KJV, not only as an inadequate translation for twentieth century men (e.g., using archaic words), but also as based on an inferior Greek text. Hort, with something less than scholarly objectivity, condemned the Greek text behind the KJV, the *Textus Receptus* (TR), as "vile" and "villainous."

In the past, we preachers have generally defended the KJV as the best English translation, while conceding that the MSS behind the new versions are the best Greek MSS of the New Testament and that they give the better reading in places where they differ with the text behind the KJV. How often, e.g., have we not told our people at Christmas, concerning Luke 2:14, "Now the better reading of the text is, '... and on earth peace to men of good-pleasure' "? This seems to me to be an indefensible, and, in the long run, impossible, position. I will contend in this paper that the KJV is the best English version, not only because it is the best translation (i.e., as regards faithfulness to the Hebrew and Greek of Scripture; clarity; and beauty), but also because it is based on the best MSS — the MSS that faithfully transmit to us the original Scriptures, particularly the Scriptures of the New Testament. We should heed Van Bruggen, Pickering, the Trinitarian Bible Society, Burgon, and others who ask concerning the theory of W-H, whether the emperor has any clothes, and who defend the text of the KJV — the Majority, or Byzantine, or Traditional, Text.

## CRITICISM OF VARIOUS, MODERN ENGLISH VERSIONS

Many of the modern versions are to be criticized apart from the matter of the Greek text of the New Testament.

*The Living Bible*, among its countless faults, is a biased paraphrase of Scripture, in which no regard is shown for the verbal inspiration of the Bible. The human author of this best-selling book, which is neither the Bible nor living, has wilfully and systematically corrupted the passages that teach salvation by sovereign grace (cf. Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28ff.; and Romans 9, throughout). It is a repository of false doctrine.

*Good News for Modern Man*, or TEV, weakens the Deity of Jesus, e.g., in John 1:1 (“Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God”), and in Romans 9:5 (“they are descended from the patriarchs, and Christ, as a human being, belongs to their race. May God, who rules over all, be praised for ever! Amen.”). It translates “virgin” as “girl” in Luke 1:27. It omits “begotten” in John 1:14, 18 and elsewhere in John. As is well known, it systematically translates “blood” as “death,” e.g., in Acts 20:28 (“...Be shepherds of the church of God, which he made his own through the death of his own Son” — where the Godhead of Jesus is also obscured by the translation), thus robbing the church of the precious comfort of the blood-theology of Holy Scripture. Throughout, this version omits, adds, and changes words at its pleasure.

*The New English Bible* is ravaged with theological modernism. In Genesis 1:2, it has a “mighty wind” sweeping over the waters of the chaos. In Isaiah 7:14, “virgin” is translated “young woman.” Isaiah 9:6 raises ancient Arius from the dead: “For a boy has been born for us...and he shall be called in purpose wonderful, in battle God-like...” God is stripped of His sovereignty and the saints, of their comfort at Romans 8:28: “and in everything...he co-operates for good with those who love God...”

*The Revised Standard Version* renders “virgin” as “young woman” in Isaiah 7:14; “from everlasting” as “from ancient days” in Micah 5:2; and “only begotten” as “only” in John 1:14, 18 and elsewhere in John — thus weakening the testimony to the Godhead of Jesus.

Evident in these representative versions is a weakening of Scripture’s testimony to the Godhead of Jesus and, therefore, to the Trinity, and a weakening of Scripture’s teaching of God’s sovereignty. Glaringly evident is the disbelief on the part of the translators of the doctrine of the infallible inspiration of Holy Scripture, extending to all its parts — the doctrine which the church has expressed as “verbal inspiration.” This is the reason why the translators paraphrase Scripture; deliberately falsify the words of Scripture; change the words; and add or omit words.

It is this unbelief concerning Scripture’s inspiration which also accounts for the theory of translating which gains ground today, namely, “dynamic equivalence.” In the interests of putting the language of Scripture into the language that the people of a certain age and culture will understand, this theory permits the translator to depart widely from the very words which God breathed out in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. The reader of a version which has been translated according to the theory of dynamic equivalence cannot be sure that he has God’s Word at any point; the word may well be the word of the translator.

The main proponent of this theory is Eugene A. Nida, who holds important positions in both the United Bible Societies and The American Bible Society.<sup>1</sup> Nida himself indicates how this theory of translation may affect the doctrinal content of the English Bible:

One of the most common interpretations of the atonement has been substitutionary, in the sense that Christ took upon Himself our sins and died in our place as a substitutive sacrifice. This interpretation, true and valuable as it may be for many, is not communicable to many persons today, for they simply do not think in such categories. . . the presentation of the Atonement in terms of reconciliation is more meaningful, since in this way they can understand more readily how God could be in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.<sup>2</sup>

Our objection to this theory of translating does not imply the demand for a literal, word-for-word translation. As Luther, masterful translator of the German Bible, insisted in defense of his own work, translation of Scripture requires the freedom to express the text in the idiom of the people for whom Scripture is being translated. The Bible must be made to speak German, or English, or Chinese. At times, this means that the translator gives up the words of the original Hebrew and Greek and renders the thought of the passage in different words.

. . . at many places we have departed rather freely from the letter of the original. . . . Again in Psalm 68 we ran quite a risk, relinquishing the words and rendering the sense. For this many know-it-alls will criticize us, to be sure, and even some pious souls may take offense. But what is the point of needlessly adhering so scrupulously and stubbornly to words which one cannot understand anyway? Whoever would speak German must not use Hebrew style. Rather he must see to it — once he understands the Hebrew author — that he concentrates on the sense of the text, asking himself, "Pray tell, what do the Germans say in such a situation?" Once he has the German words to serve the purpose, let him drop the Hebrew words and express the meaning freely in the best German he knows.<sup>3</sup>

But this necessary freedom in translating differs essentially from the changing of the text of Scripture by "dynamic equivalence." For even the free translation of Luther was always a faithful rendering of the thought and meaning of the original. Besides, when it came to doctrines, Luther translated literally, keeping strictly to the words of the original. Here, he was willing to sacrifice the German idiom. If, at times, he made the Jews speak German, Luther also made the Germans learn Hebrew.

On the other hand we have at times also translated quite literally — even though we could have rendered the meaning more clearly another

way — because everything turns on these very words. . . .out of respect for . . .doctrine. . .we should keep such words, accustom ourselves to them, and so give place to the Hebrew language where it does a better job than our German.<sup>4</sup> I have been very careful to see that where everything turns on a single passage, I have kept to the original quite literally and have not lightly departed from it.<sup>5</sup>

Luther's concern to be faithful to the inspired Word in translating comes out in his defense of that particular translation which was most vehemently attacked: Romans 3:28. As is well known, Luther's translation "inserted" the word, "only" (German: *allein*). Admittedly, this word does not appear in the original Greek. The Roman Catholics professed outrage and accused Luther of deliberately tampering with the text, in order to buttress his beloved doctrine of justification by faith only. Luther does not admit to any "insertion" of a word into the Bible, without any warrant in the text itself. On the contrary, the word, "only," is called for by the meaning of the text itself and by good German usage. The thought of the apostle Paul in Romans 3:28, justification by faith without the deeds of the law, is that expressed by the word, "only." In addition, good German often uses "only," when an affirmative and a negative statement are contrasted. The word, "only," is not *necessary* in a German translation of Romans 3:28; but it does make Paul's statement "more complete and more intelligible" than would be the case if it were omitted.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to Luther's faithfulness to the inspired Word, "dynamic equivalence" produces versions which change the Word of God, not only as regards words, but also as regards sense, thought, and doctrine. But a Bible is worthless, if it cannot be trusted to give faithfully and reliably the Word inspired by God.

Although a main objection to the New International Version concerns the Greek text of the New Testament used in its translation, also the NIV often fails faithfully to give in English the words of the Hebrew and Greek original. According to David Stark, in a brochure, "Prove all Things," "the whole O.T. is riddled through with textual reconstruction, independent of the *Hebrew Manuscript Authority*. This is done twenty-one times in the Book of First Chronicles, alone!" Van Bruggen writes: "In the N.T., the NIV. . .is also too free in its translation." He illustrates this charge in an "Appendix."<sup>7</sup> Other weaknesses of the NIV are its translation of "only begotten Son" as "one and only Son," or "only Son" (omitting "begotten"), in the Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John and its footnotes which destroy the confidence of the reader in basic teachings of Scripture at crucially important passages. At Romans 9:5, e.g., the NIV translates correctly, ". . .Christ, who is God over all,



forever praised! Amen,," but a footnote casts doubt on this clear teaching of the Deity of Christ: "Or Christ, who is over all. God be forever praised! Or Christ. God who is over all be forever praised!"

Heretical views of Holy Scripture prevail in the churches today, especially among the scholars and theologians. There is the view that the Bible is only the fallible testimony of Israel and of the church to Jehovah and to Jesus of Nazareth. But there is also the view that Scripture as given by God cannot effectively communicate to modern men, or with certain groups of modern men, e.g., the youth. It must be adapted by the church, in order to be able to speak to men today. These low views of the Word of God influence the translation of the Bible. They give the translators license to render Scripture almost as they please. This is seen today in the version being prepared by the National Council of Churches which will filter the Bible through the mind of the women's liberation movement, even though we lose our Heavenly Father and our Elder Brother in the process. I suppose that these translators are sincere and that their work on this version is consistent with their view of Scripture: it must be made to speak to twentieth century "liberated" women, if not to a unisex society. It is not at all inconceivable that future versions will be made to "communicate" with Marxists; proponents of liberation theology; homosexuals; and those who take salvation as a purely this-worldly event.

There is a spiritual issue, here — the issue raised in Isaiah 66:2: "... but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word"; in John 10:35: "...and the scripture cannot be broken"; and in Revelation 22:19: "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

In light of this consideration of a reliable translation alone, how excellent is the KJV. It is a perfectly faithful and reliable translation into English of the Hebrew and Greek original. Men translated it who believed the Bible to be a Divine, and not a human, book, and who believed that God would be able to "communicate" with His people by the words which He inspired, faithfully rendered in English.

Such men are required for the translating of the Bible. It is not enough that they be scholars of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek and adepts in the language into which the Bible is translated; but they must also be godly, orthodox saints who reverence Scripture as the holy Word, wholly God-breathed.

Ah, translating is not every man's skill as the mad saints imagine. It requires a right, devout, honest, sincere, God-fearing, Christian, trained,

informed, and experienced heart. Therefore I hold that no false Christian or factious spirit can be a decent translator.<sup>8</sup>

## THE ISSUE OF THE GREEK TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is impossible, however, to do justice to the subject of the English Bible without treating the issue of the authentic Greek text of the New Testament. (As concerns the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, there is no controversy; there is one Hebrew text — the “Masoretic Text.”) The controversy concerns the Greek text of the New Testament; and the issue makes a significant difference in the New Testament that is put into the hands of the people of God in an English translation.

The facts in the case are these. The KJ translators used Greek MSS that represent the type of Greek text supported by an overwhelming majority of extant Greek MSS of the New Testament. There are, according to Wilbur N. Pickering, more than 5,000 Greek MSS of the New Testament.<sup>9</sup> Eighty to ninety percent of these MSS are in basic agreement among themselves. The Greek text contained in this majority of MSS is known as the Majority Text, the Byzantine Text, or the Traditional Text (TT). The text of the KJV, which belongs to this majority of MSS, but is not perfectly identical with the TT, is known as the *Textus Receptus* (TR) — the “Received Text.” This text was accepted as the authentic text of the New Testament by the Protestant Church from the Reformation to the nineteenth century and by the Greek Church for more than a thousand years before the Reformation. In the nineteenth century, Westcott and Hort asserted the superiority of a type of text represented by a small minority of Greek MSS, particularly Codex Vaticanus (b) and Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph), which had recently been discovered. They made this text, which they called “Neutral” and which is now called “Alexandrian,” the basis of the RV of 1881-1885. Their rejection of the TR and of the TT won the day, not without strong protest, most notably by John W. Burgon, an outstanding scholar in the field of textual criticism in the nineteenth century. All the modern versions, including the NIV, adopt the position of W-H and are based, in the New Testament, upon the text which they proposed. Basically, this is the text found in B and Aleph, especially B.

In his review of Burgon's works, B.B. Warfield remarks that there was some truth in the reproach of Hort, “that he looked upon B as an infallible voice proceeding from the Vatican and upon the combination B Aleph as a manifest deliverance from heaven itself.”<sup>10</sup>

In the past, we (preachers) have accepted the theory of W-H. Herman Hoeksema indicates his acceptance of their position on the New Testament

text and on the work of lower criticism in the rules which he lays down in the syllabus, "Hermeneutics":

- 1) The support of a majority of the manuscripts means little or nothing. The majority of manuscripts is not always a majority of *the oldest and best manuscripts*.
- 2) An older manuscript may represent a more recent reading than a later manuscript. The oldest text is, of course, to be preferred.
- 3) The difficult reading is always to be preferred above an easy reading.
- 4) Always prefer the shorter before the longer reading. . .<sup>11</sup>

Probably, all of us use a Nestle-Aland, United Bible Societies edition of the New Testament. And we are accustomed, now and again, to tell the congregation that a reading in B or Aleph is "better" than the reading of the TT.

At the same time, we stoutly maintain and vigorously defend the KJV.

This is an indefensible position. First, an integral part of the W-H theory is its sharp attack on the KJV. The "preface" of the RSV is typical:

...the KJV has grave defects. . .these defects are so many and so serious as to call for revision of the English translation. . . The KJV of the N.T. was based upon a Greek text that was marred by mistakes, containing the accumulated errors of fourteen centuries of manuscript copying. . .We now possess many more ancient manuscripts of the N.T., and are far better equipped to seek to recover the original wording of the Greek text.

D.A. Carson makes the same charge: "the textual basis of the TR is a small number of haphazardly collected and relatively late minuscule manuscripts. . ."<sup>12</sup> To adopt the W-H theory is to accept this criticism of the KJV.

Second, mere tradition ("We have learned to love the KJV," etc.) cannot, in the end, hold out against other, vehement attacks being made upon the KJV from conservative and Reformed quarters. Carson writes:

The plain truth of the matter is that the version that is so cherished among senior (sic!) saints who have more or less come to terms with Elizabethan English, is obscure, confusing, and sometimes even incomprehensible to many younger or poorly educated Christians.<sup>13</sup>

He quoted Edwin H. Palmer, spokesman for the NIV, attacking the KJV almost fiercely:

Do not give them a loaf of bread, covered with an inedible, impenetrable crust, fossilized by three and a half centuries. Give them the Word of God as fresh and warm and clear as the Holy Spirit gave it to the authors of the Bible. . .For any preacher or theologian who loves God's Word to allow that Word to go on being misunderstood because of the veneration of an archaic, not-understood version of four centuries ago is inexcusable, and almost unconscionable.<sup>14</sup>

Third, we weaken the people's trust in the reliability of the Bible which they use when we so often and so casually say, "The reading of the KJV is wrong; the better reading is. . ." I find evidence of mistrust when, in a debate in a Bible study class, a member will say, "Maybe the Greek is different," or, somewhat cynically, "Probably, the original has something else."

At the very least, we ought to subject the W-H theory to a critical examination. Our love for the KJV and the obvious, serious weaknesses of the modern versions should motivate us to do this. It is to be feared that we and other Reformed men, including the influential Warfield, accepted the views of W-H uncritically, without seeing the weaknesses and implications of their theory.

Perhaps Wilbur N. Pickering is too strong when, having examined the W-H critical theory, he concludes: "It is evidently erroneous at every point."<sup>15</sup> But his careful examination clearly shows that it certainly would not be too strong to conclude that the W-H theory is *unproven* at every point. One cannot but ask, "Why was their theory so readily and widely accepted as gospel-truth in the realm of textual criticism?"

The W-H theory chooses the few older MSS rather than the many later MSS. But it is not proved that the oldest are the best; it is not proved that the oldest MSS contain the authentic text. There is reason to suspect the oldest MSS. All are from one region — Egypt, where the climate allows for the preservation of MSS. The oldest MSS differ greatly from each other; "B and Aleph. . . disagree over 3,000 times in the space of the four Gospels."<sup>16</sup> The very fact that these MSS exist at all may be evidence that the church did not *use* them.

The W-H theory rejects the testimony of the majority of Greek MSS because they are alleged to be a later text. It is now freely admitted by some defenders of the W-H text that the TT is an ancient text, going back at least to the time of B and Aleph. It is demonstrated that Byzantine, or Traditional, readings appear in the MSS and in the church fathers long before Nicea (A.D. 325).

The W-H theory discounts the majority because they are said to be one, common, parent MS. Therefore, the testimony of the many MSS carries little weight. But this dogma of W-H concerning genealogy is not proved. Indeed, there is solid evidence that, although there is essential agreement among the majority of MSS (which are not limited to one region, but are scattered through all parts of Christendom), the Majority MSS are not related genealogically.

The W-H theory attempts to account for the TT and for its dominance by positing a recension of the Greek text by one Lucian of Antioch (d. A.D. 311). A "recension" is a deliberate, editorial revision of the text of Scripture, by which a new text is composed from existing, earlier texts. This revised text,

then, becomes the "official" text used by the church. Bruce M. Metzger notes that the assertion of W-H, that "the Byzantine text is an essentially revised text — following sometimes one, sometimes another of the earlier texts," is the crux of the W-H theory.<sup>17</sup> For at one fell swoop, the TT is judged a later, unreliable, and unauthentic text of Scripture, while at the same time its popularity in the church is accounted for. But this assertion of a recension of the Greek text of the New Testament by Lucian is sheer speculation, devoid of proof.

Similarly ungrounded is the assertion that the dominance of the TT in the Greek Church from the fourth or fifth century on was due to the extraordinary influence of Chrysostom. As the former confidence in a supposed "Lucianic recension" fades, those who reject the TT must look elsewhere for an explanation of the use of the TT by the church. Some look to Chrysostom. This is how Gordon D. Fee attempts to explain the dominance of the TT:

One can scarcely underestimate the influence of Chrysostom in the history of the Greek Church. . . It is almost inevitable that the text form Chrysostom used first at Antioch and then later carried to Constantinople should become the predominant text of the Greek Church.<sup>18</sup>

The W-H theory judges the TT inferior because it exhibits "conflation," i.e., a certain text is supposed to have combined the different readings of two or more MSS. "Conflation is the term used to denote. . . editorial change in which two variant readings of a text are combined forming a new reading not precisely identical with either of the two source readings."<sup>19</sup> The TT was alleged by Hort to be characterized by a combining of the readings of the "Neutral" and of the "Western" texts. As a result, the TT (called "Syrian" by Hort) is a more complete text than the others. This, too, is mere speculation and is rightly challenged, and exploded, today.<sup>20</sup>

The W-H theory charged that the scribes responsible for the form of the TT deliberately added material to the text and simplified hard readings. Hence, two sacred canons (cows?) of textual criticism are that the shorter reading is to be preferred and that the harder reading is to be preferred. On this basis, W-H criticized the TT for "lucidity and completeness," "apparent simplicity," and being "conspicuously a full text." The natural reaction is: Why should not the authentic text, faithfully transmitting the autographa, be lucid, complete, simple, and full? These characteristics are not unworthy of inspired Scripture!

It is this aspect of the W-H theory that may be the most dangerous of all. Called "the internal evidence" of the readings, it really consists of the scholar's judgment as to what the original reading of a given passage probably was. The scholar judges that scribes added material; the scholar decides that scribes simplified passages. There is reason to fear that this subjectivity is manifest

today in the "eclectic" method of establishing the Greek text — a select body of scholars pick and choose readings as suits them. The NIV acknowledges that "the Greek text used in the work of translation was an eclectic one" ("Preface"). Should the church be so at the mercy of the scholars in such a matter as determining the Greek text of the New Testament? Still more, some who develop the W-H theory of textual criticism have come to have doubts about the very possibility of the church's possession of the authentic text of the New Testament. In his "Introduction" to Burgon's *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark*, Edward F. Hills quotes F.C. Conybeare:

the ultimate (N.T.) text, if there ever was one that deserves to be so called, is for ever irrecoverable.<sup>21</sup>

Hills quotes Kirsopp Lake to the same effect:

In spite of the claims of W-H and of von Soden, we do not know the original form of the Gospels, and it is quite likely that we never shall.<sup>22</sup>

Now this may be the personal doubt of scholars who lack the faith that God preserves His Word, seeing to it that not one word falls to the ground; but it may also be the final working out of the very principles of W-H.

It is not correct to minimize the significance of this issue of the Greek text, as though the differences in any case are minor. According to Pickering, there are over 5,000 differences between the TT and the text of W-H. Although many are minor, adoption of the text of W-H means that we lose a sizable portion of the New Testament, including Mark 16:9-20; John 7:53-8:11; and John 5:3b, 4. One can check these passages in TEV or NIV, to see that the modern versions set these passages aside as uninspired. In his convincing work, *The Woman Taken in Adultery and God Was Manifested in the Flesh*, Burgon shows, among other arguments, that the omission of John 7:53-8:11 destroys the coherence of the passage: John 8:12 does not relate to John 7:52.<sup>23</sup> It is significant that the translators of the NIV, feeling the incoherence, were forced to translate 8:12 in a manner wholly unwarranted by any Greek reading: "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said," etc. The KJV reads correctly: "Then spoke Jesus again unto them, saying," etc. The Greek text does not have "when," nor does it have "the people."

Another serious aspect of the issue is the weakening of the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus in the text of W-H. An outstanding instance is I Timothy 3:16, unaccountably omitted from the chart reproduced by D.A. Carson in which he tries to disprove the charge that the modern versions weaken the testimony to the Godhead of Jesus.<sup>24</sup> Where the KJV has "*God* was manifest in the flesh," the text of W-H and the modern versions, including the NIV, have, "He," or "Who," thus nullifying at a crucial point the testimony to the Deity of Jesus

Christ. Textually, the reading, "God," is well-supported; indeed, the support is overwhelming. Aleph stands virtually alone in rejecting the reading, "God." The passage itself demands the reading, "God," just as Isaiah 7:14 requires the translation, "virgin." No more than it is a sign that a young woman has a child is it the great mystery of godliness that "he" is manifest in the flesh. For myself, I will accept no Bible that does not read "God" in I Timothy 3:16. Yet another example is the omission of "the Son of God" in Mark 1:1 by the text of W-H. Where the KJV reads, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," the W-H text reads, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Although the NIV and the New American Standard Bible do translate, "the Son of God," in Mark 1:1, both have weakening footnotes, that some MSS omit these words. Other instances of a weakening of the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus by the W-H text include John 6:69; Acts 8:37; Acts 20:28; and I Corinthians 15:47.

In its fine pamphlet, "The Bible — A Sure Foundation," the Trinitarian Bible Society points out that by its omission of the words, "...and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him. . .," in Luke 24:51, 52, in connection with its omission of the last twelve verses of the Gospel of Mark, the W-H text not only removes a powerful testimony to Jesus' Deity, but also the entire account of the historical event of Jesus' Ascension in the Gospels.

In opposition to the theory of W-H, we should at least consider, with utmost carefulness, the claim of the Greek text in the majority of MSS to be the authentic text of the New Testament Scriptures. This is essentially the text of our KJV. Van Bruggen<sup>25</sup>, Pickering, the TBS, and Burgon<sup>26</sup> before them have convincingly defended the TT on textual grounds. The TT is the text of nineteen-twentieths of the manuscript evidence; it is an ancient text; it is the text found everywhere in Christendom.

And this is the Greek text that the church, in the Providence of God, accepted and used for some 1500 years.

## THE ARGUMENT FROM GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Christ promised His church that she would always have His Word: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). This is necessarily implied in the doctrine of Scripture. If Scripture is God-breathed, as II Timothy 3:16 teaches, God in His Providence will surely preserve Scripture for His church in all ages. The Greek Church maintained the TT for some 1000 years prior to the Reformation. The Protestant Churches accepted it and used it for some 350 years (and some continue to use it to this very day). It is, of course, the text not only of the KJV, but also of Luther's

German Bible and of the Dutch Bible of the Synod of Dordt, as well as others.

How widely this text has prevailed in the actual use of the church, Bruce M. Metzger, himself no advocate of the TT, indicates. It "spread widely throughout Greek speaking lands." It was the text of the first translation of the Bible into a Teutonic language, by Ulphilas, "apostle to the Goths," in the second half of the fourth century. It was the text of the first translation of the Bible into a Slavic language, thus forming "the basis of the New Testament. . . for millions of Slavic peoples." Metzger concludes:

As regards the history of the printed form of the Greek New Testament, the so-called *Textus Receptus*, which was based chiefly on manuscripts of the Antiochian recension (sic), has been reprinted, with only minor modifications, in almost one thousand editions from 1514 down to the twentieth century. When one considers how many translations into the vernaculars of Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America have been based on the Greek *Textus Receptus* of the New Testament (such as the King James version or Luther's translation), it will be appreciated how enormous has been the influence of Lucian's recension (sic), made in Antioch about the turn of the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era.<sup>27</sup>

Although the defenders of the text of W-H and of the modern versions are severely critical of the argument from Providence, it is striking that W-H could never account for the use of the TT by the church after A.D. 300, along with the disuse of the text of B and Aleph. Nor can the present critics of the TT give satisfactory explanation.

It is, at the very least, difficult to imagine that the genuine text went unused and largely unknown for some 1500 years, only to be picked out of a waste-paper basket on Mt. Sinai and discovered in the Pope's library in the nineteenth century (as Burgon sarcastically put it).

The text of B and Aleph, then, is a text which God led the church to reject, just as He led her to reject spurious books from the New Testament canon. The church recognized this text as corrupted by heretics in the time when the doctrines of the Deity of Jesus and of the Trinity were being assailed, and by careless scribes who were prone to omission.

## OUR PRESENT TASK

We ought to renew our gratitude to God for the KJV. Our congregations should be instructed to prize the KJV, not only because of its reliability and other precious characteristics as a translation, but also because it presents the authentic text of the New Testament. We ought to defend it, and repudiate the modern versions, on this ground, as well as others. We should continue to



to use it, and it only, in our churches, homes, personal devotions, and schools, as our English Bible.

We could profitably arrange lectures in which we teach the fascinating history of the English Bible; set forth the worth of the KJV; and warn concerning the dangers of the modern versions.

We preachers should acquire a TR and the Byzantine, or Majority, or Traditional, Text.<sup>28</sup> We should stop referring to B and Aleph as the best text.

We should acquaint ourselves with the work and materials of the Trinitarian Bible Society.

As Van Bruggen points out, there is still room for work in textual criticism, determining the exact text of the majority of MSS.

Is there a need for a new English version based on the TT? In my judgment, this would be warranted only if the English of the KJV is not clear to present readers. It is conceivable that the English language undergoes such change that this is the case. But this is not the case today. The reason for the ignorance of many church-members is not the darkness of the KJV. The proof is our own children. I make bold to say that they, reared solely on the KJV, know more of Scripture than most who use the modern versions. The reason is, first, that the KJV is clear and, second, that they are thoroughly instructed in the truth of Scripture. Lack of good instruction, and not the KJV, is the reason for much ignorance in Protestantism today. As for the few out-dated words in the KJV, let preachers, parents, and school-teachers explain them to the children.

Our main task, therefore, is that which it has always been: preaching, teaching, hearing, reading, and studying Holy Scripture, the God-breathed Word, which, by the grace of God, we have. “. . .from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:15).

#### FOOTNOTES

1 Cf. Jakob Van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible* (Nashville and New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1978), pp. 67ff., 151ff.

2 Eugene A. Nida, *Message and Mission* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 59. Quoted in Theodore P. Letis, “A New Hearing for the Authorized Version” (Springfield, Missouri: Reformation Research Press Inc., 1978), p. 13.

3 Martin Luther, “Defense of the Translation of the Psalms,” *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), pp. 209, 213, 213.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 216.

5 Martin Luther, “On Translating: An Open Letter,” *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 194.

- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 185ff.
- 7 Van Bruggen, *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 169ff.
- 8 Luther, "On Translating: An Open Letter," *op. cit.*, p. 194.
- 9 Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977), p. 16.
- 10 B.B. Warfield, *Critical Reviews* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 29. Warfield enthusiastically embraced the W-H theory and became an influential promoter of the theory in Presbyterian and Reformed circles. Cf. also his *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 236-242, and his *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, a popular textbook.
- 11 pp. 12, 13. The syllabus is published by the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, in Grandville, Michigan.
- 12 D.A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 36.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 102.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 15 Pickering, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- 17 Bruce M. Metzger, *Chapters in the History of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1963), pp. 19, 20.
- 18 Gordon D. Fee, "Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the *Textus Receptus*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, March, 1979, pp. 19-33.
- 19 Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976), p. 41.
- 20 Cf. Pickering, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-62.
- 21 John W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1959), p. 41.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 23 John W. Burgon, *The Woman Taken in Adultery and God Was Manifested in the Flesh*, pp. 235ff. (Neither publisher nor date is given.)
- 24 D.A. Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
- 25 Jakob Van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament* (Winnipeg: Premier Printing Ltd., 1976). Cf. also his *The Future of the Bible*.
- 26 Edward F. Hills has been instrumental in reviving John W. Burgon's defense of the TT and opposition to the W-H theory. Cf. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (Des Moines, Iowa: The Christian Research Press, 1956, 1973).
- 27 Metzger, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-30.
- 28 The TR is available from the Trinitarian Bible Society (Canada), 26 Gracey Blvd., Weston, Ontario M9R 1Z9. The TT is available from D.C. Divry, Inc., 293-7th Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001.

## THE SCOTTISH REFORMERS' VIEW OF THE MAGISTRATE IN THE CHURCH-STATE RELATIONSHIP

Thomas Miersma

While the Reformation in Scotland has many features in common with the Reformation on the Continent, at the same time it has certain aspects which are unique to it. In Germany it was the disposition of the rulers and princes which determined the course of progress of the Reformation and led to the division of that country into Lutheran and Roman Catholic regions. In France and Spain the opposition of the temporal powers ultimately destroyed the Reformation there. In Switzerland the Reformation developed from the people, in connection with the civil government, while the progress of the Reformation in England was controlled by the kings and queens to a larger extent. In Scotland, however, it was particularly the people and the lesser nobility which accomplished the Reformation, and that in the face of sustained opposition from the supreme ruler of the country. In this sense the Reformation in Scotland is unique.

The course of that Reformation may be divided into several phases. There was first of all a pre-Reformation phase, that is preparatory to the Reformation proper, which was characterized by the suppression of the preaching of the gospel by the Roman clergy, including the martyrdom of some notable preachers. The second phase occurred during the regency of Mary of Guise, at which time the reform movement gained momentum and culminated in the official establishment of a Reformed church. There was, following the deposition of Mary from the office of regent, a brief interim of establishment and consolidation. Then followed the rule of Queen Mary which was a period of conflict and trouble. The Reformation in Scotland may be said to close with Mary's abdication and King James VI's accession to the throne (though as an infant), during which period Scotland was ruled by a Protestant regent.

Two factors tend to compound the complexity of the Scottish Reformation. First, during the regency of Mary of Guise, there was a two-fold struggle in the country. Mary was pro-Catholic and pro-French, and accordingly those who opposed her did so from differing motives: either because they were pro-Reformation, or because they were anti-French, and in some cases, pro-English.

In many instances both elements were blended together. The second factor follows from the first: namely, that with the death of the husband of Mary Queen of Scots and her return to Scotland, the problem of pro- or anti-French feeling largely disappeared. This accounts for the apparent defection of many of the nobles from the Protestant cause to the Queen's side. The Queen on her part was determined to maintain Catholicism for herself and to reestablish it in Scotland. Hence the second conflict developed.

These political factors had a significant impact on the direction and shape of the Scottish Reformation. The political interests, factions and conflicts form the background for the Reformation proper. Because of this, one of the key issues in the Scottish Reformation was the biblical idea of the magistrate, and questions regarding the relationship of the subject to the ruler in the context of the Biblical injunction to be subject to the powers that be. There were a number of complexities to this question. Among these were the nature of the magistrate's office, his authority, duties, powers, and the limits of those powers. Further there was the question of the calling of the magistrate at various levels of government, his proper duty to those over him and to the Reformation, and the obedience due to him. The "powers that be" in Scotland at this time did not consist merely of an autocratic monarch, but in addition to the monarch, there were also Parliament, various grades of nobility, city councils, bailiffs, provosts, and other officials, not to mention the role of the semi-political authority of the Roman Catholic prelates and bishops. In addition to this was the fact that during most of the initial period of reformation, Scotland was under the rule of a regent, ordained such by Parliament, namely Mary of Guise. The relation of church and state and the role of the magistrate formed then a predominant element in the history of the Reformation in Scotland.

It is particularly this question of the magistrate which must be discussed therefore in treating the Reformation in Scotland. Because of the complexity of the question, however, and of the history, certain limitations must be laid down.

The key figure in the Scottish Reformation was John Knox, and it is therefore in particular his perspective on and conception of the magistrate which is of chief importance. His *History of the Reformation in Scotland* presents his own perceptions of the issues which are important. Knox himself was not concerned with all that happened, but only with the Reformation proper and that which pertained to it. It is from his point of view that we wish to treat the history in connection with the question concerning the magistrate.

The broader political history was not his concern. He writes in his preface,

And yet, in the beginning, must we crave of all the gentle readers not to look of us such an History as shall express all things that have occurred within this realm during the time of this terrible conflict that has been betwix the saints of God and these bloody wolves who claim to themselves the title of clergy, and to have authority over the souls of men; for with the Policy (editor's note: that is, political affairs; the polity) mind we to meddle no further than it hath Religion mixed with it.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this limitation, Knox still deals with the history in great detail. It is not our intention, however, to go into detail concerning all of the events and movements of that history as many of the conflicts and events in the history were similar in character to one another. During the first major phase under the Regent, Mary of Guise, the shape of that history was largely as follows. Mary of Guise, in order to obtain Parliament's consent to the marriage of Mary Stuart to Francis II, promised by oath that after the bestowal of the crown matrimonial, she would agree to allow the reform of religion to go forward. This oath she broke. The result was an iconoclastic uprising in the town of St. Johnston, in which the Protestant lords of the town and town officials removed the Roman Catholic idols and abolished the mass. In reaction, Mary of Guise surrounded the town with an army of French mercenaries. In discussions with the Protestants, she negotiated a settlement whereby she was permitted to enter the town with the understanding that the reforms taken there would stand. This promise she violated, and upon entering the town, she took it over with the intention of putting the Protestants to death if she could lay hands upon them. The result was that the Protestants and officials fled and that a form of civil war broke out in Scotland between the Queen Regent and her French mercenaries, aided by Scottish Catholics, against the Protestant nobles. It culminated in the Queen's military defeat by the Protestants with the aid of English soldiers, and her deposition from office.

The second major phase of the conflict occurred with the return to Scotland of Mary Queen of Scots after the death of her husband, Francis II of France. At this point, the Reformed religion had been established by Act of Parliament, and idolatry, which included both the worship of saints and the mass, had been outlawed. This act had been passed in the Queen's name. The Queen herself refused to ratify it however, because it was her intent and design to reestablish Roman Catholicism. The consistent point at issue between the Protestants and Mary Queen of Scots became then, first of all, her own private

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<sup>1</sup> John Knox, *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. William Croft Dickinson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), Volume I, p. 6.

idolatry at the mass, which was illegal and which she persisted in practicing, to the offense of the people. In connection with this stood her consistent lying and oath-breaking, her dissolute life and ultimately her apparent connivance at the murder of her second husband, Lord Darnley, at the hands of Bothwell, who then became her third husband through the instrument of an unbiblical divorce on his part, to the added offense of the reformers. The Queen was ultimately forced to abdicate in favor of her son, James VI, and because he was an infant at the time, Scotland was placed under the regency of the Earl of Moray, a Protestant noble. Throughout the periods of both Mary of Guise and Mary Queen of Scots, the royal history was characterized by falsehoods, broken promises, murders, and acts of violence. In the midst of all this was also the perpetual rise and fall of various nobles in the favor of the Queen or Regent, and their replacements. With this background sketch of the history of the period, we will pass from a consideration of the specifics of the history to a consideration of the issues which are our main interest.

In order to understand the nature of Knox's views on the magistrate, which formed the basis of the conduct of the Protestant lords and nobles, and which he shared with his fellow-ministers in Scotland, certain other aspects surrounding the question must be considered. In the mind of the Scottish reformers, the Roman church in Scotland was the kingdom of Antichrist and of Satan. This becomes evident already from Knox's preface where he writes,

It is not unknown, Christian Reader, that the same cloud of ignorance that long hath darkened many realms under this accursed kingdom of that Roman Antichrist, hath also overcovered this poor realm; that idolatry hath been maintained, the blood of innocents hath been shed, and Christ Jesus His eternal truth hath been abhorred, detested, and blasphemed.<sup>1</sup>

In speaking of the persecutions which preceded the Reformation proper, Knox writes, "Thus ceased not Sathan, by all means, to maintain his kingdom of darkness, and to suppress the light of Christ's Evangel."<sup>2</sup>

The bishops or prelates of the Roman Church, whom Knox repeatedly termed the "congregation of Satan," were some of the most corrupt men in Europe. They were given over to murder and robbery of the people, failed to discharge any semblance of office, and were guilty of virtually every vice imaginable. Knox documents this extensively in his *History*. An example of these crimes and gross miscarriages of justice may serve to illustrate this point.

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1     *Ibid.*, p. 5.

2     *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Knox relates the following incident.

At Saint Paul's Day, before the first burning of Edinburgh, came to St. Johnston the governor and cardinal, and there, upon envious delation, were a great number of honest men and women called before the Cardinal, accused of heresy; and albeit that they could be convicted of nothing but only of suspicion that they had eaten a goose upon Friday, four men were adjudged to be hanged, and a woman to be drowned; which cruel and most unjust sentence was without mercy put in execution. The husband was hanged, and the wife, having a sucking babe upon her breast, was drowned.<sup>1</sup>

Over against the Roman Catholics stood the Reformed party and the Reformed church, which as a whole was denominated "the congregation." Knox is not always consistent in his conception of the congregation. At times he speaks of it as if it embraced the whole nation of Scotland. At other times he limits it to the godly in Scotland. Furthermore, Knox's conception of the congregation virtually identifies the church of Christ in Scotland with Israel. He does this not merely in the sense of the organic unity of the church of all ages, but also carries over the manner in which God dealt with Israel under the Old Testament economy. The result of this is that Knox appropriates God's dealings with Israel from the Old Testament and brings them to bear directly upon the contemporary situation. Writing to the nobles, the lords of the congregation, from Dieppe just before his return to Scotland from Geneva, he says,

But this will I add to my former rigour and severity, to wit, if any persuade you, for fear of dangers that may follow, to faint in your former purpose, be he never esteemed so wise and friendly, let him be judged of you both foolish and your mortal enemy: foolish, for because he understandeth nothing of God's approved wisdom; and enemy unto you, because he laboureth to separate you from God's favour; provoking his vengeance and grievous plagues against you, because he would that ye should prefer your worldly rest to God's praise and glory, and the friendship of the wicked to the salvation of your brethren. I am not ignorant that fearful troubles shall ensue your enterprise (as in my former letters I did signify unto you); but O joyful and comfortable are those troubles and adversities, which men sustaineth for accomplishment of God's will, revealed by his word! For how terrible that ever they appear to the judgment of the natural man, yet are they never able to devour nor utterly to consume the sufferers: For the invisible and invincible power of God sustaineth and preserveth, according to his promise, all

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

such as with simplicity do obey him. The subtle craft of Pharaoh, many years joined with his bloody cruelty, was not able to destroy the male children of Israel; neither were the waters of the Red Sea, much less the rage of Pharaoh, able to confound Moses and the company which he conducted; and that because the one had God's promise that they should multiply, and the other had his commandment to enter into such dangers. I would your Wisdoms should consider that our God remaineth one, and is immutable; and that the Church of Christ Jesus hath the same promise of protection and defence that Israel had of multiplication; and further, that no less cause have ye to enter in your former enterprise, than Moses had to go to the presence of Pharaoh; for your subjects, yea, your brethren are oppressed, their bodies and souls held in bondage: and God speaketh to your consciences (unless ye be dead with the blind world) that you ought to hazard your own lives (be it against kings or emperors) for their deliverance.<sup>1</sup>

Of particular interest in this connection is Knox's understanding of the judgments of God, as they manifest themselves temporally. God dealt with the church in Scotland the way he dealt with Israel. When that church sinned or declined from the truth, God sent upon them troubles and distress, even as He sent famine and the sword upon Israel.

This also means that the conflict between the visible church and the visible manifestation of the kingdom of Satan took on a concrete physical form. To perceive that Knox and his contemporaries so understood and interpreted the acts of God's providence is important if one is to understand that which often motivated them in their actions. Describing the period of pre-Reformation, Knox recounts the labors of Master George Wishart in the city of Dundee. Wishart preached there, and was not well received by the people and was ultimately expelled from the city. At his leaving of the city Wishart spoke to the people thus,

"...But and if trouble unlooked for apprehend you, acknowledge the cause and turn to God, for he is merciful. But if ye turn not at the first, he shall visit you with fire and sword." These words pronounced, he came down from the preaching place.<sup>2</sup>

Not long afterward, while Wishart was occupied in Kyle, a plague broke out in Dundee which was extremely vehement in character. Knox quotes Wishart as saying,

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1 *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.



"They are now in trouble, and they need comfort. Perchance this hand of God will make them now to magnify and reverence that word which before (for the fear of men) they set at light price."<sup>1</sup>

When the governor broke his oath to the English and the English retaliated, Knox describes it as the execution of God's judgment. He writes,

This was a part of the punishment which God took upon the realm for infidelity of the Governor, and for the violation of his solemn oath.<sup>2</sup>

Violation of an oath, therefore, brought upon the realm of Scotland God's judgment. When the Regent, who had been deposed, was being besieged by the Protestants at Leith, an assault on the part of the combined Scottish and English forces was repulsed. In the ensuing defeat, Knox relates the following incident.

The French, proud of the victory, stripped naked all the slain, and laid their dead carcasses before the hot sun along their wall, where they suffered them to lie more days nor one: unto the which, when the Queen Regent looked for mirth she happit (editor's note: skipped) and said, "Yonder are the fairest tapestry that ever I saw: I would that the whole fields that is betwix this place and yon, were strewn with the same stuff." This fact was seen of all, and her words were heard of some, and misliked of many. Against the which John Knox spake openly in pulpit, and boldly affirmed, "That God should revenge that contumely done to his image, not only in the furious and godless soldiers, but even in such as rejoiced thereat." And the very experience declared that he was not deceived; for within a few days thereafter (yea some say that same day) began her belly and loathsome legs to swell, and so continued till that God did execute his judgments upon her, as after we shall hear.<sup>3,4</sup>

The disease mentioned by Knox in this case shortly led to the Regent's death.

In the war and at about the same time as the events described above, a fire broke out in the city of Leith which Knox describes as follows,

While the siege thus continued, a sudden fire chanced in Leith, which devoured many houses and mekill victual; and so began God to fight for us, as the Lord Erskine in plain words said to the Queen Regent: "Madam (quoth he), I can see no more, but seeing that man may not expel unjust possessors forth of

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 319.

4 While the historicity of this particular incident may be doubtful, it is the fact that Knox believed it to be true which is of importance here.

this land, God himself will do it; for yon fire is not kindled by man."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, as with Israel of old, it is God Who fights for the congregation. When the kings and princes of the realm violate their oath, God's judgment comes upon the nation physically. Similarly, when idolatry goes unchecked and the Protestants declined from their duty, God sends famine upon the nation, just as He did with Israel. Thus, for tolerating Queen Mary's idolatry in the mass, Knox describes a famine which God sent upon the country. This famine was particularly severe in those regions in which the queen had travelled and the mass had been erected. He writes,

The year of God a thousand five hundred threescore three years, there was a universal dearth in Scotland. But in the northland, where the harvest before the Queen had travelled, there was an extreme famine, in the which many died in that country. The dearth was great over all, but the famine was principally there. . . And so all things appertaining to the sustenation of man, in triple and more exceeded their accustomed prices. And so did God, according to the threatening of his law, punish the idolatry of our wicked Queen, and our ingratitude that suffered her to defile the land with that abomination again, that God so potently had purged by the power of his word. For the riotous feasting and excessive woman repaired, provoked God to strike the staff of bread and to give his malediction upon the fruits of the earth. But, o alas, who looked, or yet looks to the very cause of all our calamities.<sup>2</sup>

In connection with His judgments, God also sent signs and portents of the coming of these judgments. Knox relates accounts of signs in the heavens. Thus during one winter, he describes the appearance of a comet and certain other signs, which he understood to be warnings or omens to the Queen, which the Queen ignored. Thus he writes,

In the end of the next harvest, was seen upon the Borders of England and Scotland a strange fire, which descended from the heaven, and burnt divers corns in both the realms, but most in England. There was presented to the Queen Regent, by Robert Ormiston, a calf having two heads, whereat she scripp'd (editor's note: scoffed) and said, "It was but a common thing."<sup>3</sup>

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1 *Ibid.*, pp. 320-321.

2 John Knox, *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. William Croft Dickinson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), Volume II, pp. 69-70.

3 Knox, Volume I, p. 124.

What is significant about this view is first of all the idea of the direct and visible operation of God's providence, which is conceived of in Old Testament terms as direct visitations of God, and secondly, that this idea lies as a motivating principle behind the actions and concerns of the reformers in Scotland, and this is particularly the case in connection with the sin of idolatry.

In Knox's view, these judgments and signs were not seen merely as precursory signs of Christ's second advent, but also as direct operations of God which had specific revelatory content. They could be interpreted and understood. Famine came upon the land because of idolatry, in particular, the Queen's mass.

The mass, in the view of the reformers and the Protestant lords of Scotland, was idolatry. The preachers from the pulpit declared how odious this idolatry was in God's presence and what commandment He had given for the destruction of the idols in Israel. They declared the law of God concerning idolatry, which was the death of the idolater, and the fierce judgment of God upon the nation which practiced idolatry. It is particularly at this point that the Scottish reformers draw upon the civil legislation given to Israel under the Old Testament economy and apply it directly to the contemporary situation in Scotland. In this they lifted all that was to be found in the Old Testament concerning God's pronouncements against idolatry in Israel and applied it directly to the situation in Scotland. This raised a question in connection with the Queen: whether Mary Queen of Scots could be allowed to have her own private mass or not, and if not, who was to suppress it, since she was the supreme ruler of the land? Further, would such suppression be a rebellion against the powers that be? Thus, in a debate between Knox and Lethington, the following discourse takes place. Lethington speaks first.

"...Our question is, Whether that we may and ought to suppress the Queen's Mass? Or whether her idolatry shall be laid to our charge?

"What ye may (do)," said the other (Knox), "by force, I dispute not; but what ye may and ought to do by God's express commandment, that I can tell. Idolatry ought not only to be suppressed, but the idolater ought to die the death, unless that we will accuse God."

"I know," said Lethington, "the idolater is commanded to die the death; but by whom?"

"By the people of God" said the other; "for the commandment was given to Israel, as ye may read, 'Hear, Israel,' says the Lord, 'the statutes and the ordinances of the Lord thy God,' etc. Yea, a commandment was given, That if it be heard that idolatry is committed in any one city inquisition shall be

taken; and if it be found true, that then the whole body of the people shall arise and destroy that city, sparing in it neither man, woman, nor child."

"But there is no commandment given to the people," said the Secretary, "to punish their King if he be an idolater."

"I find no more privilege granted unto kings," said the other, "by God, more than unto the people, to offend God's majesty."

"I grant," said Lethington; "but yet the people may not be judges unto their King to punish him, albeit he be an idolater."

"God," said the other, "is the Universal Judge, as well unto the King as to the people; so that what his word commands to be punished in the one, is not to be absolved in the other."<sup>1</sup>

It is noteworthy that in this debate the question of the death of the idolater according to the law given to Israel and its application to the then current situation in Scotland is not an issue, but only the way in which the law is to be executed upon the supreme magistrate and by whom.

This same question of rebellion against the powers that be arose in connection with the Regent, Mary of Guise, and the reform movement which was occurring in the country at that time. There again, the law concerning idolatry was involved, but in this instance, it was connected with the question of justice and right judgment upon the part of the magistrate in a fair trial. The Protestants had overthrown the papal worship in parts of the country and removed also the images from some of the churches, particularly in the town of St. Johnston. In response to this they were accused by the Regent of insurrection and rebellion. It is in this context that the congregation writes a letter to the nobility of Scotland. An excerpt from this letter follows.

"TO THE NOBILITY OF SCOTLAND, THE CONGREGATION  
OF CHRIST JESUS WITHIN THE SAME, DESIRES THE  
SPIRIT OF RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT."

Because we are not ignorant that the Nobility of this realm who now persecute us, employing their whole study and force to maintain the kingdom of Sathan, of superstition and idolatry, are yet none the less divided in opinion; WE, the Congregation of Christ Jesus by you unjustly persecuted, have thought good, in one letter, to write unto you severally. Ye are divided, we say, in opinion; for some of you think that we who have taken upon us this enterprise to remove idolatry, and the monuments of the same, to erect the true preaching of Christ Jesus in the

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1 Knox, Volume II, pp. 120-121.

bounds committed to our charges, are heretics, seditious men, and troublers of this common wealth; and therefore that no punishment is sufficient for us: and so, blinded with this rage, and under pretence to serve the Authority, ye proclaim war, and threaten destruction without all order of law against us. To you, we say, that neither your blind zeal, neither yet the colour of authority, shall excuse you in God's presence, who commandeth, "None to suffer death, till that he be openly convicted in judgment to have offended against God, and against his law written," which no mortal creature is able to prove against us: for whatsoever we have done, the same we have done at God's commandment, who plainly commands idolatry, and all monuments of the same to be destroyed and abolished. Our earnest and long request hath been, and is, that in open assembly it may be disputed in presence of indifferent auditors, "Whether religion, which they by fire and sword defend, be the true religion of Christ Jesus or not?" Now, this our humble request denied unto us, our lives are sought in most cruel manner. And ye, the Nobility (whose duty is to defend innocents, and to bridle the fury and rage of wicked men, were it of Princes or Emperors) do, notwithstanding, follow their appetites, and arm yourselves against us, your brethren, and natural countrymen; yea, against us that be innocent and just, as concerning all such crimes as be laid to our charges. If ye think that we be criminal because that we dissent from your opinion, consider we beseech you, that the Prophets under the law, the Apostles of Christ Jesus after his ascension, his primitive Church, and holy Martyrs, did dissent from the whole world in their days; and will ye deny but that their action was just, and that all those that persecuted them were murderers before God? May not the like be true this day? What assurance have ye this day of your religion, which the world that day had not of theirs? Ye have a multitude that agree with you, and so had they. Ye have antiquity of time, and that they lacked not. Ye have councils, laws, and men of reputation that have established all things, as ye suppose: But none of all these can make any religion acceptable unto God, which only dependeth upon his own will, revealed to man in his most sacred word. Is it not then a wonder that ye sleep in so deadly a security, in the matter of your own salvation, considering that God giveth unto you so manifest tokens, that ye and your leaders are both declined from God? For if "the tree shall be judged by the fruit" (as Christ Jesus affirmeth that it must be) then of necessity it is that your Prelates, and the whole rabble of their clergy, be evil trees. For if adultery, pride, ambition, drunkenness, covetousness, incest, unthankfulness, oppression, murder, idolatry, and blasphemy be evil fruits, there can none of

that generation, which claim to themselves the title of Churchmen, be judged good trees; for all these pestilent and wicked fruits do they bring forth in greatest abundance: And if they be evil trees (as ye yourselves must be compelled to confess they are), advise prudently with what consciences ye can maintain them to occupy the rounge and place (editor's note: the appointed place) in the Lord's vineyard? Do ye not consider, that in so doing ye labour to maintain the servants of sin in their filthy corruption; and so consequently ye labour that the Devil may reign, and still abuse this realm by all iniquity and tyranny, and that Christ Jesus and his blessed Evangel be suppressed and extinguished?<sup>1</sup>

It is in this context that we understand the whole question of the magistrate in the Scottish Reformation and the reformers' views on the relation between church and state. Just as the issue in Luther's Reformation was originally indulgences, so the issue in the Scottish Reformation was the question of the suppression of idolatry, as found in the mass and in images, and, in connection with that, the calling and duty of the magistrate. Because they believed God would judge the nation for idolatry, the law against idolatry became a strong motivation for the reformers' actions.

Idolatry and the law concerning the suppression of idolatry stood related to the duties of the magistrate and Knox's conception of the magistrate. God's judgments upon a disobedient nation, moreover, stood behind this issue. It is important to remember in this connection that during the second phase of the conflict between Mary Queen of Scots and the reformers, idolatry had been outlawed by act of Parliament. The law abolishing idolatry had a twofold character. In the first place, it was the law of God, which stood above princes and human authority. Secondly, idolatry was illegal by act of Parliament from the time of the deposition of Mary of Guise as regent.

It is from this perspective that we must consider Knox's view of the magistrate and the question of obedience to the higher powers. Knox conceived of the magistrate as an office. "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1c). Thus Knox can write, "All authority which God hath established, is good and perfect, and is to be obeyed of all men, yea under the pain of damnation."<sup>2</sup> The function of this office of magistrate is to execute just judgment. The magistrate, whether that be the higher powers of the realm or the lower judicial officials, are under the law. Therein lies also the duty of the magistrate.

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1 Knox, Volume I, pp. 167, 168.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 168.

The seat of judgment is principally the seat of Christ, Who is King. The powers that be are therefore, according to their office, a manifestation of God's majesty on earth. Thus Knox writes,

The least of us knows better what obedience is due to a lawful authority, than she or her Council does practise the office of such as worthily may sit upon the seat of justice; for we offer, and we perform, all obedience which God has commanded; for we neither deny toll, tribute, honour, nor fear to her, nor to her officers. We only bridle her blind rage, in the which she would erect and maintain idolatry, and would murder our brethren who refuse the same. But she does utterly abuse the authority established by God: she profanes the throne of his Majesty in earth, making the seat of justice, which ought to be the sanctuary and refuge of all godly and virtuous persons, unjustly afflicted, to be a den and receptacle to thieves, murderers, idolaters, whore-mongers, adulterers, and blasphemers of God and all godliness.<sup>1</sup>

Because the calling of the magistrate is to sit in judgment, and because of the failure of some to do so, Knox makes a distinction between the person and the office. Thus he writes,

But do ye not understand, that there is a great difference betwix the authority which is God's ordinance, and the persons of those which are placed in authority? The authority and God's ordinance can never do wrong; for it commandeth, That vice and wicked men be punished, and virtue, with virtuous men and just, be maintained. But the corrupt person placed in this authority may offend, and most commonly doth the contrary hereof; and is then the corruption of the person to be followed, by reason that he is clad with the name of the authority? Or, shall those that obey the wicked commandment of those that are placed in authority be excusable before God? Not so; not so. But the plagues and vengeance of God taken upon kings, their servants, and subjects, do witness to us the plain God, who commanded his subjects to murder and torment the Israelites, and at last most cruelly to persecute their lives. But was their obedience (blind rage it should be called) excusable before God? The universal plague doth plainly declare that the wicked commander, and those that obeyed, were alike guilty before God. And if the example of Pharaoh shall be rejected, because he was an ethnike, (editor's note, a Gentile, that is a heathen) then let us consider the facts of Saul; He was a king anointed of God, appointed to reign over his people; he commanded to persecute

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1 *Ibid.*

David, because (as he alleged) David was a traitor and usurper of the crown; and likewise commanded Ahimelech the High Priest and his fellows to be slain: But did God approve any part of this obedience? Evident it is that he did not. And think ye, that God will approve in you that which he did damn in others? Be not deceived: with God there is no such partiality. If ye obey the unjust commandments of wicked rulers, ye shall suffer God's vengeance and just punishment with them. And therefore as ye tender your own salvation, we most earnestly require of you moderation, and that ye stay yourselves, and the fury of others, from persecuting of us, till our cause be tried in lawful and open judgment.<sup>1</sup>

This distinction between person and office is fundamental to Knox's conception. It arises out of the dilemma of ungodly men holding the office of magistrate. Obedience to the person and obedience to the office must be distinguished. There are limits to the authority of the higher powers, and in transgressing those limits, the person holding office abrogates his own authority. To obey the evil commands of the magistrate is therefore sin.

The magistrate's calling is to promote the true religion and to suppress idolatry and superstition. The magistrate must fulfill both tables of the law. Thus Knox writes to the nobility of Scotland,

...and God speaketh to your consciences (unless ye be dead with the blind world) that you ought to hazard your own lives (be it against kings or emperors) for their deliverance. For only for that cause are ye called Princes of the people, and ye receive of your brethren honour, tribute, and homage at God's commandment; not by reason of your birth and progeny (as the most part of men falsely do suppose), but by reason of your office and duty, which is to vindicate and deliver your subjects and brethren from all violence and oppression, to the uttermost of your power. Advise diligently, I beseech you, with the points of that letter, which I directed to the whole Nobility, and let every man apply the matter and case to himself; for your conscience shall one day be compelled to acknowledge that the reformation of religion, and of public enormities, doth appertain to more than to the Clergy, or chief rulers called Kings.<sup>2</sup>

This idea of office also comes to expression in *The Scottish Confession of Faith*.

#### CAP. XXXIV.—OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE

We Confess and acknowledge empires, kingdoms, dominions,

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1 *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 135.



and cities to be distinct and ordained by God: the powers and authorities in the same (be it of Emperors in their empires, of Kings in their realms, Dukes and Princes in their dominions, or of other Magistrates in free cities), to be God's holy ordinance, ordained for manifestation of his own glory, and for the singular profit and commodity of mankind. So that whosoever goes about to take away or to confound the whole state of civil policies, now long established, we affirm the same men not only to be enemies to mankind, but also wickedly to fight against God's expressed will. We further Confess and acknowledge, that such persons as are placed in authority are to be loved, honoured, feared, and held in most reverent estimation; because (that) they are the lieutenants of God, in whose session God himself doth sit and judge (yea even the Judges and Princes themselves), to whom by God is given the sword, to the praise and defence of good men, and to revenge and punish all open malefactors. Moreover, to Kings, Princes, Rulers, and Magistrates, we affirm that chiefly and most principally the conservation and purgation of the Religion appertains so that not only they are appointed for civil policy, but also for maintenance of the true Religion, and for suppressing of idolatry and superstition whatsoever, as in David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others, highly commended for their zeal in that case, may be espied. And therefore we confess and avow, that such as resist the supreme power (doing that thing which appertains to his charge), do resist God's ordinance, and therefore cannot be guiltless. And further, we affirm, that whosoever deny unto them their aid, counsel, and comfort, while the Princes and Rulers vigilantly travail in the executing of their office, that the same men deny their help, support, and counsel to God, who by the presence of his lieutenant craveth it of them.<sup>1</sup>

The difficulty then arises when a prince or ruler fails to execute his office, promotes idolatry, fails to render judgment, but instead commits murder, persecutes the church of God, and violates the oath, all of which sins bring down upon the nation God's judgment. To this must be added the question of the relation between the higher and lower magistrates, since it was particularly the chief rulers in the nation who were corrupt, while the lower nobility and magistrates supported the Reformation. Both held the office of magistrate. Both were of "the powers that be" which are ordained of God. And so the question which arose in the Scottish Reformation was in part, what was the calling of the lower magistrate when that calling conflicted with the sinful designs of the

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1 Knox, Volume II, p. 271.

higher powers? In this connection Knox deals with the question of what constituted sedition or rebellion against the powers that be. The following may illustrate the point at issue.

If it be seditious (for men) to speak the truth in all sobriety, and to complain when they are wounded, or to call for help against unjust tyranny before that their throats be cut, then can we not deny but we are criminal and guilty of tumult and sedition. For we have said that our commonwealth is oppressed, that we and our brethren are hurt by the tyranny of strangers, and that we fear bondage and slavery, seeing that multitudes of cruel murders are daily brought in our country, without our counsel, or knowledge and consent.<sup>1</sup>

(continued in the next issue. . .)

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1      Knox, Volume I, p. 226.