

The background of the image is a page from an ancient manuscript, likely a Bible. It features a decorative border at the top with intricate floral and geometric patterns in blue, green, and gold. The main text is written in a dark ink in a Greek script, with some words in red ink (rubrication). The text is arranged in columns, and there are some large, ornate initial letters. The overall appearance is that of a well-preserved historical document.

**The Lord has
preserved His Word:**

**The doctrine of Holy
Scripture,
its providential
preservation
and its faithful
translation**

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Trinitarian Bible Society**

cover image: beginning of the Gospel according to Mark in Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae

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This article has been approved for publication by the General Committee of the Trinitarian Bible Society. The author, who has been given liberty to use his own style and methodology in the presentation of the subject, is one of the Society's Editorial Consultants and a schoolmaster. Dr Cammenga is resident in The Netherlands.

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1. Introduction

The main focus of the present study is the doctrine of Holy Scripture or, more specifically, what Scripture has to say about its own nature. Its divine inspiration will be discussed, and its providential preservation will be shown to ensue logically and naturally from its inspiration, as well as from particular promises the Bible itself contains about its preservation (sections 1-4, 7-9).

As part of this discussion, the translation of Scripture will be considered (sections 5-6), notably its faithful and accurate translation. The discussion will continue with an evaluation of the two major positions on the New Testament text (sections 10-12) and show how these positions impact on our understanding of the doctrine of Scripture.

The underlying conviction of this study, as will be shown throughout, is that the Lord God of Truth has preserved His Word, as much as He originally inspired it, and that this has implications for how we deal with His Word.

For the possible benefit of edifying those who might denounce this approach as Scripturalist and thus biased, and whose interest might therefore be lost at the outset, two questions are posed. First, if it is reprehensible to operate on fully Christian presuppositions, is it any less reprehensible to operate on other, perhaps non-Christian, presuppositions? Second, are not all systems of thought and belief based on underlying premises or axioms?

A first principle—precisely **because** it is first—does not need to be and cannot be demonstrated. It is the basis of all argument and demonstration. If it turns out not to be a first principle after all, then some other principle will of necessity take its place. (For a brief but pertinent discussion and definition of first principles, or axioms, see G. H. Clark, *Logic*, 2nd edition [Unicoi, TN, USA: Trinity Foundation, 1988], pages 2 and 134.)

It should be noted that, when we speak of versions or translations of the Scriptures, unless otherwise stated we mean versions or translations in English.

2. One Bible or many?

One does not have to be a churchgoer to realise that there are numerous different Bibles in circulation today, particularly in English: a visit to any well-stocked Christian bookshop or the religion section of secular bookshops would quickly demonstrate as much. But what is meant by ‘different Bibles’? And how does one choose from among them?

To answer the first question, by ‘different Bibles’ in this article we mean different English Bible versions, that is, different translations in English. It will be readily apparent to anyone who picks up a few of them, selects a passage or two and compares the readings, that these translations differ. Some seem a little old-fashioned, some more contemporary. Some even read like our daily newspaper. But are they just different translations?

That translations available on the market differ is clear enough. What may not be so clear is that some of them are the result of different theories of translation. Nor does everyone realise that some of these theories differ so radically that they cannot but produce radically different translations, even if the underlying Biblical-language text is the same.

This is not surprising, as theory always determines practice. Our beliefs determine our philosophy, our philosophy determines our theories, and our theories—particularly regarding translation—determine our translation practice.

Why is this important? It is because a great deal may depend upon translation theory, especially one of a text as important as Scripture. One outcome of the different theories just hinted at is that many current translations differ not just in **how** they say things, but to some extent also in **what** they say and **what** they mean.

Does this matter? Consider this: if a person wanted to know exactly what someone else had said, particularly something that was important, what would be preferable: a truthful or an untruthful account, an accurate or an inaccurate version of the statement, a literal rendering or a summary of the thoughts conveyed? Suppose your life depended on the information: would you not want the message to be clear, complete, and true in its wording? The Bible claims that its message is a matter of life or death. It might just actually be important, then, that the version of the Bible a person reads is truthful and accurate!

Nor is this all that can be said about different Bible versions. Some differences between them stem not merely from different theories of translation, but from differing underlying texts. How is this possible? Were not the Scriptures in the Biblical languages given once—one time for each book? The Trinitarian Bible Society believes they were. And have not those original Scriptures been preserved? Again, the Society believes they have.

Vital as the message of Scripture is, there is something else that is at least as important. This, often overlooked because it is so elementary, is that the message of a text is inalienably linked to the words in which it is expressed. This is all the more important in the case of Scripture, because its very words are, uniquely, the words of God expressing His message. For 'all scripture is given by inspiration of God...' (2 Timothy 3.16), because in the uttering and recording of it, '...prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost' (2 Peter 1.21).

This link between thought-content and the words in which it is expressed makes the actual preservation of all the words of Scripture of paramount importance. Equally indispensable is a belief in this preservation as the basis of all our thought regarding, and dealing with, Scripture.

However, some, even Christians, do not believe that the very words of Scripture have been preserved. Many modern critics of the Bible text or doctrine (usually of both) believe that the genuine text of the New Testament—the subject of the present study—was discovered or authenticated only about 150 years ago; or rather, as they might put it, something that **may** be the genuine text was authenticated. They are not sure.

Perhaps it would be more accurate, from their point of view, to say that this textual tradition was rediscovered by modern critics after having been discarded by the believing church¹ for some 1,500 years or longer. This is seen in the preference by modern scholars for manuscripts which were not used until the sixteenth century or later: the third edition of manuscript B (Codex Vaticanus) was published at Rome in 1587; A (Codex Alexandrinus) was donated to the British Government in 1627 by Cyril Lucar, the then head of the Greek Catholic Church; and **Ⲁ** (Aleph or Codex Sinaiticus) was discovered by Count Tischendorf as late as 1859.

These manuscripts, the mainstay of the **Critical Text** to be discussed below, may not actually have been in the hands of the translators of the great Reformed translations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But the texts of Vaticanus and possibly Alexandrinus were most probably known and by correspondence certainly available to the Reformers and the translators of the Authorised (King James) Version. Apparently, however, they rejected them.

For example, Erasmus is known to have travelled widely and corresponded extensively. He visited numerous libraries throughout Europe, and made many notes before embarking on his first edition of the Greek New Testament. His Reformed contemporary Beza was also acknowledged to be a competent textual critic. Significantly, Beza made very little use of Codex D (called 'Codex Bezae' simply because he owned it for some time) in his 1598 edition of the New Testament, possibly because he knew it to be corrupt. He thus proved himself to be more competent and objective in this respect than Tischendorf, for example, who lost virtually all sense of proportion in assessing 'his' Codex Sinaiticus.

Whatever its origins, one of the results of the wavering Critical Text view has been the English Revised Version, the New Testament of which was the first based, as fully as was thought possible in 1881, on the recension of the Critical Text edited by Westcott and Hort. Many later English versions have followed suit in abandoning the Traditional Greek Text in favour of a new Critical Text because many Bible societies, translation consultants, and translators still think that the Critical Text best reflects the **autographs** (the original manuscripts).

However, as most, if not all, of the arguments on which Westcott and Hort base their theory and its underlying philosophy seem questionable, the present study will inquire into the main such arguments.

1. In the present study, the term **church**, when unqualified, is used as specified by the Westminster Confession of Faith chapter XXV.1-5:

The catholic or universal Church which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. [XXV.1]

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion... [XXV.2]

This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular Churches which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them. [XXV.4]

The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth, to worship God according to His will. [XXV.5]

3. An important choice

The results of the critical amendments to the New Testament text, and in the philosophy and theory underlying it, as well as in the translation theory and practice, prompt the second question posed in section 2 above.

If a good translation of the Bible is desirable, which version is to be selected? On what grounds should the choice be made? For example, is an English Bible to be called good if it 'reads easily', or if it is 'time-honoured', or inexpensive, or 'modern'?

As these questions concern a Book that has stood the test of thousands of years, it might just be a good idea to let it speak for itself on such points.

4. The Word of Truth our grounds for selection

What criterion can the Bible itself suggest for choosing a good version of it? The makings of an answer may be found in what has come to be known as the High Priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ in John 17. In this prayer, He asks God the Father, 'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth' (John 17.17; all Bible quotations are taken from the English Authorised [King James] Version). Nothing in Scripture seems a more apt characterisation of itself than this: that the Bible is God's Word and therefore it is Truth. As such, its Author uses it to regenerate His people, who are 'born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever' (1 Peter 1.23), and subsequently, to sanctify them (cf. John 17.17, cited immediately above).

The God of the Bible is the 'LORD God of truth' (Psalm 31.5). This view was already expressed long ago through Moses in, for example, the following wonderfully image-rich statement:

Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. *He is* the Rock, his work *is* perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right *is* he. [Deuteronomy 32.1-4]²

In this passage, 'a God of truth' does not mean one God of truth among many gods of various beliefs.³ Given that Moses also wrote, 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD' (Deuteronomy 6.4, endorsed by the Lord Jesus Christ, cf. Mark 12.29), this interpretation would be illogical. Instead, the phrase means that God is a God of Truth, or is of a truth God, or God indeed, or as the Geneva Bible renders it, 'God is true', in contradistinction to all other gods so-called, which are gods of falsehood or false gods; idols.

The God of Scripture is the only true God and the God of Truth. In the Biblical view of things, truth is immutable and eternal. It is always truth and it is never falsehood. God is Truth eternally and immutably. Compare:

- 'I *am* the LORD, I change not...' (Malachi 3.6);
- 'from everlasting to everlasting, thou *art* God' (Psalm 90.2);
- 'thou *art* the same, and thy years shall have no end' (Psalm 102.27);
- 'the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning' (James 1.17; see also Hebrews 6.13-18).

2. In Scripture quotations given here, occasional bold indicates the present writer's emphasis. Italics in these quotations mark words that are not in the original Greek and Hebrew texts but have been added by the translators of the Authorised Version to capture the full meaning of the original, and to render the English translation adequate and natural in a transparent fashion. Thus readers who have no knowledge of the Biblical languages are enabled to follow the original texts as closely as possible. This excellent practice, adopted by the translators of the Authorised and other Reformed versions, is absent in many modern translations, whose clarity and transparency in relation to the original text tend to be diminished accordingly.

3. The use here of the indefinite article (or rather, in the original languages of the Bible, the lack of a definite article) is commonplace in Hebrew, Greek and literary English in clauses describing the outstanding attributes of a subject. Such usages carry no inherent implication of lack of uniqueness or non-exclusivity in their subject. An example of this usage with a one-of-a-kind subject other than God would be 'The Queen is a constitutional monarch' or 'We live in a warring world'. Moreover, it would be a most forced and unnatural usage in Hebrew (and, indeed, in many instances in Greek) to use a definite article—the only available article in the language—in the grammatical construction concerned, which is known as copula. (In a copula construction, a verb such as 'be', 'seem', or 'taste' is used to identify or link the subject with the complement of the sentence.)

As such, of all beings, God is unique. For

- ‘before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, *even I, am* the LORD; and beside me *there is* no saviour...’ (Isaiah 43.10, 11);
- ‘*I am* the first, and *I am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God’ (Isaiah 44.6).

The ‘one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance [Essence]’ is ‘uncreated...eternal...neither made, nor created...the whole three Persons [being] coeternal and coequal.’⁴ God, being the eternal, immutable **Spirit** of Truth (Hebrews 9.14), is not only above the time, space and matter of the universe and of the spirits in it that He created and has since sustained and governed, but beyond them. He is in a class of His own. Thus **eternal**, when applied to God, means not only existing throughout all time, or everlasting, but also means without beginning or end. God was never born and never dies.

The relationship between Scripture and its Author is, by His having given it, clear and simple. The God of the Bible is the **God of Truth**. Therefore, His written Word is the **Word of Truth**. His nature determines its nature. The definition of Scripture as Truth applies to the entire written Word of God, i.e. the sixty-six canonical books of the Old and New Testament, enumerated, for example, in the Westminster Confession of Faith I.2 (and as contrasted with the Apocrypha in I.3).

There is no need to reiterate the discussion of the Old and New Testament canon here, even though Romanism, in one of its numerous attempts to counteract the Reformation, formally declared the Old Testament Apocrypha to be part of Scripture in the sixteenth century. The difference between Romanism and the Reformation with regard to the canon seems to have arisen from ecclesiastical and political, rather than textual and critical, grounds. This appears to be so especially from the standpoint of Romanism. For when it formally included the Apocryphal books in its own canon at the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent, which convened in three distinct periods from 1545 till 1563, it seems to have done so mainly to counter the Reformation. Significantly, this adoption of the Apocrypha has never yet been retracted or nullified by Romanism.

Originally, however, there does seem to have been a certain parallel historically between the controversy over the canon of the New Testament and that over its text. After several centuries of controversy over an autographical versus a spurious or mixed textual tradition, both the canon and the text controversy were definitively resolved by the end of the fourth century AD. The significance of that resolution having occurred at that particular time lies in these determinations being made by the professing, interdenominational body of Christ’s church: they were made by the cream of a large body of able men, and their Traditional Text tradition has reigned in the church ever since, until it was challenged by the Critical Text edited by Westcott and Hort in 1881.⁵

The ‘Traditional Text’ referred to in the preceding paragraph is here defined by John William Burgon in his *The Revision Revised* (1883: 269):⁶

...The one great Fact, which greatly troubles him and his joint Editor [Westcott and Hort]—(as well it may)—is the *Traditional Greek Text* of the New Testament Scriptures. Call this Text Erasmian or Complutensian,—the Text of Stephens, or of Beza, or of the Elzevirs,—call it the “Received,” or the *Traditional Greek Text*, or whatever other name you please;—the fact remains that a Text *has* come down to us which is attested by a general consensus of ancient Copies, ancient Fathers, ancient Versions. This, at all events, is a point on which, (happily,) there exists entire conformity of opinion between Dr. Hort and ourselves. Our Readers cannot have forgotten his virtual admission that,—*Beyond all question the Textus Receptus is the dominant Graeco-Syrian Text of A.D. 350 to A.D. 400.*

It might be added, however, that due to the radical change effected in 1881, textual and critical considerations now also figure in the differences between Romanism and the Reformed position, however much these differences are played down for political and public relations reasons by the United Bible Societies—a once Protestant organisation now working together ever more closely with Roman Catholic groups.

4. Athanasian Creed, articles 3, 4, 8, 10, 21-23, 26, as quoted in P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Books, 1993), 2.66-68.

5. Some useful background information may be found in E. F. Harrison, ed., et al., *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Book House, 1994), pp. 94-95, and G. W. Bromiley, ed., et al., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Eerdmans, 1979), 1.482-492.

6. John Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (Paradise, PA, USA: Conservative Classics, n.d.).

Such a wide-ranging description and praise of the written Word of God as is found in Psalm 119 would clearly be meaningless if this written Word were not true. The statement ‘For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven’ in verse 89, for example, reminds us of the Word’s eternal immutability. And ‘Thy word *is* very pure... Thy righteousness *is* an everlasting righteousness, and thy law *is* the truth’ (verses 140 and 142) stress its eternal purity and incorruptibility. This view recurs in the New Testament, for example in 1 Peter 1.25, ‘the word of the Lord endureth for ever’.

The truth of Scripture is presupposed throughout the Old and New Testaments, and includes the notion that it is eternally immutable and incorruptible truth. The use of a phrase such as ‘scripture of truth’ in Daniel 10.21 is significant in this respect. Daniel also used the term ‘books’ (scrolls) to refer to the Scriptures extant in his day, which he accepted as divinely inspired. He specifically mentions the then recently written book of Jeremiah, his slightly older contemporary (around 600 BC). Daniel having being recognised as a prophet in his own right by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 24.15) adds force to his calling the book of Jeremiah ‘the word of the LORD’ (Daniel 9.2).

Daniel’s use is fairly representative of the writers of the Bible and the men of God whom it describes. The alternate use of ‘scripture’, ‘the scriptures’, ‘the books’, ‘the words’ and ‘the word’ to refer to the Old and New Testament writings is their common practice. This scripture of truth, or the part of it called ‘the gospel’, is also called ‘the word of truth’ (2 Corinthians 6.7; Ephesians 1.13; Colossians 1.5 ‘the word of the truth’; 2 Timothy 2.15; James 1.18), ‘the truth of God’ (Romans 1.25, 3.7), or simply, ‘the truth’ (Romans 1.18; Galatians 3.1; 5.7; 2 Thessalonians 2.10, 12, 13; 1 Timothy 2.4; 4.3; Hebrews 10.26; 3 John 3).

As the word ‘**scripture**’ means what is written, so **Scripture** written with a capital is herein used to designate the words of God written in the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible, collectively also referred to as **the Word of God**.

Because Scripture designates itself as the truth, it is considered reliable or trustworthy. Moreover, the Hebrew words for the ideas of truth and trustworthiness are related. Therefore, the practice of some modern theologians and translators to stress the reliability of Scripture at the expense of its truth, by suggesting that the latter is a Hellenistic concept, seems odd to say the least. In addition, they often insinuate a Barthian idea of ‘encounter’ or ‘(personal) relationship’—that truth is only truth as far as it affects an individual but is not true in and of itself. On the contrary, however, it is **because** Scripture is eternal immutable Truth, given and preserved by God, that it is inherently reliable and is therefore accepted as such by the believing church.

5. A good translation

It follows that a good translation must meet at least the following three requirements: (1) it must preserve the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of its original, in what it says, teaches and entails; (2) it must transfer to and convey in another language the original text and its content without obscuring its implications; and (3) it must be a translation of what is written or spoken, not of what we think is written or spoken or of what we contend ought to have been written or spoken.

A text may be defined as a particular form or set of words, particular in that it contains a proposition or a set of propositions in which something is predicated of a subject or of many subjects. It has, or it constitutes, a particular form in that it consists of words arranged or composed in a manner that is specific to the text in which they occur, and in terms of which manner they are therefore to be interpreted and translated.

6. Criteria of reliability

Having briefly considered the nature of the Bible, the existence of different versions, some of the reasons explaining their differences, the choices they involve, and the essential concept of what makes a good version, we may now examine the last of these issues a little more closely. Specifically, what more can be said regarding a version’s reliability? How does one determine which of the various Bible versions currently on the market is, or are, reliable?

To answer these questions thoroughly, we would have to analyse the philosophy underlying each and every version, bearing in mind that both the text and the truth of Scripture are at stake in the matter. We would also have to study each set of translators’ views on Scripture, revelation, epistemology (their theory of knowledge), logic,⁷ language,

7. God is eternally and immutably one, and hence consistent in and with Himself. Therefore, He cannot and does not contradict Himself, ever, whether in His mind, in His Word, or in His actions. It follows that any change proposed to the text or the doctrine of His Word which necessarily entails any kind of contradiction—whether inherently or with respect to the truth revealed in Scripture—must, however small the contradiction, be false. Any presupposition or method necessarily implying any such change must be rejected too, because it is, wholly or partly, inconsistent with revealed truth.

translation, textual theory, and the like. On top of all this, we would have to take into account all their textual choices and translational practices.

However, the underlying views of textual critics and translators are not always expressed in concrete terms; in fact, the views are only rarely given explicitly. In many cases, these views can only be gleaned by studying the manner in which they have been embodied in the resulting translations. Such a thorough analysis would not be possible within the present limited scope. Besides, such work has to some extent already been well undertaken by others: Burgon, Hills and Hoskier, to mention a few.

Textual criteria

It is now fairly generally agreed as a basic premise that there are, in the main, two traditions at work in the transmission of the New Testament text. It seems sufficient, therefore, to limit the present focus to a consideration of some of the major differences between these two, the **Traditional/Majority Text** and the **Critical/Minority Text**.

In discussing the Biblical text, it is, regrettably, necessary nowadays to be aware that some acknowledged textual experts are unbelievers or liberals. Equally regrettably, these experts are no longer taking a lonely stand in this regard against the bulk of the church: church officers in quite a few denominations must also be regarded as liberal and sometimes non-Christian. These textual experts do not believe that Scripture is the Word of God, or that its text and doctrine are divine Truth. To them, the Bible is just another, human, book: useful perhaps for building a career on or to study out of mere academic interest but of no eternal merit. Such textual analysts have no qualms about handling Scripture in a destructively critical manner, contrary and detrimental to its Truth.

Furthermore, it is distressing that many of them carry out this work while in the pay of some church or church-sponsored university or seminary, whose own harm is thereby also assured. This does not usually weigh heavily on such experts' consciences, however; they are quite happy to pursue their careers of studying the presumed vicissitudes and defects of the Scripture text. But what they will not brook is the thought that God really has inspired His Word and preserved it intact throughout history.

Before more is said about the Traditional Text view and some of its consequences, which will be supported by the present study, and about the Critical Text view and its consequences, several important points may require clarification, viz. the concept of the traditional New Testament text, the concept of faithfulness in translation, and the primacy of the Truth of Scripture and some consequences thereof.

Transmission of the text

First, by 'the traditional text of the New Testament' we mean the text that derives from the autographic text given to and recorded by the professing church in the first century AD and subsequently copied and transmitted by it. Following about three centuries of textual and canonical controversy, it was specifically acknowledged and confirmed as the true text by the confessing church in the fourth century. From then on, it continued to be ecclesiastically transmitted, becoming the text most widely accepted and used up to 1881.

By 'ecclesiastically transmitted' is meant that the Scriptures were accepted, respectfully used, faithfully copied, and handed down to subsequent generations as the standard text by the confessing church. In this context, the church is viewed as the repository, safeguard and instrument (or conduit) used by the Lord God of Truth.

Admittedly, the Lord can use even unbelievers (some copyists, for example) to preserve His text if He so desires. But the idea of ecclesiastical transmission here does not reflect or support the Romanist idea of the church determining or authenticating the text, as if that particular organisation had authority over and above that of Scripture and its text. Nor does it suggest that wholesale endorsement of the Scripture text by unbelievers was necessary to its transmission, although this often did occur.

The Greek New Testament text was transmitted by the Greek Church over the whole Byzantine period (AD 312-1453) and preserved in the overwhelming majority of existing Greek manuscripts, in the same way that the Hebrew Old Testament text was transmitted in the Temple and synagogues up to and in the Lord Jesus Christ's time, and later preserved by the Masoretes. As a result, the printed editions of this Greek New Testament text, beginning with Erasmus in 1516, faithfully reflected the New Testament text that had been providentially preserved through the centuries. Though Erasmus's first edition included a few readings from the Latin Vulgate (that is, back-translated from Latin into Greek), he thoroughly revised this in his fourth edition of 1527 on the basis of the Complutensian Polyglot and its underlying variety of manuscripts.

However, a few brief readings taken from the Latin for which there are now few or no extant Greek manuscripts have always been included in the various printed editions of the **Received Text**. Though it is sometimes argued that these

were added by Rome or her allies, this cannot be proven. Instead it is argued that these readings were original and found in earlier Greek manuscripts which are no longer extant or in quotations from the Church Fathers which are no longer available but instead have been preserved in the Latin translation. Since these readings may therefore have come from the autographs, it seems advisable to exercise extreme caution on the side of hundreds of years of tradition in this vital matter, and to retain them, instead of removing them as endorsed by this or that critic who too often is an unbeliever. This would be the more advisable given that none of the few passages concerned is in any way inconsistent with the Truth of Scripture.

One such reading is 1 John 5.7-8, also known as the 'Johannine Comma'. It has been much disputed by critics, but an article published by the Trinitarian Bible Society, *Why 1 John 5.7-8 is in the Bible* (which can be found at www.tbsbibles.org/pdf_information/40-1.pdf), presents a well-reasoned defence of its inclusion in the Scriptures. Other evidence apart, it argues that, though this reading was originally supported by Latin versions only, it has also been found to have Greek manuscript support. The writer has even suggested (in personal correspondence) that **all** originally 'Latin-only' readings in the New Testament now have Greek manuscript support, albeit to varying degrees.

In textual criticism the term **apograph** is used to designate any copy of the autograph (the original writing) of a text. It may refer to an immediate copy, i.e. one made directly from the original, or to a mediate copy, i.e. one made from a copy of the original or from a copy of a copy, and so on; in principle, this can continue *ad infinitum*. In effect, the term may refer to any copy of a text other than its original.

Where it is at all possible to differentiate 'near' and 'distant' apographs, i.e. to determine the relative nearness or distance of copies with respect to the autographs and each other, these relationships can typically be definitively demarcated only when their actual linkage is known, their date alone being insufficient for this purpose. For example, a manuscript that can be dated to AD 300 could be several generations removed from the original, whereas a manuscript dated AD 900 could be a copy of a copy of the original. More often than not, however, it is not possible to determine such relative distances with any precision. This is especially so in the case of Bible manuscripts, certainly those of the New Testament, because their precise linkage is not known.⁸

Second, we have to recognise the limitation of translation: every translation is the result of a transference of words and their meaning. It is necessary to bear this constantly in mind, because one and the same idea may be expressed radically differently in different languages or even by individual speakers, or by the same speaker in different contexts. This factor is far more prevalent than is often presumed by even very literary-minded monoglots, and especially so where languages of unrelated language families are concerned, such as Hebrew to English.

An example of this would be languages' differing rules on word order. Where one language (e.g. English) regularly uses the order of subject-verb-object to mark a statement, another (e.g. Hebrew) may typically use verb-subject-object. A translator must take differences of this sort into account if he is to produce a translation that is natural, accurate and intelligible. Such a difference, being grammatically determined, and so of a fairly objective linguistic nature, requires what might be termed **grammatical equivalence**.

The above premise is radically different from **dynamic equivalence**. Dynamic equivalence is a central concept in the translation theory, developed by Eugene A. Nida,⁹ which has been widely adopted by the United Bible Societies and other translation groups for over forty years now. Purporting to be an academically linguistic concept, it is in fact a sociocultural concept of communication. Its definition is essentially behaviourist: determined by external forces, such as society—with strong pragmatist overtones—focusing on the reader rather than the writer. Indeed, but for a few exceptions, most twentieth-century American philosophical endeavours are predominantly pragmatist, dwelling in the shadows cast by William James and John Dewey.¹⁰

8. See also the remarks on the 'Ferrar group' later in this paper. Kirsop Lake wrote, 'The Ferrar group and Family 1 are the only reported cases of the repeated copying of a single archetype, and even for the Ferrar group there were probably two archetypes rather than one... Apart from these two there seem to be no groups of manuscripts which are conceivably descendants of a single lost codex...' ('The Caesarean Text of the Gospel of Mark', *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 21, 1928, pp. 347-348).

9. Eugene Nida (d. 25 August 2011), writer on linguistics and Bible translation, was an executive member of the American Bible Society and the United Bible Societies, and exercised great influence worldwide, over the past forty or more years, on the theory and practice of Bible translation as applied by the aforementioned societies. See, for example, E. A. Nida and C. R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1974).

10. William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952) were American pragmatist philosophers. Dewey was a prolific and comprehensive writer (see *A Pluralistic Universe*, *Pragmatism*, and other works) whose impact on such disciplines as the philosophy of

Unlike grammatical equivalence, however, the concept of dynamic equivalence allows the translator a wide margin of subjective interpretation in its application: that is, each translator is free to be subjective in the actual translation.

The concept of translation defended in this study is the one which we deem to hark back more faithfully to the Biblical view of Scripture as the written Word of God and as eternal, immutable, incorruptible Truth. The view underlying it is well summarised in the Westminster Confession.¹¹ Chapter I.4 of the Confession states, ‘The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.’ Note that ‘any man’ includes modern critics.

Note also the Confession’s statement that ‘All synods or councils, since the Apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both’ (XXXI.4).

This view of Scripture has a number of repercussions upon our concept and use of Scripture, including our translation of it. One such is that our translation must stress the primacy of Truth—hence the need for accuracy in the text and content of Scripture—without ignoring or abandoning the propensities of the receptor language (the language into which a text is translated). It is this primacy of Truth that determines the concept of a faithful translation of Scripture.

It is this primacy, likewise, that makes it so vital to obtain a correct answer to the question, ‘What is the original New Testament text?’ Words, being conventional symbols, are rightly said to ‘bear meaning’. That meaning is rightly said ‘to be borne’, that is, to be expressed and implied, by those words in the text in which they stand. This is why words can be distinguished from their meanings but not orphaned from them, even though some philosophies and theories minimise, obscure, ignore, or deny this truth.

This primacy of Truth is bound up with other facets of the concept of reliability as it is applied to the translation of Scripture. These relate not only to what Scripture predicates or implies about its own origin, nature, text, and content, but also to what it says about its deployment by God in history and its promised preservation. Doctrinally interdependent as they are, these properties would all seem to bear on the reliability of translation and will therefore be discussed in section 7.

To sum up the present section on the reliability of translation, and that of Scripture in particular, three conclusions may be drawn. First, since Scripture is the Word of God written, that which it prescribes, says, argues, teaches and entails, especially concerning itself, is of paramount importance for our theory and practice of translation. Therefore, Scripture’s own teaching must be taken into account as fully and consistently as is possible in its actual translation.

Second, since the traditional majority view as to what constitutes the New Testament text appears to be based on the orthodox view of Scripture concerning itself, it is the versions that have the following properties that will tend to be the most reliable and perspicuous. These are versions that: (1) are based on the Traditional Text, (2) maintain the grammatical form, category, order, and propositional content of the original words as completely as possible, (3) indicate explicitly any words added in the translation to render more precisely what is in the original text, in a manner that is transparent to the reader, and (4) respect the doctrine of Scripture concerning itself, at least as far as is outlined above and in the next section.

Third, because the exponents of the Critical Text appear to have disregarded these criteria—by having started with a low regard for the doctrine of Scripture concerning itself and of God (implicitly substituting their own views), and thereby

education is still felt today. James was especially influential in the fields of psychology and religion, for example through his *Varieties of Religious Experience*. For an introduction and useful discussion, see G. H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey* (Unicoi, TN, USA: The Trinity Foundation, 1985), pages 500-508 on James, and pages 517-533 on Dewey, and his monograph, *William James and John Dewey*, 1995, also published by The Trinity Foundation (see www.trinityfoundation.org).

11. Though not produced, strictly speaking, by synod or council, the Westminster Confession is the work of an assembly of 121 divines and thirty laymen appointed by Parliament in 1643 (cf. J. L. Carson and D. W. Hall, eds., *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly* [Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994], page 314). Admittedly a human document, it is here neither conflated (mixed), nor equated, with Scripture. Rather, it serves as a convenient platform for discourse, subordinate to the statements and teachings of Scripture, which it has been found to summarise aptly in the area under consideration. Not the work of one, two, or a few authors (as were some earlier Reformed confessions and catechisms) but of at least sixty learned men (the average attendance at the assembly’s meetings), and properly consistent and comprehensive, it may well be considered as embodying the ripened thinking of the Reformation era. Nor is it the only such document of its time.

having a low regard for the text and Truth of Scripture itself—it is only logical and natural that they should have begun to tamper with the Traditional Text rather liberally. From a Biblical point of view, however, this does rather discredit their position and its fruits from the very outset.

7. The Biblical doctrine of Scripture

If Biblical doctrine bears on our premises, our textual theory, our theory of translation, and thus also on our textual choices and translational practice, which teachings are specifically relevant in these respects? The most obvious, though not the only, candidates suggesting themselves would be the doctrines of God and of Scripture. The present focus will be limited to these.

Perhaps most Bible believers may think of God first. Being the Creator, He must have existed before the universe He created. Does not the doctrine of God come first, then? Such a stance may seem plausible, but as the compilers of the Westminster Confession realised, if the question of existence is to be tackled, that of knowledge must be answered first: How do we obtain our knowledge? This is why the Confession's opening chapter deals with Scripture, and only then, its second and subsequent chapters with God.

The connection between the doctrines of God and Scripture may be characterised as follows. For us, epistemologically (in terms of how we come to know anything) the doctrine of Scripture logically precedes the doctrine of God. Once this is granted, it is also true to say that, ontologically (in terms of actual being) the doctrine of God logically precedes the doctrine of Scripture. Of course, this last statement is an epistemological statement, too. By His eternal decree God made the universe through His creating activities, and has given us Scripture and many other mercies through His providence.

While Scripture was given within time, it has nevertheless been in His mind eternally and immutably, as we are reminded by Psalm 119.89. Thus it is doubly the Word of God, since it is both part of, and originates from, His mind. Through it we know the Lord Jesus Christ and all else that God has graciously condescended to make known to us.

Some aspects of the doctrine of Scripture already outlined will presently be expanded. Its inspiration and preservation will be briefly considered in section 8. But first, some aspects of the doctrine of God will be recapitulated, and a few more taken into consideration, with a brief indication of their relevance to the text and translation of Scripture.

Truth

God is (1) Truth, or the God of Truth. Therefore, His Word is Truth, or the Word of Truth. See Deuteronomy 32.1-4, Psalm 31.5 and John 17.17, all already quoted or mentioned, and also Isaiah 65.16. He is (2) eternal and (3) immutable, or, otherwise put, eternally immutable (recall Psalm 90.2; Malachi 3.6; James 1.17), 'the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever' (Hebrews 13.8).

Taking points 1 to 3 together, it may be argued that He, being eternal immutable Truth, 'cannot deny himself' (2 Timothy 2.13), cannot be other than He is ('I AM THAT I AM', Exodus 3.14), and 'cannot lie' (Titus 1.2). He speaks only truth consistently and acts accordingly, never contradicting Himself. Compare Isaiah 46.9-11: 'I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure... I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it'.

As God cannot speak falsely or illogically, neither can His Word. It is eternally immutable truth. 'Thy word *is* true *from* the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments *endureth* for ever' (Psalm 119.160). Hence it is consistent truth in its expression and its content, in its text and its doctrine. Hence, too, any translation of it should be consistent truth, in its underlying (source) text, in its wording, and in its intellectual content.

Though enough Biblical theology may have been covered in the preceding points for us to be able to proceed to the discussion of major aspects of the text and the translation of Scripture, further considerations are added at this point, in order to relate this theology more effectively to Scripture's own conception of itself. The Westminster Confession is once again taken as our summary guideline, especially chapters II-V, but the reader might also wish to consult works of systematic theology.¹² The connection between the theology of Scripture and its text, translation, or doctrine of itself will continue to be emphasised.

12. For example, Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Book House, 1853, 1993); Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Eerdmans, 1872-1873, 1989), especially volume 1, 'Theology', chapters 5ff; and John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Paris, Arizona, USA: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1769, reprinted 1989).

One

The God of Scripture is the one and only living God. He is one numerically, in that He is the only God there is. And He is one qualitatively, in that His Being is simple, free from division into parts and from compositeness. This is supported by statements such as the following:

- ‘The LORD our God *is* one LORD’ (Deuteronomy 6.4)
- ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Matthew 16.16)
- ‘I and *my* Father are one’ (John 10.30)
- ‘*there is* none other God but one’ (1 Corinthians 8.4)
- ‘ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God’ (1 Thessalonians 1.9)

Therefore, His Word is an ever living and life-giving Word, for as He made the universe out of nothing through His Spirit and His spoken Word, so He regenerates dead sinners through His Spirit and His now-written Word. Compare:

- ‘And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And **God created**...every living creature...’ (Genesis 1.20, 21, emphasis added)
- ‘Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me’ (John 5.39)
- ‘I am that bread of life... I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever... As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me... It is the spirit that quickeneth... **the words that I speak unto you**...*they* are life’ (John 6.48, 51, 57, 63, emphasis added)

Spirit

God is a most pure Spirit. Therefore His Words are spirit. Compare John 4.24, ‘God *is* a Spirit...’, with John 6.63, ‘It is the spirit that quickeneth...the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit...’, and with John 16.13, ‘Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come’. See also John 14.16, 17, 26; 15.26; Romans 1.2; 16.26; Ephesians 3.5. No doubt this is why Scripture, recognised as the Word of God, is called ‘the sword of the Spirit’ (Ephesians 6.17).

Indeed, many of the attributes predicated by Scripture of God are also properties of His written Word, the following ones included.

Knowledge

Because ‘the LORD *is* a God of knowledge’ (1 Samuel 2.3), His Word is knowledge (Romans 1.2; 11.33; 16.25-26).

Compare:

- ‘He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, *which* saw the vision of the Almighty...’ (Numbers 24.16)
- ‘Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his...he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: he revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what *is* in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him’ (Daniel 2.20-22).

Light is often used in the Scriptures as a symbol of knowledge and truth. See also Proverbs 2.6; Isaiah 11.2; John 1.5, 7-9; Colossians 2.2, 3; 1 John 1.5-7.

Wisdom

As He is Wisdom, so is His Word, as seen in previous references.

Infinite

Because He is omniscient, there is no limit other than God’s own nature, to the truth, wisdom, and power of His Word.

Compare:

- Psalm 147.5, ‘Great *is* our Lord, and of great power: his understanding *is* infinite’
- Romans 16.27, ‘...God only wise...’
- Isaiah 55.8-11, ‘For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For *as* the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.’

This point is of a piece with the foregoing and the subsequent one.

Powerful

Because God is omnipotent, His Word is powerful and cannot finally be affected by men as to its truth or text. Rather,

God will judge men by its truth. Compare:

- 'I *am* the Almighty God' (Genesis 17.1)
- 'The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all' (Psalm 103.19)
- 'Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come' (Revelation 4.8)
- 'For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart' (Hebrews 4.12)
- 'God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel' (Romans 2.16)
- 'For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged' (Romans 3.3-4)

Also recall Ephesians 6.17, already quoted, and the references to the Word as the means through which God by His Spirit created the universe and regenerates dead sinners.

Everywhere

As God is omnipresent, so His Word is universally applicable. Compare:

- 'Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD' (Jeremiah 23.24)
- 'For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil' (Ecclesiastes 12.14)
- 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad' (2 Corinthians 5.10).

Also recall Romans 2.16, quoted in the preceding paragraph.

Holy

As He is holy, so His law or His Word as a whole is holy. Compare:

- 'Who *is* like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who *is* like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful *in* praises, doing wonders?' (Exodus 15.11)
- 'Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good' (Romans 7.12). Hence Scripture calls itself, 'the holy scriptures' (Romans 1.2, 2 Timothy 3.15). Indeed, if, as in its emphatic language Scripture states '... Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts...' (Isaiah 6.3), we may infer, holy, holy, holy is His Word.

Just

As He is just, so is His Word.

- 'The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works' (Psalm 145.17).
- Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross as the propitiation for our sins, '...to declare his [Christ's] righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus' (Romans 3.25-26). See also Romans 7.12, quoted above.

Good

As He is good, so is His Word. Compare:

- 'And Jesus said unto him...*there is* none good but one, *that is*, God' (Mark 10.18).

See Romans 7.12 again, quoted in the paragraph before last. His goodness includes His love. Hence, as He is love, His Word is lovingly kind to His beloved.

- 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (John 3.16)
- 'And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him' (1 John 4.16).

More might usefully be said about the divine perfections and their interrelationships, and many more passages adduced in support, but for present purposes those mentioned must suffice. Even so, they involve a great deal of theology. Their relevance to the doctrine of Scripture and our view and handling of it has been made explicit to some extent, but is supposed throughout this study.

The Biblical doctrine of Scripture and its use will now be summed up in seven points, taking the main propositions made regarding it in the Westminster Confession for a guideline again. Section 8 will focus on the inspiration and preservation of Scripture.

1. Scripture is God's written revelation (publication, announcement, proclamation, what He has made known publicly) to His people in both Old and New Testament times, of the eternal immutable truth about Himself and His will, which He has moreover promised to preserve forever. Its words and their propositional content are thus the necessary and sufficient Truth made known to us.

He has made it known in order to give

that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord...to reveal Himself, and to declare...His will unto His Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same **wholly** unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased. [Westminster Confession I.1, emphasis added]

The Old Testament in Hebrew...and the New Testament in Greek...being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal to them. [Westminster Confession I.8]

This bears repeating. The original Old and New Testament Scriptures were immediately inspired by God and by His singular care and providence have been kept pure in all ages, and are therefore authentic. That is, they are authentic by twin virtue of having been both inspired originally and preserved subsequently.

The authenticity here discussed is thus predicated not only of the autographs, but equally of their faithful apographs. Without the providential preservation of the Scriptures in and through these faithful copies, a final appeal to them by the church in all controversies of religion would evidently be futile. By the same token, such authenticity should not be claimed for copies whose readings are demonstrably faulty or peripheral to the overall manuscript corpus. Compare points 3 and 5 immediately following and the remarks about authenticity made in the next section.

2. Being the Word of God, Scripture is infallible and authoritative. '[O]ur full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word...' (Westminster Confession I.5).

This is another way of saying that what Scripture says and entails is the eternal immutable Truth of God. Since what it says and entails is the whole counsel of God given to us (as already implied under point 1), and given for His specific purposes, there follow, at the least, the five further propositions below.

3. The correct theological method or principle of interpretation is that of consistent deduction from the sentences of Scripture. This will be clear from the following points A to D taken together.

A. 'The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence [logical inference] may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men' (Westminster Confession I.6).

B. 'All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means,^[13] may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them' (Westminster Confession I.7).

C. 'The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly' (Westminster Confession I.9).

D. 'The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture' (Westminster Confession I.10).

13. The immediately relevant 'ordinary means' seem to be the reading, preaching, and teaching of Scripture; prayer, especially calling on the Holy Spirit to enlighten one's understanding of God's written Word; and a correct application of logic, because God, being the God of Truth, cannot contradict Himself, and because His Word, being the Word of Truth, cannot contradict itself.

It might be added that the concept ‘doctrines of men’ now arguably includes behaviourism, pragmatism, dynamic equivalence theory, and modern textual criticism. The phrase ‘private spirits’ in essence refers to those persons who claim to have private revelations from the Holy Spirit or some other source, over and above, in addition to or apart from, the written Word.

4. Scripture is complete. That is, nothing is to be added to, or taken away from, the text and the teaching of Scripture (cf. Westminster Confession I.6, already quoted above). Note that just as this pertains to what Scripture says and entails, it equally applies to its text, translation, exegesis, preaching, teaching, and application, pastoral or otherwise, and to our view and handling of these.

5. Scripture, as given and preserved by God in the original languages, is to be the church’s final court of appeal in all matters of controversy. See the first sentence of Westminster Confession I.8, and I.1, both quoted above.

6. Scripture is to be translated into the common languages of all nations. ‘Because these original tongues [Greek and Hebrew] are not known to all the people of God...they are to be translated into the vulgar [commonly used] language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope’ (Westminster Confession I.8).

7. Being the infallible rule of interpretation of everything, including itself, Scripture is to be the standard by which any proposition about anything is judged (cf. Westminster Confession I.9, 10, already cited, which is thus supplemented and completed here). The material just quoted could be broken down further. Moreover, these seven points do not exhaust all the possible implications of the Scriptural teaching that Scripture itself is the Word of God. Supporting Scripture references and cross-references have not been given here, but may be found, often with pertinent comments, in editions of the Westminster Confession currently available in print.¹⁴

8. Divine inspiration and providential preservation

Two already-mentioned aspects of the doctrine of Scripture—what it says about itself—now deserve closer consideration, namely its inspiration and preservation. As part of this, we also will consider their interrelation and their bearing on matters of text and translation. Presupposing the general doctrines already summarised, I shall take the Westminster Standards again as an outline. The view and approach of Scripture defended here agrees with these in that both are based on these three presuppositions: (1) Scripture was inspired, and (2) is divinely preserved (3) by divine providence.

First, even if we might never fathom all the particulars of the divine act of inspiration, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were breathed out by the Spirit of God into the minds of their writers, governing and directing them to record the very words of God.

That Bible writers were themselves aware that what they recorded was thus inspired may be shown from one Old and one New Testament example.

- OT: ‘Now these *be* the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said... The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word *was* in my tongue’ (2 Samuel 23.1, 2).
- NT: ‘And unto the married I command, *yet* not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from *her* husband’ (1 Corinthians 7.10).

Moreover, the writers of the New Testament, and the men of God whose words and actions it records, in many places confirm the divine inspiration of the Old Testament. They do so both by their respectful use of it, and by their express acknowledgement of its inspiration.

Compare what the Lord Jesus Christ said to some of the Pharisees: ‘How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying...’, following which He quotes Psalm 110.1 (Matthew 22.43). When Paul declares that ‘...the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God’ (1 Corinthians 2.11), he is referring to ‘the testimony of God’ (verse 1) and ‘the wisdom of God’ (verse 7), which he contrasts to the wisdom of men (verses 4 and 5). This wisdom is ‘*even* the hidden

14. For example, *The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms with the Scripture Proofs at Large* (Edinburgh, Scotland: the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1967)—this is the edition quoted herein. Also see *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994), which also includes *The Larger Catechism* and *The Shorter Catechism*; G. H. Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe? The Westminster Confession: Yesterday and Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ, USA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1965—also available from the Trinity Foundation (www.trinityfoundation.org); and R. Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1845, 1992).

wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory' (verse 7), which yet, 'God hath revealed...unto us by his Spirit' (verse 10).¹⁵

Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ expressly promised His disciples the same inspiration as that of the prophets of the Old Testament (John 14.17; 15.26; 16.13). It is thus the same Spirit of Truth who has given the Scripture of Truth in the Old and in the New Testament.

Second, these writings have been preserved intact through time—a subject to be discussed in depth presently.

Third, both their inspiration and their preservation have been effected in a particular way, namely through divine providence. That is why they are inextricably related. The importance of this linkage, and the attempt of modern criticism to confuse or obliterate it—or as some, to nullify it by merely paying lip service to it—was seen by Wilbur N. Pickering, who wrote:

It has been commonly argued, for at least 200 years [since John Bengel, who died in 1752], that no matter what Greek text one may use no doctrine will be affected... The discrepancy between UBS³ [the third edition of the Greek New Testament produced by the United Bible Societies] and the Majority Text is around 8% (involving 8% of the words). In a Greek text with 600 pages that represents 48 solid pages' worth of discrepancies! About a fifth of that reflects omissions in the eclectic text, so it is some ten pages shorter than the Majority Text. Even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that up to half of the differences between the Majority and eclectic texts could be termed "inconsequential", that leaves some 25 pages' worth of differences that are significant (in varying degrees). In spite of these differences it is usually assumed that no cardinal Christian doctrine is at risk (though some, such as eternal judgment, the ascension and the deity of Jesus, are weakened). **However**, the most basic one of all, the divine inspiration of the text, is indeed under attack.¹⁶

It might be added that the preservation of the text is under attack as much, if not more.

If both the inspiration and the preservation of Scripture are expressions and results of divine providence, what is this providence? God, it is taught, executes His eternal decrees in and through the works of creation and providence according to His infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of His own will (Larger Catechism 14). From creation onward, 'the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence...' (Westminster Confession V.1). He does so by 'upholding all things by the word of his power' (Hebrews 1.3).

His power being omnipotent, the word of His power is omnipotent as well. That is, it achieves anything and everything He wants it to achieve. Inasmuch, then, as the coming into existence of Scripture was an act of providence, God omnipotently caused it to be given, received, recorded, and preserved providentially.

The text of Scripture has been determined by the counsel of His will alone, eternally foreknown by Him, absolutely free, infallible, and immutable, as to the cause, the manner, and the result of its inspiration and preservation. It is absolutely free in that it has not been determined (effected or fashioned) by anything or anyone other than God Himself, though His people could 'determine' (discover) the text by recognising and knowing it.

As God's providence is 'his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing [of] all his creatures; ordering them, and all their actions, to his own glory' (Larger Catechism 18), this implies with respect to the text of Scripture that its inspiration was, and its preservation is, determined by God's infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of His will. So when He had the writers of Scripture record its text and its copyists copy it later on, He preserved and governed both them, as they worked, and 'their' finished product.

Inspiration and preservation—instances of God's works of providence—are acts in and through which He has demonstrated and continues to demonstrate His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governance of the writers, writing, copyists, and copying of His Word. In this case, likewise, He has ordered both the people and their actions for His own glory. For, '...our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased' (Psalm 115.3). He is the 'Lord God Almighty' (Revelation 4.8).

15. A good exposition of this fundamental subject in 1 Corinthians 2 may be found in G. H. Clark, *First Corinthians* (Unicoi, TN, USA: The Trinity Foundation, 1991), pp. 278-58. See especially the topic 'Excursus on Wisdom' on pages 46-57.

16. W. N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text II*, 2nd edition (Eugene, OR, USA: Wipit and Stock Publishers, 2003), p. 169

It pleased the Lord, then, to reveal Himself and to declare His will to His church, and afterwards, so as to better preserve and propagate the truth, to commit it wholly and definitively to writing in the Scriptures. His revealed providence, being eternal, immutable, omniscient, and omnipotent, renders it perfectly intelligible that He could do, and did, all this.

Thus the Scriptures are inspired. Their inspiration is both verbal and plenary. Not just their ideas, but their very words, that is, all their words, and only their words, are the words of God: or collectively, the Word of God.

Having been given as the rule of faith and life by the immediate inspiration of God their Author, who is Truth itself, the authority of these Scriptures wholly depends on Him alone, and we are persuaded and assured of their infallible truth and divine authority by their own evidence and from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts. Containing the whole counsel of God expressly or by valid inference, these Scriptures are both necessary and sufficient, so that nothing may be added to them or taken away from them.¹⁷

As these Scriptures were originally inspired, so they have since been preserved by God. This is called the doctrine of the providential preservation of Scripture. It teaches that God has kept and will keep His Word intact through all time, untouched, undamaged, and complete.

Let it be noted that this statement will not necessarily hold good for any given individual manuscript. Nor is it necessarily a naive position with regard to the doctrine of God or of Scripture, as some might seek to suggest. Nor does it necessarily negate the admittedly varying nature of manuscript evidence, as critics who take their own thoughts as premises would probably argue (see Isaiah 65.2). The plain historical fact that some New Testament manuscripts have been only partially preserved, and that others are demonstrably faulty or corrupt, is freely admitted. The Word of God written has been preserved intact through time **in spite of** such manuscripts. They actually make more conspicuous the agreement of the vast majority of good manuscripts.

Hence we maintain that despite very early, even first century, attacks on the text of Scripture, God has actually, really, truly preserved it. It is further asserted that this preservation can accordingly be verified on the basis of sound method and evidence, bearing in mind, moreover, the character of the witnesses produced. Compared with the texts not only of classical works, such as those of Plato and Homer, but of other religious books, such as the Muslim Qur'an or the Hindu Vedas, the position of the Old and New Testament Scriptures may even be said to be historically and factually unique in this respect.

God has actually preserved His Word from the moment He gave it until the present day, and will do so for at least as long as heaven and earth last in their present state. The Lord Jesus Christ acknowledged and promised as much: in John 10.35 He said, 'the scripture cannot be broken'; and in Matthew 5.18, 'Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled'. Thus the Scripture teaches.

As the Westminster Confession I.8, puts it, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in the original languages, 'being immediately inspired by God', have been 'by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, [and] are therefore authentic'.

Authentical, or **authentic**, together with the Latin equivalents of the word, is an important term in seventeenth-century theology. It is found, for example, in the arguments of writers such as John Owen and Francis Turretin. The Oxford English dictionary includes the following senses of the term:

1. Of authority, authoritative; entitled to obedience or respect...
2. Legally valid; legally qualified...
3. Entitled to belief, as stating or according with fact; reliable, trustworthy...
4. Real, actual, genuine, original, first-hand; really proceeding from its reputed source, author, painter, etc.¹⁸

Selecting the relevant parts of these definitions and combining them in their application to Scripture, it may be said that because all of Scripture is verbally inspired—i.e. God-breathed as to its very words—and as it has by His providence always been kept pure, it alone is originally, properly, truly, infallibly, immutably the Word of God and hence of inherent and final divine authority, truthfully, logically, and legally binding upon all, and is thus entitled to claim the faith, respect, and obedience of all.

17. This and the preceding paragraphs have been adapted from the Westminster Confession I.1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 8.

18. Lesley Brown, Ed.-in-Chief, *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2 vols. (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1.150.

The authenticity of the Scriptures is thus inferred from their divine inspiration and their providential preservation combined. The compilers of the Westminster Confession recognised this double work of God and thus they were confident in writing about the Scriptures as they had them. On the same twin grounds, we can accept the Scriptures—and in the context of this discussion, particularly the New Testament Scriptures—as we have them and as the vast majority of the church has had them for two thousand years, being confident that only relatively few manuscripts are demonstrably faulty in any significant way.

The connection between inspiration and preservation is the strongest one possible: it is God Himself, working through His providence. He who inspired the Scriptures is the same as He who has preserved them and will preserve them forever. He is one, self-consistent, eternally immutable, Truth itself, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. As His nature consists in His essential attributes, so His eternal decrees motivate, inform, and operate through His works of creation and providence. They are all His. Thus all His works, though distinguishable, are one and consistent, including His providential works of inspiring and preserving the Scriptures.

The Scriptures have been preserved for the same reasons that God gave them in the first place. The first chapter of the Westminster Confession, carefully observing this, presupposes both inspiration and preservation to be works of providence that necessarily bear on the nature of the Scriptures and underlie their transmission. In each of these two works, the divine motives and objects are the same. The following points, adapted from that chapter, are advanced in support of these ideas.

For what reasons or purposes, then, has God caused the revelation of Himself, His mind, and His will, which was given at several times and in diverse manners, to be committed wholly to writing in the Scriptures and finally preserved therein?

First and foremost, it has been so preserved because, as He has made known to us in His Word, it was His will to do so.

Second, the following reasons involving His relationship with His creatures may be added.

1. The light of nature and the works of creation and providence manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God sufficiently to leave men inexcusable for their sin, but insufficiently to give the knowledge of God and His will that is necessary unto salvation.

Hence He gave the Scriptures,

2. to better preserve and propagate the truth and knowledge of God and His will;

3. to save His people thereby;

4. to establish and comfort the church (i.e. His people in Old and New Testament times) more surely against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world;

5. because the former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people have ceased (i.e. since the completion of Scripture, the Holy Spirit has given, and will give, no new Scripture, but will only illuminate the Scripture He has already given by leading people to it and by explaining and applying it to them: in short, no more special revelation, but only illumination);

6. to make the Scriptures both necessary and sufficient for His church to achieve His purposes;

7. to raise their authority as His written Word above any doubt in each generation because of their sole dependence on God, the Word's Author, Truth itself;

8. to give an infallible rule of interpretation of themselves (i.e. of the Scriptures), the Supreme Judge in all matters of controversy being the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures (i.e. the Scriptures themselves);

9. to enable the Holy Spirit to do all His work among men by bearing witness in, by, and with this Word in our hearts;

10. to set up a clear and intelligible standard of Truth to which the church is finally to appeal in all matters of controversy; and

11. to allow the Word of God to dwell plentifully in all; and so,

12. to guide His people to and in correct worship; and finally,

13. through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, to give them hope.

Consider now the following questions about the doctrines of inspiration and preservation. How could He, who sees the end from the beginning, start by giving His Word and having it fixed in writing, and then lose sight of the end by not preserving it? How could He with whom there is no shadow of turning show His love to His people by giving them His Word in writing, and then disown His love by not preserving this Word? How could He who is eternally immutably one and consistent, defeat the motives and objects He had in causing His Word to be recorded by not preserving it?

The answer to all of these questions is that God **could not**. For Him to have given His Word and then to have had it destroyed, even if only in part, would have been illogical and inconsistent. That He is not, and cannot be. Therefore, for Him to have done so would be theological nonsense.

It is not in the nature of God to do anything by halves. He certainly has not done so in redemption. Its objective work was accomplished ('It is finished', John 19.30), and its application is always complete, for '... he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ' (Philippians 1.6), who is both 'the author and finisher of *our* faith' (Hebrews 12.2; also compare John 10.28-30 and 1 Peter 1.5).

Nor has God taken any half-measures with regard to His Word. Would He, the Almighty Author, set down the Scriptures, His means of making His Word known in a certified form, and then thwart His original intentions in giving it and propagating it by not preserving it? The Biblical and theological answer to this question is, No. He gave His Word **and** has preserved it.

Yet destructive critics suggest the contrary. Insisting that the true Scriptures, or parts of them, were lost in the fourth century and disappeared for about 1,500 years, and then were at last recovered by Westcott and Hort, they insinuate illogicality and inconsistency on God's part.

But their position follows neither from the Biblical doctrine of God, nor from what Scripture teaches about itself. Being 'forever...settled in heaven', it 'cannot be broken', because God has preserved it (cf. Psalm 119.89 and John 10.35). He has done so despite its having been under attack almost from its inception, which applies especially to the New Testament.

Careful distinction must be made between the true text preserved through His church of all ages and false texts lost or corrupted: between God's preservation and man's neglect or corruption.

Let us briefly recapitulate some of the arguments discussed. It was by and large the received part of the Traditional Text that was established and accepted in the fourth century by the church at large, notably that section of it most qualified to ascertain the New Testament text, namely the Greek-speaking church.

It was, moreover, this part of the church that had had much of the New Testament originally addressed to it in the individual churches (e.g. to the Philippians), and that had stayed close to the original since that time. Western churches had replaced this original with a Latin translation, and ultimately the Vulgate was produced in AD 384-406.

In addition, it was this Greek text that from then on predominated in most churches and in the vast majority of manuscripts until the Reformation, reflecting the judgment and determinations of the ancient church.

Furthermore, this text was reaffirmed and propagated by the Reformers in printed editions of the Bible from 1516 onwards, reflecting the judgment and determinations of the churches of the Reformation.

Some of these points will be elaborated below.

Now an important question that must be tackled is this: were the manuscripts that were once more brought to light toward the end of the Middle Ages and just before the Reformation, and soon to be supported by many other manuscripts of the same general stamp, representative of the correct text of the New Testament? Or may the few emphasised by Westcott and Hort in the nineteenth century and previously lost for many centuries lay claim to this honour?

The Traditional Text, supported by the vast majority of the manuscripts, came with the Reformation to be widely used again in Western Europe, since after the days of the Apostles large swathes of 'the church' had become corrupted, roughly from AD 400 until 1500, and since Roman Catholic ecclesiastical leaders in particular had in effect hidden away this text from the common people by denying them access to it. These had, therefore, been 'Dark Ages' indeed.

In contrast, the relatively few demonstrably corrupt manuscripts brought to the fore in the nineteenth century signal a reactionary move against this established majority, because a few men claimed, without sufficient support, that they were closer to the originals.

All the more wonderful, then, is the providence of God, Who has sometimes performed His works in spite of those claiming to be His church. He had done so too in Old Testament times, as in the reigns of those kings antecedent to Josiah, for example.

These are established facts of history. How are they to be interpreted?

As the church is both the recipient and the guardian of the truth revealed in Scripture, and of the form in which it has been revealed, it is her responsibility and task always to keep this written Word of God pure and complete, and to defend it against all attacks, including those on its words and on its doctrine.¹⁹

Given the teaching summarised in the Westminster Confession, Chapter I, at least four indestructible Biblical, logical and factual links must always be kept in mind in our thinking about the church. These are the links between (a) God and His written Word, (b) the words and the doctrine of Scripture, (c) respectful faith in and obedience to Scripture and the existence and well-being of the believing church, and (d) the preservation and observance of Scripture by the church. It is God who has inspired and who preserves Scripture. He does so by the power of His Holy Spirit, through those who have kept, are keeping, and will keep it.

Significant in this respect is the following characterisation that the Lord Jesus Christ gave of His church: 'I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word' (John 17.6). Here the church is said to consist of those who (a) are God's from eternity, (b) are given by the Father to the Son, (c) have the Father's name revealed to them by the Son, and (d) **have kept God's word**.

In this passage, the words 'have kept' are a translation of *teterekasi*, the perfect indicative active of *tereo*. Thayer says it means, 'to attend to carefully, take care of...to guard...metaphorically, to keep one in that state in which he is...to observe...'; adding that it 'expresses watchful care and is suggestive of present possession.'²⁰ Robert Young's *Analytical Concordance*, in its 'Index-Lexicon to the New Testament' (92), indicates that the word is used seventy-five times in the Authorised Version, in which it is rendered 'keep' fifty-seven times, 'reserve' eight times, 'observe' four times, 'watch' twice, 'preserve' twice, and in its participial form as 'keeper' once and 'hold fast' once. The verb thus expresses the guarding, preserving, and observing of the words and the doctrine of Scripture. Logically, too, its observance presupposes its preservation, for what has not been preserved cannot be observed.

Biblical promises about the preservation of the spoken and written Word of God may also be brought to bear at this point. See, for example, 'As for me, this *is* my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that *is* upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever' (Isaiah 59.21), and, 'These things have I spoken unto you, being *yet* present with you. But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you' (John 14.25-26).

The church is thus defined as those who have kept, are keeping, and will keep the Word (or, the words) and the doctrine of God. It follows that those who do not preserve and observe the words and the doctrine of Scripture, though they may be professing members of the visible church, are not in fact Christ's church in the sense of being believers. Scripture makes an eternal separation between wheat and chaff,²¹ sheep and goats,²² believers and

19. This is entailed in the Westminster Confession I.1-10, and taught in Scripture. Compare, for example, 'But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Timothy 3.15), and, 'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him* my new name' (Revelation 3.12).

20. J. H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 622.

21. See Matthew 3.1-12, especially verse 12.

22. See Matthew 25.32-33, 'And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left'.

unbelievers.²³ Both are found in the visible church. Regrettably, unbelievers may include textual experts, university professors, and ministers. However, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles forewarned us to expect such a situation.²⁴

This state of affairs may be seen to bear on the ecclesiastical transmission of Scripture as follows. God has promised to preserve His written Word. Therefore, He has preserved it, is preserving it, and forever will preserve it. He does this in and through His believing church by the power of His Spirit. As the Westminster Confession XXV.2 says, the visible church 'consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion'²⁵...and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ,²⁶ the house and family of God...²⁷ Its professing members consist of elect believers, some of whom may also be found outside the visible church, along with unbelievers.²⁸

Now in virtue of promises such as Isaiah 59.21 and descriptions such as John 17.6, we may reasonably suppose that God, who is zealous for His Word and His church, ordinarily uses believers to transmit Scripture. Due to Adam's fall, and the corruption of man thereby, some of these believers may have made some textual errors in transmitting the text of Scripture, whether through wrong theory or faulty method. God may even have used some non-elect professing members of the visible church. All the while, it appears that heretics and haters of the Word of God have been seeking, are seeking, and will continue to seek to mutilate or otherwise attack the words and doctrine of Scripture.

However, in spite of, and even through, such circumstances, God's promises to preserve His written Word still stand. Consequently, if the focus is on Scripture as a whole, rather than on this or that individual manuscript, then we may be sure that His promise of providential preservation has been, is being, and will be fulfilled by Him till the end of time. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ has promised. 'For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled' (Matthew 5.18). Of course, non-believers accept neither such promises nor their fulfilment. Nor will they take such as grounds for their textual theory and method. However, this should neither surprise us, nor shake nor deter us who do believe Scripture.

Since all formal and informal thought starts from axioms or presuppositions, all data and phenomena are perceived, accepted, handled, ordered, and evaluated—in short, used—on the basis of these underlying beliefs. The difference between one system and another lies primarily in the different axioms that each takes for its point of reference. These, and the methods that inevitably accompany them, eventually determine the results of the system of thought that they underpin. Ultimately, these results take the form both of what people think, say and do, and of what they do not think, say and do.

This state of affairs holds true also for our present subject. Therefore, no discussion of the preservation of Scripture can ever be justifiably divorced from the views on Scripture's origin, nature, form, content, history and transmission held by those who propose to deal with the subject.

The points discussed in the previous sections warrant the position that Scripture is different from all other writings ever produced or yet to be produced, because this Book is, indeed, what it claims to be: the written Word of God. This position, if true, must arguably determine our view and handling of Scripture absolutely.

Furthermore, the seven points on the doctrine of Scripture mentioned above, including its inspiration and preservation discussed in the present section, will bear on any and all possible doctrinal, historical, or textual proposition. They imply the necessity of a correct view and of the use of logic. They also imply a radical distinction between the two main textual traditions already mentioned: the traditional/majority text, based on an orthodox view of Scripture, versus the critical/minority text, which appears to be based largely on a naturalistic or rationalistic view.

23. See Matthew 7.15-23, especially verses 21-23.

24. In admonitions such as, 'Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves' (Matthew 7.15); 'Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves' (Matthew 10.16; see also Luke 10.3); and, 'For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock' (Acts 20.29).

25. Psalm 2.8; Romans 15.9-12; 1 Corinthians 1.2; 1 Corinthians 12.12, 13; Revelation 7.9.

26. Matthew 13.47; Isaiah 9.7.

27. See Ephesians 2.19 and 3.15.

28. Westminster Confession XXV.1.

These implications proceed from the proposition that Biblical doctrine is both necessary and sufficient, and both relevant and normative, for the theory and handling of the text and translation of Scripture.

9. Further implications of Biblical doctrine for our view of Scripture

The foregoing considerations of Biblical presuppositions, doctrines and correct method are intended to bring us to a sound view of the text of Scripture, especially the New Testament, and of its transmission in history. It is to be hoped that such a view will encourage a more fulsome and respectful treatment of the text.

A brief summarising view of Scripture will now be given. Its transmission will be considered more closely in sections 11 and 12 below in a discussion of the two major textual views and traditions already introduced. Some preliminary implications are elucidated in the present section.

Some of what is now Scripture was first spoken and heard before it was written down. For instance, when in 1 Timothy 5.18 Paul writes, 'For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward', he expressly combines a quotation from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 25.4, with an utterance originally spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ and recorded in the New Testament, Luke 10.7. In doing so, he identifies **both** quotations as 'scripture', recognising an utterance of the Lord Jesus Christ as part of the written Word of God.

Unless Paul had heard this teaching of the Lord from the mouths of the other Apostles, his citation suggests that the Gospel according to Luke was already in existence when Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy. More importantly, it demonstrates that the utterances of the Lord Jesus Christ were accorded the status of the written Word of God as early as around AD 65, the generally accepted approximate date of **1 Timothy**.²⁹ Even so, for us it is the preserved written record forever fixed in Scripture that gives us access to the Lord Jesus Christ and His spoken words, not vice versa.

As the term **Scripture** (the Scripture, the Scriptures) essentially means something written, its primary reference herein is to a written text. Hence it has naturally and commonly come to refer to the writings or books of the Old and New Testament as we now have them. In this, we have indeed taken our cue from Scripture itself, whose Hebrew words *sepher*, *sephar*, *siphrah*, and Greek words *biblion*, *biblos*, *biblaridion*, meaning 'writing', '(book-)roll', '(little) scroll', 'book', 'booklet', are used to refer to the Scriptures themselves. Hence too, the term **Scripture** is equally used to refer to the words written, in their given order, in the Bible. That is why so-called 'variant readings' immediately touch upon the identity of Scripture.

However, since the whole counsel of God is either expressly recorded in Scripture or may be validly deduced from it,³⁰ the word **Scripture** may also refer to the intellectual content, or doctrines, of the Old and New Testament writings, and to their valid implications. As it is in many cases proper and useful to differentiate between what these 'say', 'teach', and 'imply', this extended usage is legitimate.

For example, an admonition such as, 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God' (Matthew 22.29), clearly addresses an insufficient understanding, on the part of some Sadducees (verse 23), of the teaching of 'the scriptures', taken as a whole. In this context, the doctrine of 'the resurrection of the dead' is in view (verse 31). The Lord Jesus Christ makes two distinct statements about this doctrine. One emphasises that 'in the resurrection', in the new heaven and earth, there will be no marriage because the resurrected will be like the angels (Matthew 22.30). The other statement takes the form of a deduction from a truth stated explicitly in Exodus 3.6, 'Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...' The point of the original is that this is how God revealed His identity to Moses. However, the Lord Jesus used this statement to argue that as God is the God of the living (compare, for example, Deuteronomy 5.26; Joshua 3.10), and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, these three

29. See R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans, 1880, 1995), 3.480ff.; and Bromiley, 3.685. The general thought, but not the words or the emphasis, of this and the preceding paragraphs may also be found in B. B. Warfield, *Works*, 10 vols., vol. 1: *Revelation and Inspiration*. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Book House, 1981), 1.110, 121, 452, and 455. On page 452, his emphasis is, however, on the link between, and the sameness in nature and level of, the Old and New Testament. On page 455, he uses Luke 10.7 to clarify the concept of apostolicity, which is defined not as apostolic authorship, but as 'the imposition [of something] by the apostles as "law"'.

30. This principle is not adduced here to imply or promote any judgment on the quality or the content of the Westminster Confession, which gives a slightly different formulation of the matter (I.8), but to underline the rational, non-contradictory nature of the written Word of God and of all truth validly derived from it. The attention given here is thus limited to the usage of the word **scripture** and to the doctrine of Scripture. The reader is kindly asked to note that particular views on other doctrines are not implied, nor is agreement with them required at this juncture.

men must therefore be among the living. Hence there is a resurrection of the dead. More specifically, Christ is asserting that the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection, though disputed by the Sadducees, is true (Matthew 22.31, 32). Both statements are part of what 'the scriptures' say, teach, and imply about the resurrection of the dead.

Elsewhere, the unity, infallibility, and immutability of the Scriptures are expressed by the Lord Jesus Christ in the emphatic statement, 'For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled' (Matthew 5.18), as well as being implied in His statement that 'the scripture cannot be broken' (John 10.35).

The connection between the words and the doctrine of Scripture is inevitably a close one. For what it teaches is either identical with what it says (its statements, clauses, sentences), or consists of propositions validly inferred from these. This is implied by a statement such as, 'All scripture... is profitable for doctrine' (2 Timothy 3.16), and it also appears from instances of deduction, such as the Lord's argument in Matthew 22, quoted in the paragraph before last.

Incidentally, this is why good exegesis, preaching, and teaching range from the one to the other and then back again: from text to doctrine, from statements to implications and applications, and then back to the text. The old preachers were right to focus on the text, the doctrine, and the use of Scripture. Indeed, the close connection between words and doctrine is often mentioned explicitly in Scripture itself, as in, 'nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine' (1 Timothy 4.6), and '...they who labour in the word and doctrine' (1 Timothy 5.17; also compare 1 Timothy 6.3; 2 Timothy 4.2; Titus 1.9; 1 Peter 1.25).

In the nature of the case, therefore, the exegesis, teaching and preaching of Scripture are necessarily and inextricably linked to its words. For they are the 'things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth' (1 Corinthians 2.13).

Nevertheless, the primary reference of the word **scripture** is to the written text of the Bible and so to the ordered words of which it consists. A statement such as 'no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost' (2 Peter 1.20-21) identifies Scripture, including this text itself, as being divinely inspired, breathed out by God into the minds of its recipients, without any admixture of words of human origin. If this view of its origin and its communicative process is accepted, it follows that the result was, and is, the uncorrupted, even incorruptible (as in 1 Peter 1.23), Word of God, yet allowing for recognisable differences in individual style among its writers. The statement that 'All [or, 'Every', Greek *pasa*, which is both collective and distributive] scripture *is* given by inspiration of God' (2 Timothy 3.16) further affirms that not just some of it is so inspired, but **all** of it.

It is these properties that make Scripture one of a kind, the Word of God forever fixed and preserved in writing.

In conclusion, two inferences may be drawn. First, the preceding argument serves to predispose the believing Bible student against any naturalistic view of Scripture. Most modern critics hold (with varying degrees of openness) such a view, maintaining that Scripture is like any other writing and therefore to be treated as such: in other words, it is essentially and substantially no different from any human writing. If that is so, then it is not the unique Word of God fixed and preserved in writing that it claims to be.

Second, the foregoing argument equally predisposes the Bible-believing Christian against any naturalistic view of the transmission of the Scripture text. To him, this is no haphazard, impersonal, or mechanical process, nor a merely, or even predominantly, human affair. It is the account of a divinely inspired text that actually has been, and is being, providentially preserved in history. Therefore, its transmission amounts to historically documented providential preservation in action.

10. Arrangement of the rest of this study

The rest of this study is organised as follows. Section 11 gives a brief comparative outline of the Critical Text and the Traditional Text positions in terms of some of their axioms, their methods, and their arguments, and briefly considers the Critical Text view.

Section 12 discusses the Traditional Text view and compares the two views. Specifically, it considers how their different presuppositions cannot but give rise to, and have indeed given rise to, rival theories, methods, and practices with respect to the New Testament text and its translation.

Section 13 then reviews one basic assumption concerning Scripture in some detail, showing how the two different views work radically differently.

Section 14 draws some distinctions, recapitulates some of the arguments, and offers some conclusions.

Section 15, finally, evaluates the most important points discussed in this study.

11. Critical theory: Westcott and Hort, and their philosophical descendents

To have argued that doctrine bears on the text of New Testament Scripture and on one's view of it does not prejudice the discussion in favour of the Traditional Text position or against the critical position. On the contrary, to have done so is merely to be realistic, for at least three reasons.

First, logically, if Scripture is the Truth of God, as it claims to be, then what it says pre-eminently bears on the issues at hand.

Second, historically, the critical position was admittedly a reaction against the Traditional Text position, which it was intended by its proponents to replace: hence this position's reactionary origin and nature.

Third, doctrinally, in Westcott and Hort's influential book to be treated of below, theoretical considerations clearly played a predominant role in the nineteenth-century change of textual view, even to the extent of their having been its cause.

The limitations of this study do not allow for a discussion of all the properties of the Critical Text theory, nor even a lengthy one of some. However, since most later critics have followed the original arguments fairly closely,³¹ the interested reader may gain a fuller understanding of the critical position by consulting the two-volumes of *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST translated out of the Greek: being the Version set forth AD 1611, compared with the most ancient Authorities, and Revised AD 1881*, Oxford and Cambridge, by Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. These volumes will be quoted below. Its first volume, which contains the Greek text as Hort and Westcott revised it accompanied by notes on individual readings, will be referred to hereafter as 1881 and its second volume, an introduction and appendix to the text, is hereafter referred to as 1882.³²

The critical view is often called the 'Westcott and Hort theory' because they were the first to promote its current form. But it is really the latter's brainchild: '...the writing of this [second] volume and the other accompaniments of the text has devolved on Dr Hort' (1882: 19). For this reason, their second volume will be referred to as Hort 1882.

Hort's theory has been very influential and remains so even to the present. Not only did it cause the New Testament text to be revised in 1881, but it has succeeded since then in leading many to judge the New Testament to be even **revisable on principle**—revisable even without textual evidence. What, then, are the theory's more prominent characteristics?

In discussing some of these, a useful distinction might be made between the Hort theory's underlying presuppositions, its method, and its arguments. In nearly all facets of these aspects, his theory differs from the Traditional Text position. Hence, although holders of the critical and the traditional views share some facts—both acknowledge, for instance, that there is a text that is supported by the vast majority of the manuscripts—they tend to evaluate these facts differently because of their radically different basic premises.

The present discussion cannot be exhaustive, but it is hoped that some of the differences between the two views are outlined sufficiently to enable readers to make up their own minds about them, or at least to embark on further reading meaningfully and purposefully.

31. An example of such a study, which also seeks to cast critical developments since Westcott and Hort in the most positive terms, is D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate. A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Book House, 1979). The author's kind of 'realism' leads him to state that, 'All things taken together, it is my considered judgment that the NIV New Testament is the best English translation of the Greek New Testament now available' (p. 97). It also drives him to the conclusion that 'The church of Jesus Christ must constantly pursue reformation. Any body of believers that is bound by its heritage, however splendid that heritage may be, has already begun the drift to heterodoxy' (p. 103). This conclusion, however, seems to be rather a mixed bag. Its first sentence is biblical enough on the face of it, but the rest of Carson's book makes it clear, that, in his view, the church is to be reformed on and through the critical presuppositions, method, and handling of the Scriptures, no less. The second sentence of his conclusion, especially if it be meant as a general principle, is dubious at best, and tendentious at worst. One wonders whether this is indeed realism, or ill-founded and misguided idealism, however well-intended it may be.

32. *The New Testament in the Original Greek, The Text Revised* by Brooke Foss Westcott D.D. and Fenton John Anthony Hort D.D. , 'Introduction-Appendix', Cambridge/London, MacMillan, 1882. The Dean Burgon Society Press, P.O. Box 354, Collingswood, New Jersey 08108, USA, has recently published a reprint of this.

Critical View:

1. Scripture is like any text of human origin.
2. Approach Scripture like any other text.
3. The subjective judgment of the individual critic is the ultimate criterion for determining the Scripture text, to be applied through the methods of intrinsic and transcriptional probability.
4. The older the manuscript, the better its text.
5. The quality of a manuscript is determined by its genealogy.
6. The number of manuscripts is not a criterion for determining the quality of a text.
7. The traditional majority text is the result of conflation (the mixing of two or more texts).
8. The Traditional Text is the result of at least two deliberate revisions.
9. Cureton's Syriac is the only surviving specimen of the unrevised version.
10. The critical minority text is the purest.

Traditional view:

1. Scripture is the unique Word of God.
2. Scripture requires its own special approach.
3. The Scripture text is to be established on the basis of all the available textual evidence by applying all the relevant textual principles, at least the 'seven notes of truth' (defined by John Burgon in Burgon 1896a: 1 and discussed below).
4. The age of a manuscript is a necessary but not sufficient criterion for determining the quality of its text, even less an absolute one. For the New Testament text, age is also inadequate in that some of its earliest manuscripts are among the most corrupted ones, so that an older witness is not necessarily better. Moreover, the oldest uncials³³ adduced to support the Critical Text are not the oldest extant manuscripts.
5. Genealogy is an inadequate principle, insufficient in and of itself. Drawn as it is from familial relationships, the textual analogy is flawed. As the precise relationships between most extant New Testament manuscripts are unknown, this principle is inapplicable.
6. Insufficient in and of itself, the number of manuscripts is one of several textual criteria necessary for determining the providentially preserved text. The normal laws of evidence require it. Hort is contradicting himself.
7. There is no sufficient and unambiguous historical evidence to support any conflation, much less wholesale conflation, of the Traditional Text. Omission in the Critical Text is more plausible.
8. That there were the two revisions supposed by Hort is pure conjecture. This view is not supported either by external evidence of the existence of church councils on such revisions, or of any documents relating to major Bible revisions produced by such councils.
9. This critical assumption is pure hypothesis, unsupported by historical or textual evidence.
10. The traditional majority text is the purest.

33. 'Uncials' are European manuscripts of the 4th-8th centuries written in a majuscule script with rounded unjoined letters, from which modern capital letters are derived.

To aid the reader, on the preceding page is an overview briefly summarising ten contrasting features of the two views. It should be noted that there is overlap in these in individual textual critics; for example, in point 1 some who hold the critical view believe that the Scripture is the unique Word of God, but they would treat it as if it were not, as seen in point 2.

It is now time to discuss the features of the Critical Text theory listed in the overview given above.

Arguably the fundamental axiom of the critical theory is the idea that Scripture is like any text of human origin. Thus it is viewed as not essentially different from any other text in existence, whether as to its nature or its transmission. This means that Scripture is not believed to be the uniquely inspired and preserved written Word of God.

Another basic idea, equally naturalistic, which follows on logically is that Scripture is to be approached like any other text.

This is also related to Hort's assumption that some words of the Word of God have now been irretrievably lost. This may appear from the following. To the questions, 'Is it or is it not reasonable to expect that in any considerable number of cases the true reading has now perished? Have we a right to assume that the true reading always exists somewhere among existing documents?' (Hort 1882b: 276), he gives two answers. The first seems the more germane to the present argument and will therefore be quoted here at length.

The question is often foreclosed on one or both of two grounds which in our judgment are quite irrelevant. First, some think it incredible that any true words of Scripture should have perished. In reply it is a sufficient *argumentum ad hominem* to point to the existence of various readings, forming part of various texts accepted for long ages, and the frequent difficulty of deciding between them, even though we say nothing of difficulties of interpretation: on any view many important churches for long ages have had only an approximately pure New Testament, so that we have no right to treat it as antecedently incredible that only an approximately pure New Testament should be attainable now, or even in all future time. For ourselves we dare not introduce considerations which could not reasonably be applied to other ancient texts, supposing them to have documentary attestation of equal amount, variety, and antiquity. [Hort 1882b: 276-277]

Several points in this quotation may be highlighted. First Hort argues that even though some Received or Traditional Text adherents may think themselves able to recover the New Testament from the ruins of corruption that it has been in for, for argument's sake, 1,500 years, this is uncertain, even unlikely. That is, they err: the Traditional Text is dubious at best and, even with the rediscovered uncials which are the mainstay of the Critical Text taken into account, the recovery of the true text of the New Testament text is unattainable. Grounds and arguments against this position and text, put forward by Traditional or Received Text adherents, he dismisses as 'irrelevant'.

Second, as already pointed out, this view is based on Hort's first premise, that Scripture is just like any other text. It bears repeating that this position reflects a naturalistic concept of Scripture. The assumption that any of the true words of Scripture may have—and that many of its words have—perished, effectively denies what Scripture teaches concerning the divine providential preservation of itself in the course of history. Hort's stance entails that God has not in fact preserved, and is not preserving, His Word. It denies the truth of Scripture in this respect, and so, potentially, in any other respect. In effect, it denies that Scripture is the Word of God. It also presupposes the falsehood of, at the least, divine omnipotence, omniscience, rationality, unity, and sovereignty.

Third, Hort's reply is more than an **argumentum ad hominem** (arguing from sentiment rather than objective evidence). It is governed by a disbelief in the existence and power of God. As such, it is an instance and expression of atheism.

Fourth, the suggestion that 'the existence of various readings' in and of itself sufficiently proves that parts of the Word of God have now been lost seems philosophically naive, and is in fact plainly false. That there is variation among and within manuscripts, no-one denies. What is important, however, is on what grounds and by what method one understands and accounts for this phenomenon. Understanding and evaluation are always determined by presuppositions.

Now it is fair to assume from Hort's statements that he has an inadequate understanding of the God of Scripture as it relates to the nature of Scripture. Therefore he is not reluctant to turn textual variations into proofs for the inadequacy of Scripture, perhaps implying that the process of preservation is outside God's control.

The Bible-believing student of Scripture, on the other hand, views and interprets the same facts quite differently, for he operates on a fundamentally different basis. Recognising that attacks on the New Testament Scriptures (to limit ourselves to these) occurred practically from the moment they appeared, he would argue that God, in His manifold wisdom, has guarded His Word against corruption by distributing it among, and preserving it in, many and various manuscripts.

Moreover, some of these are, demonstrably, more consistent internally or in comparison with others, or both, and thus are more reliable than others. This of course seriously undermines the underlying views of those who hold the Critical Text view, and indeed their text itself. To a Bible believer, therefore, it is not surprising—but rather telling—that Hort will not allow for an evaluation of readings that takes into account the relative quality of the manuscripts in which they occur.

Fifth, Hort, always eager to overstate his point, argues that, because ‘many churches for long ages have had only an approximately pure New Testament’, ‘we have no right to treat it as antecedently incredible that only an approximately pure New Testament should be attainable now, or even in all future time.’ In other words, we have no right to believe in the providential preservation of Scripture.

Hort clearly wills his conclusion to be universally and pervasively true, arguing that ‘the true reading’ does not ‘always exist...somewhere among existing documents’. By stressing, in addition, ‘the frequent difficulty of deciding between them’, and further, unspecified, ‘difficulties of interpretation’, he almost seems to **wish** the verification of the true text of the Word of God to be a thing impossible. But his argument is a non sequitur. For, from the supposed fact that ‘many’ churches have had a corrupted New Testament at times—even if this is or were true—it does not follow, as Hort’s assertion would have it, that all churches must always have a corrupted New Testament.

Nor, sixth, is the preceding argument true with ‘any view’, as is claimed. In fact, the argument is naively biased by his own critical philosophy and text view. Moreover, it deliberately ignores the massive body of manuscript evidence, handed down through the centuries, that favours the Traditional or Received Text.

In sum, Hort’s argument is false. So, therefore, is the conclusion he wishes to draw from it, namely that we are forced to view and treat Scripture like any other book.

Westcott and Hort’s slighting of the Traditional Text and of the ancient church’s appreciation of it further appears from the fact that, whereas their original instruction from the Convocation of the Southern Province of the Anglican Church had been merely to correct ‘plain and clear errors’ in the Authorised **English Version**, they actually went so far as to produce a revision of the **Greek text**. It is remarkable that such a limited assignment given by one section of one denomination to a handful of men who abused their mandate has led to a view and a text that now dominates the majority of what were once Reformed churches, without most of their members being sufficiently aware of the facts, if at all.

A similarly disparaging attitude springs from their Greek text having being based primarily on one manuscript with only a few others supporting it, and Hort then claiming, in the wording of the title of the 1882 edition, that their text was **the** New Testament in **the** original Greek (cf. Burgon 1896a: 2, 3, 9ff., 1939; 1896b: 10-14; 1883, 2ff; see footnote 34).

It should be no surprise, therefore, to find that, according to the critical view, it has now become the task of ‘sacred’ textual criticism to **correct** the Traditional Text primarily **by making it conform to the few manuscripts these critics have preselected**.

A methodological consequence of the foregoing assumptions is that the ultimate ground for testing the soundness of principles, methods, arguments, and textual—or any other—propositions is not the truth of Scripture and the laws of logic based on it, nor well-documented external textual or historical evidence, but the subjective judgment, the inner consciousness, of the individual textual critic. That this was indeed Hort’s position, astounding as it may be, appears from statements such as the following.

1. ‘No individual mind can ever act with perfect uniformity, or free itself completely from its own idiosyncrasies...the danger of unconscious Caprice is inseparable from personal judgment’ (1882b: 17).
2. ‘We are obliged to come to the individual mind at last; and Canons of Criticism are useful only as warnings against natural illusions, and aids to circumspect consideration, not as absolute rules to prescribe the final decision’ (quoted by Burgon 1883: 251, who is referring to Westcott and Hort’s private 1870 limited edition of the text, pages xviii-xix, already mentioned on his page 22).
3. ‘Where one of the documents is found habitually to contain morally certain, or at least strongly preferred [by Hort himself], readings, and the other habitually to contain their rejected rivals, we [Westcott and Hort] can have no doubt that the Text of the first [their Critical Text] has been transmitted in comparative purity; and that the Text of the second [the Received Text] has suffered comparatively large corruption’ (Hort 1882b: 32).

It is not at all clear, at least not to the present writer, how readings can be ‘morally certain.’ The use of such a phrase

in a context like this merely seems tendentious. Did Hort use it because he knew that most of his readers would be ecclesiastical ones?

This principled subjectivism gave rise to the so-called textual ‘methods’ of intrinsic probability and transcriptional probability (Hort 1882b: 20-30).

Another critical axiom is that seniority among manuscripts automatically implies superiority of readings. With some variation, this had all but been the method of critics who worked before Westcott and Hort, such as Lachmann, Tregelles and Tischendorf. But it was Hort and Westcott who raised it to an almost absolute principle, and it has practically remained so among their followers, so that we find in twentieth-century Bible translations footnotes which baldly state that a given reading is not found in the ‘oldest and best manuscripts’.

It is further assumed in the critical framework that the quality of a manuscript is determined by its genealogy. The supposition is that ‘all trustworthy restoration of corrupted Texts is founded on the study of their History’ (Hort 1882b: 40). Note the universal, almost peremptory, claim that is being made. This principle is believed to produce ‘a total change in the bearing of the evidence’ (Hort 1882b: 43).

Another idea taken as a principle is that the number of manuscripts, more particularly a clear majority, counts for nothing; or at least does not necessarily present an argument in favour of a disputed reading. The issue is cast in the following negative form, clearly intended to favour the Critical Text: ‘A few documents are not, by reason of their mere paucity, appreciably less likely to be right than a multitude opposed to them’ (Hort 1882b: 45).

Yet another assumed principle is that the Traditional Text is the result of mixture by ‘conflation.’ Conflate readings are defined as readings whose constituent parts are taken from several distinct texts (Hort 1882b: 93-107; the concept is defined on pages 94-95). This notion is supposed to prove the relative lateness of ‘Syrian’ to ‘Western’ and other ‘Neutral Readings.’ That is, the traditional or majority text, deliberately delimited by Hort as ‘Syrian,’ is claimed to be the latest text-type of all (his names for the various text-types he posits reflect his bias).

The preceding point is related to Hort’s supposition that there were three deliberate ‘recensions’ (textual revisions), which are moreover assumed to have been interconnected (Westcott and Hort 1881a: 552). Two concern the ‘Syrian’ (the traditional majority) text and supposedly took place between AD 250 and 350 (Hort 1882b: 132-133). The third one involves the Old Syriac text and is supposed to have occurred in the fourth century, at Edessa, Nisibis, or Antioch (Hort 1882b: 136-137). In the critic’s own words:

The facts would, we believe, be explained by the supposition, natural enough in itself, that (1) the growing diversity and confusion of Greek texts led to an authoritative Revision at Antioch, which (2) was then taken as a standard for a similar authoritative revision of the Syriac text, and (3) was itself at a later time subjected to a second authoritative revision, carrying out more completely the purposes of the first; but that the Vulgate Syriac text did not undergo any corresponding second revision... The final process was apparently completed by AD 350 or thereabouts. At what date between AD 250 and 350 the first process took place, it is impossible to say with confidence; and even for conjecture the materials are scanty [Hort 1882b: 137]

Note, however, that all of this is posited. Nothing of it is proven.

The supposed historical outcome of these assumed events in terms of the character of the Traditional Text is that it is a hybrid text:

Entirely blameless, on either literary or religious grounds, as regards vulgarised or unworthy diction, yet **showing no marks of either Critical or Spiritual insight**, it presents the New Testament in a form smooth and attractive, but appreciably **impoverished in sense and force; more fitted for cursory perusal or recitation than for repeated and diligent study**. [Hort 1882b: 134-135, emphasis added]

Hort’s not-so-subtle depreciation of the traditional/majority/Byzantine text verges once again on the acerbic here. In addition, as before with the phrase ‘moral certainty’ in regard to readings, he now seems to use the term ‘spiritual’ tendentiously with respect to a text.

Another critical assumption, related to the preceding one, is that Cureton’s Syriac is

...the only surviving specimen of the unrevised Version, and is henceforth *invariably* designated by these authors [Hort and his associates] as “the old Syriac”; and referred to as “syr. vt.” [Syriaca Vetus], in imitation of the Latin “vetus” [old]: the venerable Peschito being referred to as the “Vulgate Syriac”: “syr. vg.” [Burgon 1883: 276]

That the critical minority text is the purest is really the conclusion that the critics would like to draw from all their arguments combined, based on their foregoing (and other) suppositions. At the very least, their stance is that of the two main textual traditions of the New Testament, the Critical Text is the purer one. Supposedly, the Critical Text best reflects the original manuscripts, however uncertain the resulting text may be. However, the Critical Text, which has met with rather more success than it would appear to merit, may turn out to be yet another red herring dragged across the church's path.

12. The Traditional Text view

We now turn to the traditional view. Its outline will be broken down in the same manner as the one just given above of the critical view. In all important points, the two views prove to be in contrast with each other, to the extent that they are mutually exclusive. It may therefore be anticipated that inasmuch as the one is confirmed, the other is to the same extent refuted. After all, as already noted, the critical theory was intended to replace the traditional view, just as much as the Critical Text was meant to replace the Traditional Text.

In representing the traditional view and contrasting it with the critical position, the work of John William Burgon will be quoted fairly often. He was one of the first defenders of the Traditional Text and has been followed, in the main, by most adherents after him. The interested reader who wishes to be informed about the traditional view and text is therefore likely to find his publications still adequate and useful.³⁴

A scholarly summary and evaluation of the critical theory and text is given in Burgon 1883: 26-28. Its assumptions are discussed in terms of eight distinct features on pages 235-320 of the work. That Hort, despite being challenged, never even attempted to answer Burgon's arguments or to face his extensive arrays of data, may well be a telling indication of the impact and significance of the latter's work (cf. Burgon 1883: vii, xv).

Burgon discusses the Critical Text comprehensively in his frequently reprinted book *The Revision Revised*. This study first appeared in 1883, containing three substantial articles previously published in the *Quarterly Review* which were related in subject: 'The New Greek Text', 'The New English Version', and 'Westcott and Hort's New Textual Theory'.

The term **revision** in its title thus refers both to the Greek New Testament text as revised by Westcott and Hort on the premises of their textual theory, and to the revised English version based on it. Some of the main points of this study are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Burgon supposed, correctly, that if Westcott and Hort's theory was faulty, then their text must be, and that if their text was flawed, then so also would their translation be. He argued that their theory was indeed faulty, and that for this as well as for other reasons their text and version were likewise faulty. Hence, he concluded, it was their revision that must be revised, not the Traditional or Received Text. His book, a well-argued 549-page refutation of their theory, text, and translation (not counting the thirty-two pages of its Dedication and Preface), demonstrates why and how.

As critical philosophy, theology, and theory, and the texts and versions based on these (such as the Revised Version of 1881) are inextricably bound up with one another, so likewise, though with opposing assertions to the critical armoury, are traditional theology and philosophy, the traditional theory, and the text and versions based on these, such as the Authorised Version and the Dutch Statenvertaling.

For Burgon, 'no compromise...[is] possible between our respective methods' (517), that is, between that of the revisers and his own. He consistently placed their subjective method of 'divination' (518), over against the 'external evidence' (19)

34. The following works by Burgon have recently been reprinted by the Dean Burgon Society Press, P.O. Box 354, Collingswood, New Jersey 08108, USA: *Inspiration and Interpretation* (1861), *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to St. Mark, Vindicated Against Recent Critical Objectors and Established* (1871), *The Revision Revised* (1883), *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established* (1896a), and *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (1896b). The last two titles were posthumously arranged, completed, and edited by Edward Miller, who used Burgon's collected materials and notes. These five works number over two thousand pages of solid fare, but do not include Burgon's unpublished 'collection of quotations from the New Testament to be found in the works of the Fathers and in other ecclesiastical writings, going far beyond ordinary indexes, which may be found in sixteen thick volumes amongst the treasures of the British Museum' (Burgon 1896a: v-vi). A more accessibly written recent defence of the traditional position is found in three books edited by David Otis Fuller and published by Grand Rapids International Publications, P.O. Box 2607, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501, USA: *Which Bible?* (1975); *True or False? The Westcott-Hort Textual Theory Examined* (1973); and *Counterfeit or Genuine. Mark 16? John 8?* (1975). Though the articles and excerpts in these books vary in size and quality, quite a few of them helpfully discuss principles and problems involved in the study of the New Testament text and clearly outline the more important differences between the traditional and the critical view, and contain many useful references to theoretical and textual studies.

of 'the consentient testimony of the largest number of the best copies, Fathers, versions' (518), and 'lectionaries' (portions of Scripture used in public worship) (11, 125-126, 269, 392), which testimony he considered to be 'our best, our only safe guide' (19).

Throughout his work, he assumes the interrelationship between theology or philosophy and textual and translational theory and practice. The present article explicitly argues it. It will not be surprising, therefore, that his and the present position largely, though not entirely, coincide.

Not all of his facts and arguments are reproduced here, nor can their significance be fully or even sufficiently discussed. The interested reader may find, however, that by and large *The Revision Revised* has held its own on all the major points it makes, and that more than a hundred years after its appearance it can still speak for itself concerning these. Except where noted otherwise, the following references are to this book, with the original emphases and capitalisations retained.

Burgon argued that Westcott and Hort's theory, text, and translation are seriously at fault because of their and their predecessors' inductive fallacy in their 'exclusive reliance on a very few ancient authorities—because they are "ancient"' (242). This he considered 'irrational' (243), because, '...these are one, two, three, or four specimens only of antiquity, not "antiquity" itself' (244).

Burgon notes that Hort prefers the 1831 text of Lachmann because it was, according to Hort, "the first founded on documentary authority". Burgon, however, contends that Lachmann's textual authority is 'partial, narrow, self-contradictory; and is proved to be untrustworthy by a free appeal to Antiquity', whereas regarding the texts of Erasmus and Stunica,

their documentary authority, derived from independent sources...exhibits (*under the good Providence of God*) a Traditional Text, the general purity of which 350 years of subsequent research [roughly, one supposes, from Erasmus' fifth, and last, edition in 1535 until 1881] have succeeded in accumulating; and which is confessedly the text of AD 375. [250]

Thus Burgon lays bare an internal contradiction in the Critical Text hypothesis.

Indeed, as Burgon notes, Hort held that 'the fundamental Text of *late extant Greek MSS.* generally is *beyond all question identical* with the dominant Antiochian or Graeco-Syrian text of the *second half of the fourth century*' (257; the emphasis is Burgon's, who here quotes Hort). Burgon also notes that,

The one great Fact, which especially troubles him [Hort] and his joint Editor [Westcott]...is The Traditional Greek Text of the New Testament Scriptures. Call this Text...the 'Received', or the *Traditional Greek Text*, or whatever other name you please—the fact remains, that a Text *has* come down to us which is attested by a general consensus of ancient Copies, ancient Fathers, ancient Versions. This, at all events, is a point on which, (happily,) there exists entire conformity of opinion between Dr. Hort and ourselves... Obtained from a variety of sources, this Text proves to be essentially *the same* in all...[and it] is identical with the Text of every extant Lectionary of the Greek Church, and may therefore reasonably claim to be spoken of as the *Traditional Text*. [269]

In contrast, Burgon called the Critical Text 'untrustworthy from beginning to end', because 'it has been constructed throughout on an utterly erroneous hypothesis' (Dedication, v-vi; also cf. 227-228 and 316). In his view, the Revision had subjected the underlying Greek to 'systematic depravation' (vi), and was

a poisoning of the River of Life at its Sacred source. Our revisers, (with the best and purest intentions, no doubt,) stand convicted of having deliberately rejected the Words of Inspiration in every page, and of having substituted for them fabricated readings which the church has long since refused to acknowledge, or else has rejected with abhorrence; and which only survive at this time in a little handful of documents of the most depraved type. [Dedication, vi-vii; also cf. Preface xxx, and 107, 110, 114, 227 and 315-319]

This handful of documents he specified as B, Ⲁ (Aleph), A, C, and D (29).

Burgon also noted, correctly, that the revisers had actively discarded large parts of the available evidence, especially patristic and lectionary evidence (cf. 29, 297 and 299).

He argued moreover that the manuscripts that Westcott and Hort had selected were 'hopelessly at variance among themselves', as well as with '(1) *all other Manuscripts* of whatever date, (2) the *most ancient Versions*, and (3), *the whole body of the primitive Fathers*, decidedly opposed to them...' (325). Therefore, '...these accomplished scholars have

succeeded in producing a Text vastly more remote from the inspired autographs of the Evangelists than any which has appeared since the invention of printing' (25-26).

He further rejected the Critical Text because it is based far too often on conjecture, whereas 'IN BIBLICAL TEXTUAL CRITICISM "CONJECTURAL EMENDATION" HAS NO PLACE...' (28, original capitals).

Many more facts and arguments are adduced in Burgon's book, but perhaps these may suffice here.

In view of the foregoing and other facts and arguments, Burgon was very cautious about revising the Textus Receptus (Received Text), and considered the work of the 1881 revisers highly irresponsible from a textual and a scientific point of view.

While he held that 'in not a few particulars, the "Textus Receptus" *does* call for revision' (107), though merely 'in respect of many of its lesser details' (269), such a revision should, in his view, only be undertaken 'on entirely different principles from those which are found to have prevailed in the Jerusalem Chamber' [the 1881 revisers' place of work] (107), by which principles they had failed in their attempt at a proper revised version. He felt that the Textus Receptus was, on the other hand, 'an excellent text as it stands, and that the use of it will never lead critical students of Scripture seriously astray' (269).

True, Burgon conceded, 'I eagerly make my appeal *from* it to the threefold witness of copies, versions, Fathers [and mentioned elsewhere in Burgon's book, the Greek Lectionaries] whenever I find its testimony challenged' (392). He took this stance presumably because he did not regard 'the "Received,"—aye, or any other known "Text"—as "a standard *from which there shall be no appeal*"' (385; Burgon is here quoting Bishop Ellicott in rejoinder). However, he considered the Received Text 'quite good enough for all ordinary purposes' (392), good enough even to be used as 'a standard whereby to test—wherewith to compare—Manuscripts' (386). Indeed, he held that 'the exact *Collocation* of documents whether ancient or modern with the Received Text, is the necessary foundation of all scientific Criticism,' though he employed it 'not as a criterion of *Excellence*, but as a standard of *Comparison*' (Preface, xxiv-xxv).

While one of his leading principles was that '*the best supported Reading...must always be held to be the true Reading*' (20), he also thought that 'nothing may be rejected from the commonly Received Text, except on evidence which shall *clearly* outweigh the evidence for retaining it' (20). He went so far as to state that 'Whenever the evidence is about evenly balanced...the text which has been "in possession" for three centuries and a half [from the Reformation until 1881], and which rests on infinitely better manuscript evidence than that of any ancient work which can be named—should, for every reason, be let alone' (21). These are strong statements.

Burgon was not only arguing that the Traditional or Received Text should be let alone because it was the better, more trustworthy text, but for another reason: it was his considered opinion that textual science had not yet sufficiently advanced or matured for it to be able to revise, in particular, the New Testament text. Even Bishop Ellicott, the chairman of the revisers' committee, agreed with him on this, stating that 'it is my honest conviction...that for any authoritative revision, we are not yet mature: either in Biblical learning or Hellenistic Scholarship' (quoted by Burgon, 124).

This ground is the more important given that most of the principles and conditions that Burgon argued for as prerequisites have still not been met today. Nor are they, perhaps, likely to be met even in the near future. Apart from the need for a sufficient number of 'divines of undoubted orthodoxy' (108), who must at the same time be thoroughly trained and dedicated scholars (cf. Preface, xvii, xxv), Burgon held that not just some, but all the relevant textual criteria—antiquity, number, variety, weight, continuity, context, and reasonableness³⁵—are to be applied.

These criteria, moreover, are to be applied not just to some, but to all of the available evidence. 'The method I persistently advocate in every case of a supposed doubtful Reading...is, that *an appeal shall be unreservedly made to Catholic* [universal, or all] *Antiquity*; and...the combined verdict of Manuscripts, Versions, Fathers [as well as that of lectionaries (11)], shall be regarded as decisive' (Preface, xxvii). Burgon's view included **all** the evidence: even the uninitiated may, on reflection, appreciate the thoroughgoing implications and the magnitude of this central tenet.

In addition, despite the spate of newly-discovered manuscripts even in Burgon's day, he pointedly asked, 'who knows how to use them?' (124), and 'what living Englishman is able to tell us what they all contain?' (124), and, 'which of the Fathers has been satisfactorily indexed?' (125). Indeed, he called for more extensive and precise editing and printing of the ancient lectionaries, versions, and Fathers (125-126).

35. See Burgon's *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established* (London, England: George Bell and Sons, 1896), p. 29, etc.

He also argued that ‘the fundamental principles of the science of textual criticism are not yet apprehended’ (125). It might be added that, if these are at all sufficiently understood today, they are certainly not being consistently applied by all parties to Biblical studies.

Recognising God’s actual providential preservation of Scripture, Burgon urged, ‘let the ample and highly complex provision which Divine wisdom hath made for the effectual conservation of that crowning masterpiece of his own creative skill—the written Word—be duly considered’ (338).

Apart from the faulty critical Greek text and its underlying faulty textual theory, and more implicitly its underlying faulty philosophy, Burgon also considered the English of the Revised Version, in its own right, to be, ‘hopelessly at fault’ and ‘a very unsatisfactory product’ (Dedication, vi). He made this assessment not only for textual, but also for translational and methodological reasons. One of his reasons was that

our Authorised English Version has been silently revised: silently, I say, for in the margin of the English no record is preserved of the underlying Textual changes which have been introduced by the Revisionists. On the contrary. Use has been made of that margin to insinuate suspicion and distrust in countless particulars as to the authenticity of the text which has been suffered to remain unaltered. In the meantime, the country has been flooded with two editions of the New Greek Text; and thus the door has been set wide open for universal mistrust of the Truth of Scripture. [Preface, xxx]

Another reason was ‘the schoolboy method of translation’ used (155), referring to, among other features,

the ominous admission made in the Revisionists’ *Preface* (iii. 2 init.), that to some extent they recognised the duty of a “*rigid adherence to the rule of translating, as far as possible, the same Greek word by the same English word*”.

[187; also cf. page 167]

Burgon considered this principle of rigid consistency ‘mistaken’ (187), and contrasted it with the excellence and the variety of ‘William Tyndale and the giants who gave us our “Authorized Version”’ (155).

A third reason—that textual criticism had not yet sufficiently advanced as a scientific discipline to be capable of producing an authoritative revision of the New Testament text—has already been discussed.

Burgon’s sensible advice concerning the maturity that textual criticism needed was that

it is idle—worse than idle—to dream of revising, *with a view to retaining*, this Revision. Another generation of students must be suffered to arise. Time must be given for Passion and Prejudice to cool effectually down. Partizanship [sic], (which at present prevails to an extraordinary extent, but which is wondrously out of place in this department of Sacred Learning,)— *Partizanship* must be completely outlived—before the church can venture, with the remotest prospect of a successful issue, to organize another attempt at revising the Authorized Version of the New Testament Scriptures. [227]

Since, as he also argued, ‘an authoritative Revision of the Greek Text will have to precede any future Revision of the English of the New Testament’ (124), it follows that, in his view, a revision of the Authorised Version would have to wait too, until at the least all his prerequisites for a textual revision should have been met.

In reading the passages here quoted from Burgon’s book, it is to be realised that he did not intend for any revision to supplant the Authorised Version as an ecclesiastical text to be used in public worship—indeed, one of its original purposes was that it was ‘Appointed to be read in Churches’, as stated on the title page of any standard edition of the Authorised Version for the last four hundred years. For this, he had the following sound ecclesiastical reasons.³⁶

Whatever may be urged in favour of Biblical Revision, it is at least undeniable that the undertaking involves a tremendous risk. Our Authorized Version is the one religious link which at present binds together ninety millions of English-speaking men scattered over the earth’s surface.^[37] Is it reasonable that so unutterably precious, so

36. Such a set of reasons seems to be largely absent from the minds and writings of many modern textual critics, translation consultants, and translators.

37. It is worth noting that Burgon’s ‘ninety millions of English-speaking men scattered over the earth’s surface’ in the latter part of the nineteenth century had become by the beginning of the twenty-first century four hundred and fifty million (counting only people

sacred a bond should be endangered, for the sake of representing certain words more accurately—here and there translating a tense with greater precision—getting rid of a few archaisms? It may be confidently assumed that no “Revision” of our Authorized Version, however judiciously executed, will ever occupy the place in public esteem which is actually enjoyed by the work of the Translators of 1611—the noblest literary work in the Anglo-Saxon language. [113]

Indeed, only in a capacity

as a companion in the study and for private edification: as a book of reference for critical purposes, especially in respect of difficult and controverted passages,

did he hold that

a revised edition of the Authorized Version of our English Bible, (if executed with consummate ability and learning,) would at any time be a work of inestimable value... But certainly only as a handmaid is it to be desired. As something *intended to supersede* our present English Bible, we are thoroughly convinced that the project of a rival Translation is not to be entertained for a moment. For ourselves, we deprecate it entirely. [113-114]

In sum, Burgon argued that the Traditional or Received Text can only be authoritatively revised on a Biblical understanding of Scripture and with a belief in its divine preservation, by a consistent application of all the relevant scientific criteria to all the available textual evidence—manuscript copies, versions, Church Fathers, and Lectionaries—and by a fully matured textual science. He noted that these and other conditions had not been met in his day. Therefore, he concluded that from a biblical, logical, textual, and scientific point of view, revision of the Traditional Text was not as yet attainable in his day. And he inferred that the Revision of 1881, based as it was on the critical theory and text and on a faulty translation theory, was not a necessary and sufficient substitute for the Authorised Version, but a failure.

Since even today all the prerequisites have still not been sufficiently met, it may be argued that such a revision remains unattainable, and that translations based since 1881 on the critical theory and text cannot, therefore, be considered as necessary and sufficient substitutes for the Authorised Version, the more so as many of them are based, to compound matters, on inadequate theories of logic, language, communication, and translation.

The following features of the traditional view may now be noted, and its differences compared with the Critical Text considered.

The traditional view is based upon the belief that Scripture is what it claims to be: the Word of God written, ‘the Sacred Text’ (Burgon 1883: v). Thus it accepts as true, unreservedly and on principle, all that Scripture states, teaches, and implies about itself or any other topic, and it attempts to theorise and practise accordingly. For,

The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word... By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true **whatsoever is revealed in the Word**, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein... [Westminster Confession XIV.1, 2; emphasis added].

Hence,

the systematic depravation of the underlying Greek...is nothing else but a poisoning of the River of Life at its sacred source. Our Revisers...stand convicted of having deliberately rejected the words of Inspiration at every page, and of having substituted for them fabricated Readings which the church has long since refused to acknowledge, or

from nations whose official language is English). Including all English speakers this could perhaps quite easily be seven hundred million or ten per cent of the world’s population. English is also the first non-national language taught in every country in the world, and boasts an arguable further twenty to thirty per cent (or more) of the world’s younger adult population who are reasonably competent in or frequently exposed to English. Many of these are exposed to the Bible and Christianity largely through English, particularly online.

Additionally, at the time Burgon was writing there were but two main jurisdictions under which English speakers lived: roughly 50% in the USA and 50% in English-speaking nations of the Commonwealth (particularly the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), whereas now there are dozens. In Burgon’s time, the one thing that bound English speakers together was a common Bible: the Authorised Version. On all counts, the global unity of Anglophone Christendom through a common English Bible is more essential in the twenty-first century than ever before.

else has rejected with abhorrence; and which only survive at this time in a little handful of documents of the most depraved type. [Burgon 1883: vi-vii]

Sadly, however, large sections of the church have come to embrace what she once 'refused to acknowledge'. This may indicate the true calibre of many of its current leaders and illustrate the current tragic plight of the church at large. If there is anything that is weakening her stand for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of God, and its saving power, then it is this failure to recognise that it is the church herself that has allowed her own foundation to be impaired, however unfounded the attacks on this foundation. In doing so, the church has allowed her agenda to be determined largely by unbelievers and liberals. Paul's alert and comprehensive stand is in remarkable contrast.

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare unto you **all** the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. [Acts 20.26-30, emphasis added]

Thus the church was forewarned in the first century. Thus she should have been forewarned in 1881. And thus she ought to be forewarned now.

Consistent with their acceptance of Scripture as the written Word of God, adherents of the Traditional Text reject the proposition that Scripture is to be viewed or approached as any other text ever produced or yet to be produced, because they reject the idea that Scripture is of the same nature as, or 'just like', any other, human, production.

Hence the traditional definition of sacred textual criticism differs radically from that of critical textual criticism. It is a close inquiry into what is the genuine Greek, based on definite and scientific principles, and applied to catholic, that is, universal, antiquity (cf. Burgon 1883: 235-320). Thus traditional sacred textual criticism is a discipline to be applied to the evidence of all the extant ancient texts. These include the earliest Scripture quotations and references made by the Fathers of the second century and New Testament papyri dating as far back as AD 200, as well as Lectionaries, and not just (nor even primarily) references to a few codices dating from 350 or later.

Hence, too, the traditional view rejects the supposition that the transmission of the New Testament text has been the same as that of any other text. Instead, it is argued that from its inception the transmission of the New Testament text has, at least in part, been markedly different from that of other texts.

It is precisely because this Scripture is the Word of God that its text was attacked by some very soon after its original appearance. Due to this textual battle, its history of transmission is incomparably different from that of any other ancient text. Hence it requires a different approach. 'In the very earliest times much variation in the text of the New Testament...arose in the Church' (Burgon 1896a: 2). This resulted in two competing texts whose bodies are essentially identical to what are now known as the Critical Text and the Traditional Text. About the middle of the fourth century, the Traditional Text

...advanced in general acceptance; and, increasing till the eighth century in the predominance won by the end of the fourth, became so prevalent in Christendom, that the small number of MSS agreeing with B and **Σ** forms no sort of comparison with the many which vary from those two. Thus the problem of the fourth century anticipated the problem of the nineteenth. [Burgon 1896a: 2-3]

And, it might be added, it also anticipated the problem of today.

The divine origin, nature, form, content, history and transmission of Scripture are considered to be so important that the science of sacred textual criticism is distinguished from every other science, except Biblical theology, by the fact that its object is divine. Sacred textual criticism

has to do with a Book which is inspired; that is, whose true Author is God... It is chiefly from inattention to this circumstance that misconception prevails in that department of Sacred Science known as 'Textual Criticism'. Aware that the New Testament is like no other book in its origin, its content, its history, many critics of the present day nevertheless permit themselves to reason concerning its Text, as if they entertained no suspicion that the words and sentences of which it is composed were destined to experience an extraordinary fate also. They make no allowances for the fact that influences of an entirely different kind from any with which profane literature is acquainted have made themselves felt in this department, and therefore that even those principles of Textual Criticism which in the case of profane authors are regarded as fundamental are often out of place here. [Burgon 1896a: 9]

Burton goes on to explain what he means by this.

No sooner was the work of Evangelists and Apostles recognised as the necessary counterpart and complement of God's ancient Scriptures and became the 'New Testament', than a reception was found to be awaiting it in the world closely resembling that which He experienced Who is the subject of its pages. Calumny and misrepresentation, persecution and murderous hate, assailed Him continually. And the Written Word in like manner, in the earliest age of all, was shamefully handled by mankind.

Not only was it confused through human infirmity and misapprehension, but it became also the object of restless malice and unsparing assaults. Marcion, Valentinus, Basilides, Heracleon, Menander, Asclepiades, Theodotus, Hermophilus, Apollonides, and other heretics, adapted the Gospels to their own ideas. [In the study being quoted here, the attention is limited to the Gospels.]

Tatian, and later Ammonius, created confusion through attempts to combine the four Gospels either in a diatessaron [an arrangement of the four Gospels as a single narrative] or upon an intricate arrangement made by sections, under which as a further result the words of one Gospel became assimilated to those of another.

Want of familiarity with the sacred words in the first ages, carelessness of scribes, incompetent teaching, and ignorance of Greek in the West, led to further corruption of the Sacred Text. Then out of the fact that there existed a vast number of corrupt copies arose at once the need of Recension, which was carried out by Origen and his school. This was a fatal necessity to have made itself felt in an age when the first principles of the Science were not understood; for 'to correct' was too often in those days another word for 'to corrupt' [as is well-documented in Burton 1896b].

And this is the first thing to be briefly explained and enforced: but more than a counterbalance was provided under the overruling Providence of God. [1896a: 10-11, paragraphing added; also see Burton 1896a: 146, and the argument in Burton 1896b: 3ff].

At this point, it may be well to remind the reader that Burton's work is quoted because of his theoretical and textual controversy with Hort, and indeed many of their specific differences have proved to be prototypical. Most Critical Text and Traditional Text adherents have largely followed the lines laid out by these two forerunners.

However, the liberal use made here of Burton's work does not mean that the present study is in unqualified agreement with all his views. Three differences may be mentioned.

1. His nineteenth-century Anglican views on ecclesiastical hierarchy are not shared by this author
2. Accused by critics of attributing perfection to the Textus Receptus, Burton replied that he and Miller did not, 'advocate perfection in the Textus Receptus. We allow that here and there it requires revision... What we maintain is the Traditional Text' (Burton 1896a: 5).

However, this statement is not clear, for at least two reasons. Specifically, the phrase 'here and there' is not clarified or identified. More generally, Burton was unable to complete his work. Even of his published works, only three were supervised by him personally. As a result, we do not, indeed cannot, know precisely what his definitive view of the Traditional Text was. At the most, we can say that he identified the Traditional Text with the Textus Receptus **by and large**.

To guard against possible liberal interpretations of his stance that might allow impromptu manipulations of the Traditional Text, the present study would argue that—for doctrinal, historical, ecclesiastical, and textual reasons combined—the true text of the New Testament, with which Burton was primarily concerned, has been providentially preserved within the Textus Receptus family.

3. Burton was right in arguing for a unique status of the New Testament text. He correctly pointed out that textual errors 'crept in at the very first commencement of the life of the Church' (Burton 1896b: 4), suggesting that it was already under attack during its early transmission. Yet there are necessary and sufficient grounds for being more specific than he was about when precisely the earliest attacks on the text occurred. These are discussed in Section 13.

Since the object of the traditional view is to approach the New Testament text in conformity with the teaching of Scripture, it rejects empiricism, 'the theory that all knowledge is based on experience derived from the senses',³⁸ as

38. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12th ed. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 468. See also G. H. Clark, *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* (1989), p. 24; *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (1995), pp. 54-58; and *Thales to Dewey, A History*

philosophically unsound. For the same reason, it rejects any use of illogicality as being scientifically inappropriate and undesirable.

Both these stances are in contrast with the apparently principled subjectivism of the critical approach. As Burgon puts it, 'My aspiration all along has been, and still is, in place of the absolute Empiricism which has hitherto prevailed in Textual inquiry to exhibit the logical outlines of what, I am persuaded, is destined to become a truly delightful Science' (1883: xxix).

To obviate subjective methods and results, the object of the traditional position has been to lead to a general agreement on definite and scientific principles. To achieve this, 'seven notes of truth'—methodological criteria of textual science designed to establish a text as objectively as possible—were developed. These are: (1) antiquity, or primitiveness; (2) number, or consent of witnesses; (3) catholicity, or variety of evidence; (4) weight, or respectability of witnesses; (5) continuity, or unbroken tradition; (6) context, or evidence of the entire passage; and (7) reasonableness, or internal considerations (Burgon 1896a: 1). The requirement that these seven notes must always be applied jointly, wherever they are applicable, might be added as a necessary eighth principle.

Yet few critics have applied these criteria consistently in their work on the New Testament text. Instead, most have been content to follow their own prejudices or restrictive theories. (H. C. Hoskier, in his *Codex Vaticanus and its Allies—A Study and an Indictment* [London, England: Bernard Quaritch, 1914], seems to be an exception.) Opposing Westcott and Hort's logical and empirical insufficiencies, Burgon (1883) argues that, 'the cogency of the argument lies entirely in the cumulative character of the proof' (ix), '...the testimony of one small group of documents, or rather, of one particular manuscript (namely, the Vatican Codex B)...is the reverse of trustworthy' (ix-x), and these critics' '(so-called) "Theory" is in reality nothing else but a weak effort of the Imagination [characterised as]...absolute absurdity' (xiv).

Later on he points out that 'All critics, wherever found, at all times, have collated with the commonly received Text... as the most convenient' *standard of Comparison*, and that on this basis, codices A B \aleph C D [the manuscripts preferred by Hort and Westcott] yield divergent testimony; and therefore, so habitually contradict one another, as effectually to invalidate their own evidence throughout' (xviii). This 'divergent testimony' is exhibited in the significant differences between the five manuscripts themselves. According to Burgon these five manuscripts 'stand apart from one another in the following proportions: 842 (A) : 1798 (C) : 2370 (B) : 3392 (\aleph) : 4697 (D)' (xix). It is added that a similar result would have been obtained on any other standard of comparison. Hence, 'four out of five must be, while all the five may be, outrageously depraved documents...instead of being fit to be made our exclusive guides to the Truth of Scripture' (xix).

The methodological principle explaining these critical shortcomings is that imprecision will not do.

In Textual Criticism then, "rough comparison" can seldom, if ever, be of any real use. On the other hand, the exact *Collocation* of documents whether ancient or modern with the received Text, is the necessary foundation of all scientific Criticism. I employ that Text...not as a criterion of *Excellence*, but as a standard of *Comparison*... Whenever I would judge of the authenticity of any particular reading, I insist on bringing it...to the test of *Catholic Antiquity*. [Burgon 1883: xxiv-xxv, where the word 'catholic' means 'universal']

That is, all ancient manuscripts are to be used, not just a few of them, nor are ancient manuscripts to be made to stand alone. Therefore we should reject the critics' practice of 'erecting the individual conscience into an authority from which there shall be no appeal', and instead emphasize, or at least fully include, all the available external evidence (cf. Burgon 1883: xxv).

Subjectivism is unacceptable.

In this department of sacred Science, men have been going on too long inventing their facts, and delivering themselves of oracular decrees, on the sole responsibility of their own inner consciousness. There is great convenience in such a method certainly, a charming simplicity which is in a high degree attractive to flesh and blood. It dispenses with proof. It furnishes no evidence. It asserts when it ought to argue. It reiterates when it is called upon to explain... This...I venture to style the *unscientific* method... [T]he volume which they call 'INTRODUCTION APPENDIX' [Westcott and Hort's second volume]...is the very *Reductio ad absurdum* of the uncritical method of the last fifty years. And it is especially in opposition to this new method of theirs that I so strenuously insist that *the consentient voice of Catholic* [universal] *Antiquity* is to be diligently inquired after and submissively listened to; for that *this*, in the end, will prove our *only* safe guide. [Burgon 1883: xxv-xxvi]

This includes, 'the combined verdict of Manuscripts, Versions, and Fathers' (Burgon 1883: xxvii), and, one might add, lectionaries.

Probability

Two methods of textual criticism issuing from the principled subjectivism of the critical view are intrinsic probability and transcriptional probability. They are admittedly characterised as 'the most rudimentary form of criticism...dealing with each variation independently, and adopting at once in each case out of two or more variants that which looks most probable...called...internal evidence of readings' (Hort 1882b: 19-20).

In appealing to the first [intrinsic probability], we ask what an author is likely to have written; in appealing to the second [transcriptional probability], we ask what copyists are likely to have made him seem to write. Both...are alike derived exclusively^[39] from comparison of the testimony delivered, no account being taken of any relative antecedent credibility of the actual witnesses. [Hort 1882b: 20]

Yet both methods can only be speculative, necessarily argued largely from silence or prejudice. Furthermore, Hort here proposes to disregard the character of manuscripts completely. This is simplistic and unscientific. Yet he is always claiming that B and its associates are the best manuscripts. This is self-contradictory.

A decision on intrinsic probability is to be made 'either by an immediate and as it were intuitive judgement, or by weighing cautiously various elements which go to make up what is called sense, such as conformity to grammar and congruity to the purpose of the rest of the sentence and of the larger context; to which may be rightly added congruity to the usual style of the author and to his matter in other passages' (Hort 1882b: 20). We would like to know how such an important decision can be 'immediate' and 'intuitive'!

Transcriptional probability is defined as 'the relative fitness of each [rival reading] for explaining the existence of the others' (Hort 1882b: 22).

However, the discussion of these 'methods' (Hort 1882b: 19-30) is marked by a total absence of any test of any of the statements made, whether by example or proof, so that an impression is given of vagueness, speculative reasoning, and overriding subjectivism, enhanced by the use of self-projective criteria, amateurish psychologising of data, and a primitive brand of reception theory. Following are examples of Hort's (1882b) frequent subjectivism, irrationality, and opacity, interspersed with remarks or queries by the present writer. They have been included, perhaps rather copiously, in order to impress upon the reader what the actual foundation of the critical tradition is.

Hort goes by 'that which looks most probable' (19), and by 'intuitive judgement' (20). These are elusive criteria.

On his criterion of 'congruity to the usual style of the author' (20), even critical opinion is greatly divided, and stylistic criteria generally have, up until the present, often proved rather inflexible and controversial.

His claim that 'in dealing with this kind of evidence equally competent critics often arrive at contradictory conclusions as to the same variations' on intrinsic probability (21) highlights the controversial nature of the critical criteria. The claim implies that there is a principled basis for this controversial nature and seems to confirm that for Hort, subjectivism is the rule.

He further affirms that 'all readers are peculiarly liable to the fallacy of supposing that they understand the author's meaning and purpose because they understand some part or some aspect of it, which they take for the whole' (22). Note the generalisation 'all'.

He admits that 'what attracts ourselves is not on the average unlikely to have attracted transcribers' (22). This is an instance of self-projection.

Hort also claims that 'no motive can be thought of which could lead a scribe to introduce consciously a worse reading in place of a better' (22). But Scripture and subsequent textual history prove otherwise. A number of plausible motives for corrupting the text of the New Testament have in fact been discovered and demonstrated.

He says that 'the basis on which transcriptional probability rests consists of generalisations as to the causes of corruption incident to the process of transcription' (23). However, he does not tell us whose generalisations, nor on what they are based.

39. Note the philosophical naivety here.

He avers that ‘a plurality of [scribal] impulses recognised by ourselves as possible in any given case by no means implies a plurality of impulses as having been actually in operation’ (25). If so, his method cannot lead to any reliable knowledge or conclusions. This claim also contradicts the second quote from his page 22, cited above.

Hort continues, ‘Hence it is only in well marked and unambiguous cases that the unsupported verdict of Transcriptional Probability for detached readings can be followed’ (26). But if these cases are ‘unambiguous’, why make any decision on the basis of transcriptional probability?

Then it is claimed that ‘the insufficiency of Transcriptional Probability as an independent guide is most signally shown by its liability to stand in apparent antagonism to Intrinsic Probability...’ (26). But this in effect confutes these two principles.

This impression seems to be confirmed by the statement that ‘All conflicts between Intrinsic and Transcriptional Probability arise from the imperfection of our knowledge: in both fields criticism consists of inferences from more or less incomplete data’ (26). This, too, would render the critical method useless.

By now the reader will justifiably feel that such conflicts are more, or just as, likely to arise from the critical methods by their very natures.

‘With the exception of pure blunders, readings originating with scribes must always at the time have combined the appearance of improvement with the absence of its reality’ (27). Again note the peremptory generalisation ‘always’. The opaqueness of the last phrase apart, one might add that we will never know the minds of those scribes.

More remarks on ‘mental or semi-mental causes of corruption’ follow (27ff), apparently to support, albeit rather shakily, ‘the paradoxical precept to “choose the harder reading”’ (28).

Again, ‘The rational use of Transcriptional Probability as textual evidence depends on the power of distinguishing the grounds of preference implied in an ancient scribe’s substitution of one reading for another from those felt as cogent now after close and deliberate criticism’ (28). But in the final analysis, the original grounds remain unknown to us, so that those now felt to be cogent can only be speculative projections.

Possibly aware that his speculations have rather subverted his two methods, Hort hastens to seek to set the reader’s (and perhaps his own) mind at ease by stating that

fortunately variations conforming to this normal type are of frequent occurrence; variations, that is, in which a critic is able to arrive at a strong and clear conviction that one reading is intrinsically much the most probable, and yet to see with equal clearness how the rival reading or readings could not but be attractive to average transcribers. In these cases Internal Evidence of Readings attains the highest degree of certainty which its nature admits. [29]

Yet, remarkably, he immediately seems to contradict himself by concluding on the next page that

occasionally the Intrinsic evidence may without rashness be disregarded: but such cases are too exceptional to count for much when we are estimating the general trustworthiness of a method; and the apparent contradiction which the imperfection of our knowledge often leaves us unable to reconcile remains a valid objection against habitual reliance on the sufficiency of Internal Evidence of Readings. [30]

Many similar speculative and contradictory remarks are made, the verbosity of which (as of those quoted), while possibly alluring to some, tends to obscure the issue, leaving imprecise or incorrect thought.⁴⁰

Is older necessarily better?

The traditional view rejects the critical assumption that seniority among manuscripts automatically implies better quality of readings. More specifically, it rejects the critical text idea that the minority text is older and must therefore be closer to the autographs, and so purer, than the traditional majority text. It does so for at least the following reasons.

40. Perhaps this is as good a place as any to add a remark on ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ criticism. The suggestion of any distinction between higher and lower criticism that necessarily leads to contradictory conclusions or conflicting results, whether in the one field or the other, must be false inasmuch as such a distinction is inconsistent with the revealed truth of Scripture, with logic, or with both. This holds the more strongly for any suggested **separation** between higher and lower criticism. In any case, the object of such criticisms, the Word of God, is immutably one, as much as God, its Author, is. It might be added, generally, that distinctions made in the approach to some object do not necessarily imply distinctions in that object itself.

First, the idea that an older manuscript must imply a better text equates, and so confuses, the age of the writing materials used to produce a manuscript with the age and quality of its text. Methodologically, this critical approach has led to a narrow focus especially on א (Aleph, or Codex Sinaiticus), B (Codex Vaticanus), C (Codex Ephraemi), and D (Codex Bezae)—as Burgon says, on a ‘*little handful* of early,—but *not* the earliest,—nor yet of necessity the purest,—documents’ (Burgon 1883: 244). This method is judged to be irrational, prejudicial, partial, illogical, and factually incorrect, because these are but a few specimens of antiquity, not antiquity itself, and because all readings are old (Burgon 1883: 243-245). Hence it is ‘unscientific’ (Burgon 1883: xxvi).

Second, historically and textually, it is significant that as early as AD 175-200, the Church Father Caius was led to record that New Testament manuscripts had been, and were being, corrupted.

“The Divine Scriptures”, he says, “these heretics have audaciously *corrupted*...laying violent hands upon them under pretence of *correcting* them. That I bring no false accusation, any one who is disposed may easily convince himself. He has but to collect the copies belonging to these persons severally; then, to compare one with another; and he will discover that their discrepancy is extraordinary. Those of Asclepiades, at all events, will be found discordant from those of Theodotus. Now, plenty of specimens of either sort are obtainable, inasmuch as these men’s disciples have industriously multiplied the...‘*corrected*’ copies of their respective teachers, which are in reality nothing else but ‘*corrupted*’ copies. With the foregoing copies again, those of Hermophilus will be found entirely at variance. As for the copies of Apollonides, they even contradict one another. Nay, let any one compare the fabricated text which these persons put forth in the first instance, with that which exhibits their latest perversions of the Truth, and he will discover the disagreement between them is even excessive.

“Of the enormity of the offence of which these men have been guilty, they must needs themselves be fully aware. Either they do not believe that the Divine Scriptures are the utterances of the HOLY GHOST,—in which case they are to be regarded as unbelievers; or else, they account themselves wiser than the HOLY GHOST,—and what is that, but to have the faith of devils? As for denying their guilt, the thing is impossible, seeing that the copies under discussion are their own actual handiwork; which they received at the hands of their catechetical teachers. Else, let them produce the originals from which they made their transcripts. Certain of them indeed have not even condescended to falsify Scripture, but entirely reject Law and Prophets alike.” [in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* V.28, quoted by Burgon (1883: 323-324)].

Burgon is quick to point out the significance of the preceding passage.

Now here is an orthodox Father of the *IInd century* inviting attention to four well-known families of falsified manuscripts of the Sacred Writings, complaining of the hopeless divergences which they exhibit (being not only inconsistent with one another, but *with themselves*), and insisting that such *corrected*, are nothing else but shamefully *corrupted* copies. He speaks of the phenomenon as being in his day notorious: and appeals to Recensions, the very names of whose authors...—Theodotus, Asclepiades, Hermophilus, and Apollonides—have (all but the first) long since died out of the Church’s memory. [Burgon 1883: 324, his emphasis]

He plausibly concludes,

Therefore...by this time the claim of the oldest *existing* copies of Scripture to be the purest, has been effectually disposed of. For since there once prevailed such a multitude of corrupted copies, we have no security whatever that the oldest of our extant MSS are not derived—remotely if not directly—from some of *them*. [Burgon 1883: 324]

The force of this argument greatly increases when it is realised, first, that the corrupted manuscripts mentioned by Caius were already in existence about two hundred years before B and א, and second, that א saw ‘at least ten different Revisers, from the IVth to the XIIth century’ (Burgon 1883: 325). By the time Caius wrote his passage, Marcion (about AD 140-180) and other destructive heretical critics had already been active.

Third, though an older witness **may** be a better witness, it is not so necessarily. Older written material does not necessarily imply an older or better text. This is even less necessarily the case in a realm like that of the New Testament text, where nearly all the extant copies are to be defined as old and are not widely temporally divergent within the crucial range, and where seniority can therefore be usefully distinctive only to a rather limited extent, if at all.

After all, seniority merely means **relative** age. This is of great importance when age is used as the sole criterion. Thus, it must be the number of demonstrable (rather than imagined) textual links between the autographs and a copy, **plus** the quality of the copy or copies, that constitutes the crucial test.

However, these links cannot be established for any of the New Testament copies we possess. For instance, members of Family 13 (the Ferrar group of eleventh to fifteenth century manuscripts, classed together because of similarity of

variant readings) can only be linked primarily to each other and to Family 1 (the Lake group of twelfth to fifteenth century manuscripts), not to the autographs (see footnote 8). If the relative age of the **texts** of early manuscripts is hard to establish with precision, their absolute age is even more so, except, to some degree, in quotations by Church Fathers, which can be delimited in time.

Several matters would appear to follow from the preceding considerations.

First, **Σ** and B may be the oldest uncials, but they are not the oldest texts. The oldest texts, albeit fragmentary, are papyri, and copious quotations by Church Fathers. The fact that these two manuscripts evince a mixture of both the Critical and the Traditional Text weakens, or rather destroys, the argument that the minority text—that is, the minority **uncial** text—is older, and therefore closer to the autographs than is the Traditional Text. Moreover, such early quotations by the Fathers are numerous and cover a large portion of the New Testament. ‘The older the manuscript, the better the text’ thus proves to be a fallacy with a vengeance.

Second, other things being equal, a majority of texts and readings, the possession of which is in and of itself a necessary requirement for a proper application of the inductive method, gains considerable force as an argument in deciding between conflicting readings. Indeed, without disregarding the other criteria, its importance becomes paramount.

Third, seniority, especially when it is injudiciously used as a principle and used largely in isolation, has as little distinctive usefulness as there could be in the criticism of the New Testament text, for at least two simple yet fundamental reasons. First, as an isolated criterion it is useless on methodological grounds, because the perennial application of all the relevant textual criteria to all the available relevant data is a prerequisite in any empirical endeavour (Burgon 1896a: particularly in chapter 3 and throughout). And second, its usefulness is greatly limited, if not invalidated, by the second-century corruption of the text, noted above. Its first-century corruption is still to be discussed.

Thus the idea that the critical minority text is older than the traditional majority text and so better represents the autographs, is insufficiently supported by argument or fact. In short, it is a false idea.

The critical supposition that the quality of a manuscript is determined by its genealogy, and its presupposition in turn that ‘all trustworthy restoration of corrupted Texts is founded on the study of their History’ (Hort 1882b: 40), are also disallowed, certainly as absolute principles, by the traditional view. Strictly, this ‘historical study’ idea is not a new criterion, but a variant of the idea that an older manuscript necessarily entails an older text.

On the first supposition, Burgon writes, ‘Presuming that the meaning of [Hort]... must rather be that if we did but know the genealogy of MSS, we should be in a position to reason more confidently concerning their Texts, we read on’ (Burgon 1883: 253-254). He explains that

In strictness, all this talk about ‘genealogical evidence’, when applied to [New Testament] manuscripts, is moonshine. The expression is metaphorical, and assumes that it has fared with MSS, as it fares with the successive generations of a family... But then, it happens, unfortunately, that we are unacquainted with one single instance of a known MS copied from another known MS. And perforce all talk about ‘Genealogical evidence’, where no single step in the descent can be produced—in other words, *where no genealogical evidence exists*—is absurd. [Burgon 1883: 255-256, his emphasis]

That is, since the genealogy of New Testament manuscripts is unknown to us, the principle is useless. It might be added that little has changed since Burgon. Critics try to make much of the small ‘Ferrar group’ of manuscripts, whose interrelationships are known to some extent, but they often fail to mention that so far this is the **only** such group, and that their linkage to the autographs remains unknown.

Concerning the other presupposition underlying the genealogical approach, Burgon asks,

Are we then engaged in *the restoration of corrupted Texts*? If so, which be they? We require (1) to be shown the ‘corrupted Texts’ referred to: and then (2) to be convinced that ‘the study of *their history*’, as distinguished from an examination of the evidence for or against *their readings*, is a thing feasible. [1883: 254, his emphasis]

In other words, Hort has surreptitiously redefined the goal of sacred textual criticism: instead of the autographs, he is now seeking the ‘trustworthy restoration of corrupted Texts’ (Hort 1882b: 40).

Moreover, by admitting that ‘A theoretical presumption indeed remains that a majority of extant documents is more likely to represent a majority of ancestral documents, than vice versa’ (Hort 1882b: 45), Hort contradicts himself, the more so as ‘the vice versa presumption is absolutely non-existent’ (Burgon 1883: 255).

Furthermore, the entire argument on genealogy merely goes to show ‘that if, out of 10 copies of Scripture, 9 *could be proved* to have been executed from one and the same common original...those 9 would cease to be regarded as 9 independent witnesses’ (Burgon 1883: 255, referring to a speculative argument in Hort 1882b: 41). Hort seems unaware that ‘*therefore* (indeed *by his own showing*) codices B and **Ⲛ** having been *demonstrably* “executed from one and the same common original”, are not to be reckoned as *two* independent witnesses to the Text of the New Testament, but as little more than *one*’ (Burgon 1883: 255).

Much of the critical tradition’s argumentation tends to vacillate from one page to the next. It is usually supported by vague statements proving little or nothing. But it always ‘concludes’ that B and **Ⲛ** are unassailably the best manuscripts and must therefore be the standard by which all others are to be judged. Yet it is also concluded that B and **Ⲛ** ‘had a common proximate ancestor’ (Hort 1882b: 216), at least ‘in the sense that a single proximate original has supplied a large common element in their texts’ (Hort 1882b: 215).

However, to suggest that these are the best manuscripts and independent witnesses, and yet to ignore that they are seriously and demonstrably flawed and to admit that they have a common ancestor, is doubly self-contradictory.

Finally, the illustration of family genealogy is inadequate and therefore misleading. Burgon justly argues that if various nationalities are descended from Noah, but are all silent, and the critic knows nothing whatever about their antecedents, the latter’s remarks about their respective genealogies must be without substance. So, therefore, are Hort’s remarks about the ‘genealogies’ of copies of Scriptures. Hence, “*the factor of Genealogy*”...is the name of an imagination—not of a fact’ (Burgon 1883: 256).

Unsurprisingly, the doubtful ‘total change in the bearing of the evidence’, claimed to have been caused by applying Hort’s idea of genealogy, is always used to promote B and **Ⲛ** to pride of place among all the extant manuscripts. But in fact it has not changed the bearing of the evidence at all.

Rejecting the idea that the number of manuscripts, especially a majority, counts for nothing, or at least that it does not necessarily present an argument in favour of a disputed reading, the traditional view instead considers number to be one of several indispensable textual criteria. The one-sided critical argument is countered as follows.

First, Hort himself has an assertion contrary to the critical argument. ‘A theoretical presumption indeed remains that a majority of extant documents is more likely to represent a majority of ancestral documents, than *vice versa*’ (Hort 1882b: 45). This undermines the principle he has just assumed and effectively nullifies his position.

Second, it is observed that in a court of law,

apart from the character of the Witnesses, when 5 men say one thing, and 995 say the exact contradictory, we are apt to regard it even as axiomatic that, “by reason of their mere paucity”, the few “are appreciably far less likely to be right than the multitude opposed to them”. [Burgon 1883: 254]

Moreover, if the character of the majority of witnesses is demonstrably better than that of the minority, not only is the credibility of the majority thereby greatly enhanced, but the credibility of the minority is thereby equally diminished. It is consistently maintained that this is indeed the case with the extant copies of the New Testament text. Hence the minority does not represent some original majority of ancestral documents now no longer extant. Accordingly,

...apart from proof to the contrary...a “majority of extant documents” in the proportion of 995 to 5, and sometimes of 1999 to 1, creates more than a “presumption”; it amounts to proof of a majority of ancestral documents. [Burgon 1883: 255]

If Hort wishes to assert that ‘...this presumption is too minute to weigh against the smallest evidence of other kinds’ (Hort 1882b: 45), it is rightly objected that ‘as usual...he furnishes us with no evidence at all, tangible or intangible’ (Burgon 1883: 255).

Third, the critical tradition’s argument from number backfires. Consider:

The fundamental Text of late extant Greek MSS generally [of the Acts and Pauline Epistles] is, beyond all question, identical with the dominant Antiochian or Graeco-Syrian Text of the second half of the fourth century, Chrysostom’s having had ‘a common original either contemporary with or older than our oldest extant MSS, which thus lose at once whatever presumption of exceptional purity they might have derived from their exceptional antiquity alone. [Hort 1882b: 92]

If the relative pronoun **which** refers here to ‘our oldest extant MSS’ (A, B and **Ⲛ**), the argument would debunk the Critical Text. This is probably not intended.

If, on the other hand, **which** refers to the Traditional Text of Chrysostom and the later cursives, the more likely argument is that this text cannot claim to be the purer for its old age, because these manuscripts derive from a common ancestor and so count as one. Hence, Hort would have us believe, the Critical Text is relatively better supported.

However, he elsewhere applies the same argument to the Critical Text, arguing that A, B and **Ⲛ** often agree because they have a common early ancestor. But if his argument is destructive of the Traditional Text, it is equally so of the Critical Text; even more so, in fact, since the latter is vastly outnumbered. So his rejection of the Traditional Text based on number is a failure.

The traditional view rejects the critical idea of conflation, which is formulated and applied as a principle that supposedly caused, and so is held to explain, the Traditional Text and especially to explain its supposed relative lateness compared with other postulated ‘text-types’. There is a better explanation.

To begin with, there is no sufficient evidence to support the idea of conflation, and Hort’s grounds for distinguishing four different text-types are vague and inconclusive (see Hort 1882b: 90-179).

The controversy is between the traditional majority text based on a reverent acceptance of Scripture, its doctrinal content, and a view of the New Testament text logically deducible from it, on the one hand, and the critical minority text based on a secular, largely rationalistic or naturalistic, and fundamentally critical, view of the Sacred Writings based on the critics’ philosophy, on the other hand.

Hort asserts that

the presence of early and extensive mixture betrays itself at once in the number and intricacy of cross distributions of attestation (see §60), and thus it becomes important to ascertain at the outset whether any whole groups have been affected by it; and if such can be found, to determine the contributory groups which are thereby proved not merely to be of earlier date, but to have been the actual parents of the groups of mixed origin. The clearest evidence for this purpose...is furnished by conflate readings where they exist... [Hort 1882b: 93-94]

He is keen to posit large-scale mixture for the Traditional Text. (It should be noted that §60 is a section in his book, where only one—purely theoretical and idealised—example is given.)

However, if conflation provides ‘the clearest evidence’, as is claimed, and if this kind of evidence is so ‘important’ for establishing wholesale mixture, one would expect numerous examples of such conflation to be readily available, showing that the Traditional Text was indeed largely mixed. Yet, despite thirty years of textual work, Hort was unable to provide such proof. He could adduce a mere eight examples.

But Burgon has shown these to be unsatisfactory. First, he demonstrates that five of them (Mark 6.33, Mark 8.26, Luke 9.10, Luke 11.54, and Luke 12.18) fail to exhibit conflation. In these places, the Traditional Text is not conflated, but the Critical Text confused (Burgon 1883: 258-266).

Second, he argues that the various readings of Mark 9.38 are better explained by omission, as detailed below.

Third, the critical reading of Mark 9.49 is argued to be a ‘concurrence in error on **Ⲛ** B L Δ,—especially in S. Mark’s Gospel, which those codices exhibit more unfaithfully than any other codices that can be named...’ (Burgon 1883: 260).

Fourth, he convincingly defends the traditional reading of Luke 24.53 by pointing out that it is ‘the reading of 13 uncials headed by A and every known cursive, a few copies of the old Lat[in], the Vulg[ate], Syriac, Philox[enian], Aethiopic, and Armenian Versions. But it is found that **Ⲛ** B C omit clause (α) [praising and], while D and seven copies of the old Latin omit clause (β) [blessing God]’ (Burgon 1883: 262; see also pages 315-317).

To illustrate, Burgon argues concerning Hort’s claim for conflation in Mark 9.38:

In S. Mark 9.38, S. John, speaking of one who cast out devils in Christ’s Name, says, (α) “who followeth not us, and we forbid him (β) because he followeth not us”. Here, **Ⲛ** B C L Δ the Syriac, Coptic, and Aethiopic, omit clause (α), retaining (β). D with the Old Latin and the Vulg[ate] omit clause (β), but retain (α). Both clauses are found in A N with 11 other uncials and the whole body of the cursives, besides the Gothic, and the only Father who quotes the

place, Basil [ii.252]. Why should the pretence be set up that there has been “Conflation” here? Two omissions do not make one conflation. [1883: 260, typography adjusted]

Five of the eight ‘examples’ of conflation are thus disproved, and more plausible explanations are available for the other three.

Generally, omission by texts on which the Critical Text is primarily based seems a more promising and consistent explanation than conflation on the part of the Traditional Text. Hence, E. F. Hills suggests, it is as easy to believe that in these eight passages the traditional reading is the original, with parts having been omitted by the other ‘text-types’, as it is to suppose that the traditional reading represents a later combination of other readings.⁴¹ Indeed, if Biblical doctrine is accepted and taken into account without reservations, and if all of Burgon’s textual criteria are applied to all the extant textual data, it would appear **easier** to believe that it is omissions in the Critical Text that have caused the corruption in these eight instances.

The relative lateness of the Traditional Text is also urged by Hort later on, but again without conclusive logical proof or textual evidence. Yet he insists on drawing the strongest kind of conclusion:

It follows from what has been said above, that all Readings in which the Pre-Syrian [critical] texts concur, must be accepted at once as the apostolic readings, or to speak more exactly, as the most original of recorded readings. Indeed this is only repeating in other words that all distinctively Syrian [traditional] readings must be at once rejected. [Hort 1882b: 119]

Conversely to what is held out for the Traditional Text, an early relative date for the texts tendentiously called ‘Western’, ‘Alexandrian’, and ‘Neutral’ is in like measure supposed, rather than proven, so that their allotted names—as with that of ‘Syrian’ for the Traditional Text—rather beg the question of what actually took place historically.

Burgon (1883: 271-272) sums up as follows.

Aware that the Received or Traditional Greek Text...“is virtually identical with that used by Chrysostom and other Antiochian Fathers in the latter part of the 4th century”, and fully alive to the fact that it, “must therefore have been represented by Manuscripts as old as any which are now surviving” [quoting Westcott and Hort 1881a: 547], they have invented an extraordinary Hypothesis in order to account for its existence...

They assume that the writings of Origen “establish the prior existence of at least three types of Text”: the most clearly marked of which, they call the “Western”; another, less marked, they designate as “Alexandrian”; the third holds (they say) a middle or “Neutral” position...

“The priority of two at least of these three Texts just noticed [by Westcott and Hort] to the Syrian Text”, they are confident has been established by the eight “conflate” Syrian Readings which they flatter themselves they have already resolved into their “Western” and “Neutral” elements’ [quoting Westcott and Hort 1881a: 547 again; paragraphing added].

The traditional view rejects the assumption of three supposedly related recensions, namely two of the ‘Syrian’ text between AD 250 and 350, and one of the Old Syriac text in the fourth century. The following reasons are offered for this stance.

First, if either the Traditional Text (tendentiously limited by label to ‘Syrian’) or the Critical Text (b) is fabricated, as Hort claims, then the pertinent question is, ‘Why should not *the solitary Codex* be the offending party?’ (Burgon 1883: 272, his emphasis).

Second, since the ‘currency of three conflicting Texts in the same region’ is merely claimed by Hort (1882b: 133), but ‘has not been proved to have ever taken place at all’ (Burgon 1883: 273), it is therefore imaginary,⁴² so that the claim that ‘the Syrian Text must in fact be the result of a recension’ follows neither logically, nor historically.

Third, ‘with this hypothesis of a “Syrian” recension...stands or falls...[Hort’s] entire theory... And with it goes the New Greek Text and therefore the New English Version... which in the main has been founded on it’ (Burgon 1883: 294). In

41. Edward Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 4th ed. (Des Moines, Iowa, USA: The Christian Research Press, 1984), p. 176.

42. Cf. ‘...any such Recension as Dr. Hort imagines...’ (Burgon 1883: 273), and, ‘which Revision, however, let it be observed, still rests wholly on unsupported conjecture’ (Burgon 1883: 275). See also the arguments in Burgon 1883: pp. 293ff.

short, as its underlying assumptions have not been proven, the theory is false, the Critical Text based on it is inevitably discredited, and hence any translation based on it is unsound.

So the supposed Syrian revision confutes itself, because it is doubly unsupported. There is no external textual evidence whatsoever in the form of minutes of any church council sessions resolving upon or conducting such a revision. Nor is there any contemporary external historical evidence referring to such councils, decisions, or revisions. Although the revision is purportedly based on historical, textual, and ecclesiastical fact, it is actually corroborated by none of these.

Therefore it is pure theoretical supposition, a figment of the imagination, an invention unsupported by fact. Hort's notion of revisions, then, cannot be invoked to argue anything about the traditional text, or indeed to make any claim at all. Practically, it is useless, because no 'Syrian recension' ever took place.

Arguably, the church would do well not to give heed to fables such as this, which evidently lead to views, statements, and practices touching upon the written Word of God that are contrary to sound doctrine. Scripture teaches,

Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: *so do*... Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane...for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine [1 Timothy 1.4, 9, 10]

The traditional view also rejects the critical assumption that Cureton's Syriac is the only surviving specimen of the unrevised Syriac version, for the following reasons. First,

The very *fact* of a "Revision" of the Syriac has all to be proved; and until it has been *demonstrated*, cannot of course be reasoned upon as a fact. Instead of demonstration, we find ourselves invited (1) *to suppose* that such a Revision took place, and (2) *to suppose* that all our existing Manuscripts represent it. But...not a shadow of a reason is produced *why* we should... "suppose" either the one thing or the other... Out of this grows a "natural supposition" that "two [purely imaginary] operations" "had some *historical connexion*" [Burgon 1883: 276-277, his emphasis].

Furthermore, what Hort has at first assumed, he soon considers fact. Burgon writes,

Already therefore has the shadow thickened into a substance. The *Revised* Syriac Text has by this time come to be spoken of as an admitted fact. The process whereby it came into being is even assumed to have been "deliberate and authoritative". These Editors [Westcott and Hort] henceforth style the Peschito the "*Syriac Vulgate*", as confidently as Jerome's revision of the old Latin is styled the "*Latin Vulgate*". They even assure us that "Cureton's Syriac" renders the comparatively late and "revised" character of the Syriac Vulgate *a matter of certainty*... The very city in which the latter underwent revision, can, it seems, be fixed with "tolerable certainty". [Burgon 1883: 277, quoting Westcott and Hort 1882: 84, 136, Burgon's emphasis].

Burgon asks, 'Can Dr. Hort be serious?' (Burgon 1883: 277).

Lastly,

At the end of a series of conjectures, the foundation of which is the hypothesis of an Antiochian Recension of the Greek, the learned writer [Hort] announces that, "The textual elements of each principal document *having been thus ascertained*, it now becomes possible *to determine the Genealogy of a much larger number of individual readings than before*". We read and marvel. [Burgon 1883: 277, quoting Westcott and Hort 1881a: 552, Burgon's emphasis]

Burgon follows this with further discussion and refutation (Burgon 1883: 277ff.). One conclusion drawn is that 'Dr. Hort is in direct antagonism with the Fathers of the IIIrd and the IVth Century. His own fantastic hypothesis of a "Syrian Text"...is, in our account, the one sufficient and conclusive refutation of his own Text' (Burgon 1883: 284).

The final point, that the Traditional Text is the purest, is the conclusion that follows from the foregoing, as well as from other presuppositions of the traditional view and arguments based on them. It is evidently opposed to the presuppositions, the arguments, and the conclusion of the critical view. The two views are mutually exclusive.

13. First century attacks on the New Testament text

As pointed out, a major argument used to support the critical supposition that the New Testament is just like (and thus

to be treated as) any solely human text, is that the history of its transmission is hardly supposed to be different. This assertion denies the scriptural teachings about God and Scripture and ignores His special promises about His Word. It discredits the divine inspiration and preservation of Scripture and it rejects its uniqueness. Hence it warrants closer inspection.

Where does one begin? That Burgon should have begun his discussion of textual errors with the second century AD before focusing on the third and fourth (Burgon 1896a: 10-11, quoted above), is not surprising. Little manuscript evidence of the New Testament text survives from before AD 200,⁴³ and in any case the earliest papyrus manuscripts were not yet known in his time.

Still, presupposing that both the Traditional Text and opposition to it go back without break or intermission to the original autographs (Burgon 1896b: 2ff.), Burgon argued that 'corruption arose in the very earliest age' (1896b: 3-4), and that 'errors crept in at the very first commencement of the life of the Church' (1896b: 4). Strictly speaking, this is to imply that textual corruption had already occurred in the first century, although he does not actually say so.

Yet the supposition of such early corruption finds historical support in the New Testament. It is Scripture itself that provides clear and compelling evidence for the thesis that textual corruption was already occurring in the second half of the first century. If this is true, as we believe, then the contrary critical assumptions, that the New Testament text is just like any human writing and that its transmission is like that of any other text, are by the same token effectively nullified.

Apparently, attacks on the New Testament text were well under way by the end of the first century. They were due not only to early heresy, but also to various other forms of early opposition, both private and public. Such opposition, sometimes erupting into official and widespread persecution, was levelled not only against the divine message of the Apostles, but also against the writings which contained, expressed, and published it, i.e. against Scripture. This animosity did not come as a complete surprise. The Lord Jesus Christ had preceded His disciples in suffering opposition against both His person and His words. It culminated in His being persecuted unto death. Eventually, He was falsely accused, unjustly tried, and executed at the instigation of the then religious leaders.

Could their opposition of Christ, His words, and the teaching His words expressed and implied, have created a historical precedent? Should all this spell a warning for us today? The history of controversy over the New Testament text since 1881, and especially the methods of ecclesiastical politics through which the Critical Text has gained its widespread predominance, suggest that it should. In any case, first-century opposition is well documented in the New Testament and the early church history that it records.

Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ had forewarned His disciples that they would meet with a destiny similar to His. His admonitions to them in Matthew 10.16-39 furnish an example from His early ministry. Persecution is also presupposed in the Parable of the Sower: 'Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended' (Matthew 13.21). On another occasion, described in Matthew 20, He predicted His suffering on the cross, citing it as the Master's model for His servants,⁴⁴ even though their suffering might not equal His own (see verse 23). In a discourse delivered toward the end of His ministry, recorded in Matthew 23,⁴⁵ He even foretold the religious leaders that they would persecute His disciples (see verses 13-15, 23, 25-27, 29), apparently in the latter's presence (see verse 1).

First century evidence of persecution of the Apostles and opposition against their message may be found in the following

43. Compare Nestlé-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 'Codices raeci et Latini', pp. 684-718.

44. 'But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of my Father... But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Matthew 20.22-23, 26-28).

45. 'Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and *some* of them ye shall kill and crucify; and *some* of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute *them* from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!' (Matthew 23.34-37).

passages: Acts 4.1-2, 16-18, 21 record opposition against Peter and John (cf. Acts 3.1, 4.13); Acts 5.18, 25-27, 29 against Peter and other Apostles; Acts 5.33, 40 against the Apostles generally; Acts 6.8-15 and Acts 8.2 against Stephen; Acts 12.1-5 against James the brother of John, and Peter; and finally, Acts 13.2, 8-9, 45-46 and 50, and Acts 14.2, 5 and 19 against Paul and Barnabas. Such opposition is noted rather frequently in the New Testament, and the instances just quoted do not constitute an exhaustive list. Opposition continues to be mentioned right up to the final chapter of Acts and often recurs in the New Testament letters. Indeed, as far as we know, all the Apostles were killed for preaching and teaching the Gospel, with the possible exception of John.

We also know from Scripture and other historical records that after a while persecution was not limited to the leaders of the church, but came to be extended to its members at large (see Acts 8.1-3; 9.1-2; 12.1; 14.2; Bromiley 3.771-774). But first century opposition did not stop at this. The Apostles first delivered their message orally, but it was soon committed to writing as well. Since they were being persecuted because of their message, nothing would be more logical and natural than to suppose that their writings which contained that message would meet with similar opposition. This supposition is indeed borne out by the facts as we know them.

That the New Testament Scriptures were both closely guarded on the one hand by the early Christians, including the Bible writers themselves, and attacked on the other by enemies of Christianity and of the new Scriptures—these attacks no doubt prompting and reinvigorating the defence—further appears from the many passages that exhort believers to hold fast to what they had already been taught, whether initially imparted orally (e.g. Philippians 4.9) or in writing (e.g. Romans 15.4). Such passages often include explicit warnings against false teachers and false doctrine, too.

Indeed, the New Testament often stresses its Truth, casting it in opposition to human thought. ‘The things which God hath prepared for them that love him... God hath revealed *them unto us*... Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing [or, conjoining] spiritual things with spiritual [things]’ (1 Corinthians 2.9, 10, 13). The things being compared here are the things revealed to God’s people by the Holy Spirit, that is, the sentences and propositions of Scripture then known and given. This idea permeates Paul’s letters. Also compare, ‘the gospel of God, (which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures)’ (Romans 1.1-2), and, ‘...my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which...now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets...made known...’ (Romans 16.25-26).

Evidence of attacks on the Apostles’ teachings, whether through attacks on their persons or on their apostolic authority, is found in many passages of Scripture. These also bear witness to persecution of churches through attacks on established doctrine. They thus provide first-hand evidence from the first century AD. A clear example is from Galatians 1.6-7: ‘I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ’. This, moreover, illustrates that attacks on the Apostles’ teaching even **occasioned** the very writing of New Testament letters.

There are many more examples evincing this spiritual warfare, this contending for the Truth, this defence against attacks on sound teaching and against attempts to supplant it by false teaching.⁴⁶

To be able to appreciate the evidence involved, it is necessary to understand that the teachings of the Apostles, both as individuals and as a group, were uniform. So, therefore, were their oral and written teachings. See, for example, 2 Thessalonians 2.15: ‘Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, **whether by word, or our epistle**’ (emphasis added). Not only is this doctrinal unity a fact, but the Apostles themselves considered it very important for believers to know about it, as is clear from their frequently stressing it, often near the beginning of their letters.

Their mutual doctrinal agreement appears, for example, from Galatians 2.1-3, 7-9 (contrast with 1.6 and 2.14). Note that Peter, one of the ‘pillars’ mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2, elsewhere confirms this unity and fellowship independently. He does this by speaking of Paul as ‘our beloved brother’, and by equating his writings or epistles with ‘the other scriptures’, which ‘they that are unlearned and unstable wrest...unto their own destruction’ (2 Peter 3.15-16).

The Apostles’ individual doctrinal coherence is the phenomenon of the unity and consistency of their personal oral and

46. For example, Acts 4.15-18; Romans 15.31, 16.17-18; 1 Corinthians 9.3; 2 Corinthians 11.3-4 (much of 1 and 2 Corinthians is written in defence of the validity of Paul’s apostleship); Galatians 1.78-9; 3.1; 5.1; 6.13, 17; Ephesians 4.13-14; Philippians 1.15-16; 3.2-3, 16-20; 4.1, 9; Colossians 1.23; 2.8; 1 Thessalonians 2.1-6; 5.21; 2 Thessalonians 1.4-9; 2.2-15; 3.14-15; 1 Timothy 1.3-7, 18-20; 4.1-3; 6-7, 11, 16; 6.3-5, 20-21; 2 Timothy 1.8, 13-14; 2.2, 16-19; 3.1-16; 4.2-5; Titus 1.9-16; 2.1, 7, 8; 3.9-11; Hebrews 1.1-2; 2.1; 13.7-9; James 1.8, 16; 3.15-17; 5.19-20; 1 Peter 1.23-25; 2.1; 4.11-17; 5.8, 10; 2 Peter 1.12-16, 19-21; 2.1-3, 17-22; 3.1-8; 1 John 1.3-5; 2.178-20, 26; 4.1-3; 2 John 6-11; 3 John 9-10; Jude 3-5ff., 14-21; Revelation 2.6, 9, 14, 15, 20; 3.3, 8, 9, 10, 16; 22.178-19.

written teaching. A remarkably clear example is this admonition by Paul against those who objected to his authority: 'For *his* letters, say they, *are* weighty and powerful; but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible. Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *will we be* also in deed when we are present' (2 Corinthians 10.10-11).

This double unity appears from many New Testament passages.⁴⁷ Such passages imply that each Apostle, **in his capacity as an Apostle**, was consistent with his own ministry, and that all Apostles were consistent with each other. They testify to the Apostles' agreement in word and doctrine.

The passages concerned also declare the unity of the New Testament teaching with that of the Old. Accordingly, a theme that often recurs is that of remembrance, frequently found also in the Old Testament. It appears as an important element in God's dealings with His people, and also as something that He requires of believers (e.g. Deuteronomy 5.15; 7.18; Joshua 1.13; Judges 8.34; Nehemiah 1.8; Ecclesiastes 12.1; Isaiah 44.21; Malachi 4.4).

A fine example of this kind of remembrance, so important in God's eyes, is given by Ezekiel.

Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD [Ezekiel 16.60-63]

A final example of first century attacks comes from around the end of the period in which the New Testament was written, i.e. about AD 90-100. The Apostle John wrote to the church of Ephesus,

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. [Revelation 2.1-3]

A minimum of thirty years after the Apostle Paul wrote to this church, John here commends it for having properly identified and withstood false apostles, and for having rejected their teaching, in accordance with the Biblical injunction not to add to or take away from the words or teaching of Scripture, which the Apostle John repeats in Revelation 22.18-19. This passage thus shows at least four things: that in the first century false apostles were afoot; that false teaching was being spread within the churches; that the church was alerted to this by the Apostles, including John; and that at least part of the church withstood these false apostles and rejected their teachings and of course also the words in which these teachings were being expressed.

We may now consider some Biblical evidence of first-century opposition to the writings of the Apostles, or Scripture itself. The most elementary, but perhaps most direct, evidence comes from the Apostles being aware of imitations of their epistles. These falsified writings (pseudepigrapha) were apparently circulated in an attempt to corrupt their doctrine or to impugn their authority.

There is no mystery to this double-edged attack. Enemies of the gospel and the church undoubtedly realised that to destroy the one would be to destroy the other. Marred authority meant marred doctrine, and vice versa. Either way, the cause of Truth and of the church would suffer.

That the Apostles were aware of such counterfeits is clear from the following passages.

47. For example, Acts 20.18; 1 Corinthians 2.1, 3.11, 13; 4.15, 17 ('as I teach every where in **every** church', emphasis added); 2 Corinthians 1.12, 13; Galatians 1.8; Philippians 3.1; 4.9; Colossians 1.7; 2.7; 4.12; 1 Thessalonians 1.5; 2 Thessalonians 2.5; 1 Timothy 1.3, 11, 18; 4.13; 6.3-5, 13-14, 20-21; 2 Timothy 1.5, 13-14; 4.13; Titus 1.4, 5, 7, 9; 2.1; Hebrews 13.8-9 ('Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines'); James 5.19-20; 1 Peter 1.25 (see also 1.12, 23); 2 Peter 1.15-2.3; 3.1-2 ('This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in *both* which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour'); 1 John 1.3-5; 2.7 ('Brethren, I write...the word which ye have heard from the beginning'), 5.11; 2 John 1, 2, 10; 3 John 1, 4, 9, 12-14; Jude 3 ('...the faith which was once delivered unto the saints'), 5 ('I will therefore put you in remembrance...'), 17 ('But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ'); Revelation 1.1-2.

- ‘The salutation of *me* Paul with mine own hand’ (1 Corinthians 16.21).
- ‘Therefore I write these things being absent...’ (2 Corinthians 13.10).
- ‘Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand’ (Galatians 6.11).
- ‘The salutation by the hand of me, Paul...’ (Colossians 4.18).
- ‘Now we beseech you, brethren...that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand...’ (2 Thessalonians 2.1, 2).
- ‘The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write’ (2 Thessalonians 3.17).
- ‘I Paul have written it with mine own hand...’ (Philemon 19).

These quotations suggest at least five points of interest.

First, three of the references arguably refer to the respective letters to which they belong.

1. Philemon 19 says that Paul himself wrote this letter.

2. Galatians 6.11 also seems to apply to the letter as a whole. It may be translated, more literally, ‘see [or, you see] with how [or, in what] large letters I have written to you with my hand.’ ‘(With) letters’—in the phrase **with how large letters** (**how large a letter** in the Authorised Version)—is a translation of *grammasin*, the dative plural of *gramma*. Its basic meaning is ‘that which is drawn, hence, among other senses, also written character, letter...[and] in plural, set of written characters, piece of writing... hence...letter [epistle].’⁴⁸ So *grammasin*, by itself, may well refer to all that has gone before, i.e. to the letter as a whole.

The sense of a man’s ‘letters’ being used to mean his overall written output is also known in English, among other languages. The Authorised Version translators seem to understand that Paul is referring not to the length of the letter, which is relatively short (compared, for instance, with the letters to the Romans and Corinthians), but to the large script he used to write it in, and they rendered it accordingly.

This usage of the plural *grammasin* is not uncommon in other slightly different contexts in Scripture. Compare its similar use to refer to what are translated as the ‘writings’ of Moses in John 5.47, the holy ‘scriptures’ in 2 Timothy 3.15, and ‘letters’ (epistles) in Acts 28.21.

A related word used in Galatians 6.11 is *egrapsa* (‘I have written,’ ‘I wrote’: aorist indicative forms of *graphein* ‘to write’), and when found in conjunction with *pelikois* (‘how great’), *grammasin* seems to strengthen this interpretation.

The constant characteristic of the Aorist tense in all of its moods...is that it represents the action denoted by it indefinitely; i.e. simply as an event, neither on the one hand picturing it in progress, nor on the other affirming the existence of its result... As respects the point of view from which the action is looked at...we may distinguish three functions of the tense common to all of its moods...it may be used to describe an action or event in its entirety... to denote the inception of a state...[or] to denote the success of an effort.⁴⁹

It may be argued, therefore, that as *egrapsa* cannot picture Paul in the ongoing act of writing, it does not refer to Galatians 6.11 (and possibly the verses after it) alone. Nor would this word need to affirm the existence of its very own result only—the epistle—as this was self-evidently before the eyes of the Galatians when they read it or had it read to them. The grammatical form therefore plausibly describes the action of Paul’s writing this passage as such, or the epistle in its entirety, or possibly the success of his effort.

Incidentally, the large letters in Galatians 6.11, in combination with Paul’s mentioning that ‘there was given to me a thorn in the flesh’ in 2 Corinthians 12.7-8, suggest that he may have suffered from an eye disease.⁵⁰

3. If ‘I write’ in 2 Corinthians 13.10 refers not just to the contents, but to the actual writing of 2 Corinthians, then it too applies to the whole of that letter.

Second, the quotes mentioned above expressly draw attention to Paul’s including a specimen of his handwriting in the letters concerned.

48. Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 358.

49. E. D. Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Kregel, 1900), pp. 16-17.

50. See, for example, Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), p. 661.

Third, 2 Thessalonians 3.17 states that he did so in all his letters.

Fourth, these precautions, and the phrase ‘nor by letter as from us’ included in the earnest warning contained in 2 Thessalonians 2.1-3, indicate that Paul knew of counterfeit letters that were being circulated in his name. This was being done by false teachers who impersonated him by distributing letters with his forged name, so that his authority might extend to them or simply to discredit his work.

Fifth, these quotations distinguish between the inclusion of handwriting specimens as marks of genuineness to help recipients identify the writer, and the explicit identification of such inclusion. Taking private and public letters (those addressed to churches) together, what would have been the procedure if a letter did not contain any explicitly **identified** sample of the Apostle’s hand? The original recipient or recipients would still have been able to recognise the letter as his, on the following grounds.

1. The Apostle would have included a manuscript sample anyway (2 Thessalonians 3.17).
2. The entire letter might recognisably have been written by him.
3. The letter might have been recognised as having been written by one of his amanuenses (clerks or scribes) whose hand was equally familiar to its recipients. Witness, ‘I Tertius, who wrote *this* epistle, salute you in the Lord’ (Romans 16.22). Surely, the name of this clerk would not have been included without Paul’s consent. If Tertius, of whom we know nothing else, was known to some believers at Rome, the mention of his name would enhance the authenticity and credibility of the letter, the more so if his handwriting was familiar.

This should of course be considered jointly with the fact that Paul identifies himself as the writer of the letter (Romans 1.1); with its contents; with its style, which may have been familiar to some of the recipients; and with details of the salutations, many of which are specific and personal (Romans 16.1-16, 21-23).

4. The recipients would recognise the personal style of the Apostle who had dictated the letter.
5. They could identify a letter as coming from an Apostle by other means when it was inadvisable for him to include a writing sample or even to sign the letter. This may apply, for example, to 1, 2 and 3 John, and Hebrews. The fact that Paul was a man of principle has been used to argue that he must have signed all his letters without exception, and therefore that he did not write Hebrews. If his habits were so fixed that he could not appreciate special circumstances requiring him to depart from his usual practice, this might be so. But his habits do not seem to have been so rigid. Internal evidence and early external records suggest that he is, after all, the most likely author of this epistle.⁵¹

However, most letters **were** signed: see the first verses of all the New Testament letters other than the four just mentioned. Most letters probably had additional circumstances which made them recognisably authentic for the original recipients. For instance, 2 Corinthians is clearly a follow-up to 1 Corinthians: it addresses problems specific to the church in Corinth, and Paul and his style were well known to its members, as he had spent about three years with them and had kept in touch with them through Titus. Similarly, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are private, personal, and pastoral letters, and for that reason may well have been penned by Paul himself, whose handwriting Timothy and Titus must have known. Of course, even if a letter was not signed, a handwriting specimen would still have been included, as we have seen, to ensure that, to the recipients, it was identifiably Paul’s.

Paul’s declaration in 2 Thessalonians 3.17—that a sample of his own handwriting ‘is the token in **every** epistle’—reveals that even in those letters in which he did not expressly **mention** that he was including a sample of his own handwriting, he inserted one nonetheless. It was his standard procedure or precaution, his means of showing his addressees that these letters truly came from him, rather than from any of the forgers that both he and they knew were at large.

A possible further mark of authenticity may have been the characteristic similarity of the salutations included at the end of Paul’s letters. This applies not only to their pattern, but also to the very words employed. Thus the characteristic words: ‘(The) grace (of our Lord Jesus Christ)...*be* with you (all)’ occur in Romans 16.24, 1 Corinthians 16.23, 2 Corinthians

51. See Bromiley 2.665-667, and John Owen, *Works*, 23 vols., W. H. Goold, ed., vol. 17 *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 1850s), 17.25-94. For 1-3 John, we have to rely on early church history sources for their authorship (see J. S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator*, 56 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker, n.d.), 22.vi). For 1 and 2 John, see Bromiley, 2.1096.

13.14, Philippians 4.23, Colossians 4.18, 1 Thessalonians 5.28, 2 Thessalonians 3.18, Titus 3.15, and Hebrews 13.25. The phrase 'with you' is sometimes replaced by 'with your spirit', and in letters to individuals by 'with thy spirit' or 'with thee', as in Galatians 6.18, 1 Timothy 6.21, 2 Timothy 4.22, and Philemon 25. Ephesians 6.24 alone has, 'Grace *be* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity'. For the pattern of these salutations, compare the contexts of these references. The endings to Peter's letters include different but comparable clues for his addressees that allowed them to identify him as the author (see 1 Peter 5.12-14 and 2 Peter 3.18).

6. The recipients personally knew those who delivered the letter; in some cases they are even mentioned in the correspondence, as were the Apostle's other associates. The second letter to the Corinthians was probably delivered through Titus (2 Corinthians 7.6-16; 8.6-24; 12.18), the letter to the Ephesians through Tychicus, a native of Asia Minor (Ephesians 6.21-22; Acts 20.18; 2 Timothy 4.12), the letter to the Philippians through Epaphroditus (Philippians 4.18), the first letter to the Thessalonians through Timothy (1 Thessalonians 3.2, 6), the second letter to Timothy possibly through Mark (2 Timothy 4.11), the letter to Titus probably through Artemas or Tychicus (Titus 3.12), and the first letter of Peter through Silvanus (1 Peter 5.12). Even Hebrews 13.23 mentions Timothy, Paul's close and trusted associate.

Opposition to the persons, teachings, and writings of the Apostles did not seem to prevent their original addressees from ascertaining the authenticity of their letters. Once they had accepted a letter through any of the above means, they may reasonably be supposed to have passed on their knowledge concerning the documents they had received, thereby ensuring their canonicity.

They had all been forewarned by the Lord Jesus Christ, who had said, 'For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before' (Matthew 24.24-25). See also Matthew 10.16-22 and Matthew 24.34-35. Indeed, Paul's own parting words to the Ephesian elders even included the warning that 'Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them' (Acts 20.30).

Such, then, was Paul's habit. For the original recipients, these inclusions were telltale signs indicating that the letters they received were indeed his. This must have been reassuring, especially in times of trouble, which were frequent.

Today, however, we have to rely on the external evidence, on the ecclesiastical determinations that have been handed down to us, and most of all on what Scripture teaches and entails concerning these things. For the Bible-believing student has neither the autographs, nor, even if he did, any other samples of the Apostles' handwriting with which to authenticate them. But he can confidently go by what Scripture itself says and teaches. Thus, from the express declarations in the passages quoted above, he knows that 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon were Paul's. And though he cannot know the authorship of other New Testament letters by **this** means, he does have the external evidence of two thousand years of documented church history and other, internal, means of identification, some of them mentioned in the preceding paragraphs.

No doubt Providence foresaw that forgery of and tampering with Scripture would proliferate after the death of John, the last surviving Apostle. This explains, at least in part, the injunction not to falsify Scripture included at the end of the last Bible book written by this Apostle:

If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: 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. [Revelation 22.18-19]

Surely, this passage does not pertain to Revelation alone, as is sometimes suggested, but to the abuse of the New Testament, and even of Scripture as a whole. Man's nature since the Fall has been corrupt at all times. No doubt for this reason the like injunction had already been given and repeated long ago in Old Testament times (Deuteronomy 4.2; 12.32; Proverbs 30.5-6).

Keeping the Lord's commandments thus includes keeping the injunction not to tamper with Scripture. Both an observance of its teaching and a deference to its inscripturation and preservation are enjoined.

As already noted, Burgon correctly supposed that of all writings ever produced in history, Scripture is unique precisely because it is the very Word of God. Also, he was among the first to recognise the significance of this point and of early attempts to corrupt Scripture, and to elaborate a systematic view of the history and preservation of the text. More recently, Edward F. Hills has argued that as Scripture is the Word of God, its inspiration is infallible, its origin eternal,

and its preservation providential.⁵² Wilbur N. Pickering, recognising that early attempts were made to corrupt the New Testament text, argues with persuasive realism that its early transmission therefore occurred by both normal and abnormal means. The normal transmission was effected by faithful believers, the abnormal largely by enemies of Scripture and Christianity.⁵³

The passages quoted and discussed, with the writings of Paul and John cited as examples, show that the Apostles were well aware of those attempts to falsify the Scriptures that were made while they were still living and working in the first century AD. Subsequent church history, some of which has been discussed, confirms that such destructive textual activity continued with a vengeance into the second century, and even into the third and the fourth. These are historical facts. They show that the New Testament text was under attack from the moment it first appeared, i.e. the second half of the first century. They also show that the extent of these attacks was unusual to the point of being unique in the history of transmission of ancient texts.

Accordingly, these facts nullify the critical argument that the transmission of the New Testament text has been like that of any solely human text. The use of this argument as a proof for the view that Scripture is the same as any other text is thereby vitiated. As the premise that the Scriptures can validly be treated like any text is the major principle on which the critical view operates, most, if not all, of those of its presuppositions and arguments which have been built on this premise have been undermined simultaneously.

14. Distinctions and conclusions

The preceding discussion requires us to make or 'unmake' certain distinctions and allows us to draw certain conclusions. Let us begin with the distinctions.

First, the judgment afforded to and the tradition of (the properties and transmission of) the New Testament text in the early church, as far as we can determine these details from ecclesiastical and textual history, are to be carefully distinguished from later or modern-day speculations about this early ecclesiastical judgment and tradition.

Second, any supposedly 'neutral' (i.e. Critical) textual view and text must be rejected as a fiction, as opposed to any putative 'non-neutral' view and text (that is, the view which holds that the Received Text family within the traditional-majority-Byzantine tradition preserves the true New Testament text). There is no 'neutral' view or text, despite philosophically naive suppositions to that effect. There are only two views, a true and a false one. And there are only two texts, a true and a false one.

Third, there is a real and important distinction between any view that is consistently based on the truth of Scripture (i.e. of what it says, teaches, and entails) and any view that is not so based, either because it fails to be consistently so based owing to sloppy reasoning or wilful prejudice, or because it is deliberately not so based at all, but rather on non-Scriptural premises.

Accordingly, at its most fundamental level the textual debate seems to revolve around two questions. The first is whether or not the text and the doctrine of Scripture is the truth due to its having been inspired and preserved by God. If it is conceded that this is indeed what Scripture is, the second question must be whether or not its text is consistently viewed and handled in accordance with what it says, teaches, and entails concerning its own Author and itself, including its own identity, history and transmission, and any other conceivable properties.

In the light of these distinctions and the evidence, presuppositions, and arguments discussed, the following conclusions, at least, seem warranted.

First, the critical presupposition that Scripture is like (i.e. of the same origin, nature, and status as) any other writing, is false. It follows that the critical guideline which prescribes that Scripture is to be treated like any other writing is equally misguided. Therefore, and not least also because of the false conclusions and results that it is bound to lead to, it must be rejected.

Second, the related critical claim that the history of the transmission of its text is of the same kind as that of any other writing, is one that Scripture itself proves to be equally groundless. It does so by holding forth the unity and consistency

52. Edward Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (Des Moines, Iowa, USA: The Christian Research Press, 1956, 1988), p. 88.

53. Wilbur Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, Chapter 5, 'The History of the Text' (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, 1977, revised 1980), pp. 93-114.

of the oral and written doctrine of the Apostles, and by explicit declarations showing that the Apostles were well aware of attacks on their teachings and writings. Indeed, many of their letters in the New Testament were written with the very aim of protecting the churches they had founded against such attacks. Various affirmations in their letters evince their sustained precautions against attempts to forge their writings and thereby to corrupt their teachings. These attempts were evidently important means aimed at destroying the church: aims adopted by enemies of Christianity, who had realised that these writings and teachings were inextricably linked. One safeguard, among several, against such attempts was for Bible writers to include specimens of their own handwriting in their letters.

Third, from the known occurrence of very early, concerted and serious attempts to corrupt the New Testament text, it follows that the critical axiom that the older manuscript must of necessity contain the better text is a false premise. Hence it can no longer be maintained as an axiom or even as a guideline.

Fourth, given that the view that the Received Text family within the traditional-majority-Byzantine tradition preserves the true New Testament text and has adhered much more consistently to the Biblical premises and method, it follows that the text that supports it, and is supported by it, is to be considered the one that most accurately preserves and reflects the divine originals.

Fifth, more specifically, the often overlooked but important fact that it was the Received Text, rooted within the Byzantine family, that was predominantly reaffirmed—and that **independently**—by both the humanist Erasmus and the Roman Catholic scholars commissioned by Francisco (properly Gonzales) Ximenes de Cisneros (1436-1517) in the early sixteenth century, seems to furnish a strong argument for adhering to this strand of textual tradition.

Sixth, the majority support for this Traditional Text is considered to be the most logical and natural outcome that might have been predicted or expected from what Scripture teaches concerning God and itself. Originating as it does from God, Scripture has been preserved by Him through time, in and through the vast majority of surviving manuscripts.

Seventh, both the vast majority of extant early texts (manuscripts, Fathers, lectionaries, versions), and important aspects of the early history of transmission of the New Testament text (including both the relevant Scriptural statements and teachings, and the well-considered determinations of early Church Fathers), must always be sufficiently taken into account in our view and handling of the New Testament.

Perhaps one of the most damning criticisms of Hort's critical method is that, again and again, he merely **assumes**, without argument or proof (cf. Burgon 1883: 251, 252, 255, 256, 258ff, 263, 266). He proves little or nothing, for he neither presents conclusive supporting arguments, nor supplies the necessary external documentary evidence. He asserts, but assertion is not argument and repetition of assertion is not proof.

Hence,

The one great Fact, which especially troubles [Hort]...is the Traditional Greek Text of the New Testament Scriptures. Call this text [whatever you want]...the fact remains, that a Text has come down to us, which is attested by a general consensus of ancient Copies, ancient Fathers, ancient Versions [and as Burgon has shown before, ancient ecclesiastical determinations and lectionaries]. This, at all events, is a point on which, (happily,) there exists entire conformity of opinion between Dr. Hort and ourselves. Our Readers cannot have yet forgotten his virtual admission that, "Beyond all question the Textus Receptus is the dominant Graeco-Syrian Text of AD 350 to AD 400". [Burgon 1883: 269, 257, referring to Hort 1882b: 92].

For the foregoing reasons, it is not only advisable but indeed imperative that the received Traditional Text, taken as a whole, be adhered to, rather than the Critical Text taken as a whole. This is because the traditional approach starts from presuppositions revealed in Scripture alone; uses the accompanying method of deducing propositions from them on all the relevant aspects of Scripture (such as its origin, nature, history, transmission, form, and content); and proceeds to consider and handle (to recognise, examine, order and evaluate) all the available textual data accordingly, and to apply to them all the necessary and sufficient textual criteria.

The critical approach does something other than this. It starts, wholly or partly, from non-Scriptural human presuppositions, and devises its method and views, handles Scripture, draws its conclusions, and produces its textual results accordingly.

Even if, as regards the traditional view, a few (but not the tens of thousands some might claim) problems remain, the traditional view would appear to provide the more promising framework for ascertaining the Scripture text in those few instances.

The tree shall be known by its fruit, for everything produces after its own kind. This principle applies equally to the physical and the spiritual realm. It is first stated in Genesis 1.11, 'And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.' It is reaffirmed in the New Testament, stated in concrete physical terms, but applied spiritually, in passages such as Matthew 7.16-20, 'Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.' See also Matthew 3.10; 7.21-22; Luke 3.9; 6.43-45.

This principle may be applied to the case at hand as follows: if it be asked whether the wisdom (or some theory) of man is to be the judge of the wisdom of God, or vice versa, the Bible-believing student will answer that 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men' (1 Corinthians 1.25).

No doubt errors are made by advocates of either approach. But an important point always to bear in mind is that any position that does not start from Biblical presuppositions alone, and with all the known textual data and all the necessary textual principles, cannot but produce results that are at variance with the Scripture of Truth, with orthodoxy, and hence also with textual truth. For, as the present article has (it is hoped) made clear, choosing between real textual variants (not mere differences in spelling) tends to be more than 'simply' plumping for one reading or another. At the back of such a choice there is always some system of theory, philosophy, and theology.

If what we do is always determined by what we think and believe, our textual and translational practice will generally be determined by our theory (of Scripture, language, text and translation), our theory by our philosophy (of truth, knowledge, and the method of thought), and our philosophy by our theology (what we believe about God and His Word) and our beliefs (our presuppositions or axioms). It might be asked, do not 'facts' speak for themselves, then? No, they do not. All 'facts' are propositional and theory-laden, interpreted by the presuppositions of the interpreter.

Therefore, given the particular arguments and the backgrounds of the views discussed, it is considered truthful in accordance with the view defended here to maintain that the Lord has indeed preserved His Word as He had promised all along, rather than to say that Scripture, the New Testament text in particular, can no longer be reconstructed with any certainty, as the critical view argues, or to say that it might perhaps be reconstructed after all, as the stricter majority view seems to imply.

However much disagreement there may be in the field of New Testament criticism, virtually all contenders agree that there are essentially two views and two concomitant texts which are fundamentally opposed to each other: the traditional and the critical views and texts. Since these are owned to be mutually exclusive, the question may and should be posed in the terms of Matthew 7.24-27: which of the two is 'sand', and which is solid 'rock'? The Lord Jesus Christ urges His church to build on (that is, to hear and do) 'these sayings of mine'; thus, is it not vitally important that the church identify which text, taken as a whole, may lay claim to be these sayings of His?

15. Postscript: Forever settled in heaven...and on earth

Given the truth of the doctrine of Scripture concerning itself, it is inconceivable to a believing mind that God should not have preserved His Word. It is equally inconceivable that He should have preserved it in a slipshod or haphazard fashion. It is moreover inconceivable that, to the detriment of His church, He should have hidden His true Word for centuries, such as the 1,400 or 1,900 years suggested by some critics, only to have had it recovered by these same critics centuries later in 1881. For this would suggest inconsistency between God's revealed mind and His providential work of preservation. It would also suggest a singular lack of care on His part for His church, which, by implication, would then have been making do with a garbled text all those centuries.

However, neither the three inconceivable presuppositions mentioned above, nor their two consequences, in any way conform to the doctrine of Scripture about itself or about its Author. In fact, the reverse of these premises and results appears to be true.

Therefore, manuscript evidence should not be approached and considered on any basis which suggests that any of the preceding options is or could be true, or even probable. Instead, this evidence can only be properly viewed and fairly handled on the firm belief that the Lord God of Truth, the God of Scripture, has actually preserved His Word.

Nor is the preservation of God's Word in the ways that He has stipulated and promised just an interesting idea to toy around with academically. Quite the contrary, it is a true doctrine of His Word about that very Word. As such, it is part of the revealed Truth that Christians believe. What He has promised, He does. Therefore, Christians should believe both

the doctrine of providential preservation and its application. Its application is God actually preserving His Word by His eternal providential Presence in the course of history, which includes **our** past, present, and future.

Since God is who and what Scripture teaches He is, it is natural for Him to have preserved His Word. Therefore, on the basis of Scripture it is plausible and logical for us to accept and believe that He has done so, is doing so, and will do so forever. It is equally plausible and logical to believe that He has done so in the vast majority of the preserved manuscripts, and furthermore, that He has done so openly and traceably, rather than in a covert, obscure, or haphazard manner.

If these premises are true, as the Society believes they are, it follows that our understanding of this divine preservation, and our seeking to solve problems that for some may still remain shrouded in the actual transmission of the Bible text, cannot be reduced to statistics. Nor can this be written off as a quirk of history or ascribed to the fickleness of man.

Preservation is both doctrinally true and historically real. God **has** preserved His Word intact. He promised He would (as, for instance, in Isaiah 59.21),⁵⁴ and He will continue to do so forever. He does it historically, moreover, in ways that are sufficiently transparent and specific. In the wisdom of God, most of the New Testament text was first largely addressed to, and then preserved by, the Greek-speaking churches around the Aegean Sea. In its printed form the version in which it has been preserved and published, since (and due to) His gracious work in the Reformation, is in the Received Text family of the Majority Text tradition, which is supported by the vast majority of the extant manuscripts, Church Fathers, lectionaries, and early Bible versions.

When the truth of Scripture is accepted, this twin-faceted actual preservation seems a natural, logical, and acceptable result. Therefore, having weighed the arguments and considered the facts, the Trinitarian Bible Society believes that the New Testament Scriptures have been best preserved in this tradition. Manuscripts may vary within or among themselves. But the Word of God is invariable; it is eternally immutable. Because it is forever settled in heaven, not one jot or tittle will pass from it till all its words are fulfilled. So, till heaven and earth pass away, the Word of God, this Scripture, cannot be broken.

54. For a good discussion of textual and historical details, and for a sound exposition of this verse, the reader is referred to A. Hembd, 'An Examination of the New King James Version', part 1, *Quarterly Record* no. 581 (October to December 2007), pp. 9-44, and part 2, *Quarterly Record* no. 582 (January to March 2008), pp. 11-46.

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