



Far Eastern Bible College

"Holding forth the Word of Life" Phil 2:16
 "Holding fast the Faithful Word" Titus 1:9

9A Gilstead Road Singapore 309063
 Tel (65) 6256 9256 Fax (65) 6251 3891

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A HISTORY OF MY DEFENCE OF THE KING JAMES VERSION

Edward F Hills

New Testament Textual Criticism at Westminster 1935-8

I have been interested in the problem of New Testament textual criticism since my high school days in the 1920's. At that time I began to read the commentaries of Charles Hodge, books that were part of my Presbyterian heritage. I noticed that Hodge would sometimes mention variant readings, most however, just to show that he was knowledgeable, for he rarely departed from "the common text" (*textus receptus*) and "our English version" (King James). Even so, my curiosity was aroused, so that in 1931, when I was a sophomore at Yale University I took down C R Gregory's *Canon and Text of the New Testament* from a library shelf and began to read. I was dismayed at the large number of verses that, according to Gregory and his teachers Westcott and Hort, must be rejected from the Word of God. Nor was I much comforted by Gregory's assurance that the necessary damage had been done and the rest of the text had been placed on an unassailable basis. How could I be sure of this? It seemed to me that the only way to gain assurance on this point was to go to Westminster Seminary and study the subject under the tutelage of Dr Machen, who preached in New Haven rather frequently in those days, talking to Yale students at least twice.

Dr B B Warfield and the Providential Preservation of the New Testament

When I began to study New Testament textual criticism at Westminster (under Dr Stonehouse) I found that the first day or so was mainly devoted to praising Dr B B Warfield. He was lauded for being among the first to recognise the "epoch making" importance of the theory of Westcott and Hort and for establishing the Westcott and Hort tradition at Princeton Seminary, a tradition which was now being faithfully perpetuated at Westminster Seminary. To me, however, all this was very puzzling. Dr Warfield was a renowned defender of the Reformed faith and of the Westminster Confession, yet in the department of New Testament textual criticism he agreed entirely with liberals such as Westcott, Hort and C R Gregory. He professed to agree with the statement of the Westminster Confession that the Scriptures by God's "singular care and providence" had been "kept pure in all ages," but it was obvious that this providential preservation of the Scriptures was of no importance to Dr Warfield when he actually began to deal with the problems of the New Testament. When he engaged in New Testament textual criticism, Dr Warfield ignored the providential preservation of the Scriptures and treated the text of the New Testament as he would the text of any book or writing. "It matters not whether the writing before us be a letter from a friend, or an inscription from Carchemish, or a copy of a morning newspaper, or Shakespeare, or Homer, or the Bible."

I may be reading into my student days some of my later thinking, but it seems to me that even at that time I could see that the logic of Warfield's naturalistic New Testament textual criticism led steadily downward toward modernism and unbelief. For if the providential preservation of the Scriptures was not important for the study of the New Testament text, then it could not have been important for the history of the New Testament text. And if it had not been important for the history of the New Testament, then it must have been non-existent. It could not have been a fact. And if the providential preservation of the Scriptures was not a fact, why should the infallible inspiration of the Scriptures be regarded as a fact? Why would God infallibly inspire a book and then decline to preserve it providentially? For example, why would God infallibly inspire the Gospel of Mark and then permit (as Warfield thought possible) the ending of it (describing the resurrection appearances of Christ) to be lost?

Why Dr Warfield was so Inconsistent: His Scholastic Heritage

Why was Dr Warfield so inconsistent in the realm of New Testament textual criticism? Dr Van Til's course in apologetics enabled me to supply the answer to this question. Dr Warfield's inconsistency was part of his scholastic inheritance, an error which had been handed down to him from the middle-ages. Let me explain.

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During the middle-ages the schoolmen tried to reconcile the philosophy of Aristotle with the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church by separating faith from reason, and praying from thinking. While dealing with dogma, faith and prayer were appropriate, but the study of philosophy was reason's province. So the medieval schoolmen contended, and soon this doctrine of the separation of faith from reason became generally accepted throughout the medieval Roman Catholic Church.

The Protestant Reformers were fully occupied with other matters. Hence they spent but little time combating this medieval Roman Catholic error of the separation of faith and reason. Hence this false scholastic doctrine survived the Reformation and soon became embedded in the thinking of conservative Protestants everywhere. In the 18th century, Butler and Paley built their apologetic systems on this false principle of the separation of faith and reason, and in the 19th century, at Princeton and other conservative theological seminaries, this scholastic principle even governed the curriculum and the way in which several subjects were taught. Systematic theology, practical theology and homiletics were placed in one box labeled FAITH. All the other subjects, including New Testament textual criticism, biblical introduction, apologetics and philosophy, were placed in another box labeled REASON.

We see now why Dr Warfield was so inconsistent. We see why he felt himself at liberty to adopt the naturalistic theories of Westcott and Hort, and did not perceive that in so doing he was contradicting the Westminster Confession and even his own teaching in the realm of systematic theology. The reason was that Dr Warfield kept these subjects in separate boxes. Like an authentic, medieval scholastic, he kept his systematic theology and the Westminster Confession in his FAITH box and his New Testament textual criticism in his REASON box. Since he never tried to mingle the contents of these two boxes, he was never fully aware of the discrepancies in his thinking.

Dean Burgon: His Emphasis on the Providential Preservation of Scripture

When I began to study New Testament textual criticism at Westminster in 1935, I noticed another thing. Almost as much time was spent in disparaging Dean Burgon as in praising Dr Warfield. This again aroused my curiosity. Who was this Dean Burgon? Upon investigation, I found that he had been a British scholar that had not fitted into the usual scholastic mold. He had not kept his theology and his New Testament textual criticism in two separate boxes, but had actually dared to make his theology the guiding principle of his New Testament textual criticism. For this he was pronounced "unscholarly." Actually, he was merely following the logic of faith. He believed that the New Testament was the infallibly inspired Word of God. Hence it had been preserved down through the ages by God's special providence, not secretly in holes and caves and on forgotten library shelves but publicly in the usage of God's Church. Hence the text found in the vast majority of the New Testament manuscripts is the true text because this is the text that has been used by God's Church. As soon as I began to read Burgon's works, I was impressed by this logic of faith and also by the learned arguments by which Burgon refuted the contention of Tischendorf, Tregelles, Westcott, Hort, etc. Finally after some years of hesitation, I definitely committed myself to his view in 1952.

But there are problems connected with Burgon's view. Burgon was a high Anglican who emphasised the role of bishops in the history of the Church. He believed that the New Testament text had been preserved mainly by the bishops of the ancient and medieval Church. Hence he defended the text found in the majority of the New Testament manuscripts, but he would not defend the printed *Textus Receptus* because it had not been produced by bishops. He would, however, defend the King James Version because this had been produced by bishops. Here he was inconsistent because the King James Version is a translation of the *Textus Receptus*.

We solve this problem by substituting the biblical doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers for Burgon's high Anglicanism. Just as the Old Testament text was preserved by the Old Testament priests, so the New Testament text was preserved by the universal priesthood of believers, that is by true believers in every walk of life. And this providential preservation did not cease with the invention of printing. Hence the true text is found not only in the text of the majority of the New Testament manuscripts but more especially in the *Textus Receptus* and in faithful translations of the *Textus Receptus*, such as the King James Version. In short, the *Textus Receptus* represents the God-guided revision of the majority text.

Burgon mingled his faith with his New Testament textual criticism, urging the providential preservation of the Scriptures as the chief argument in favour of the traditional (majority) New Testament text. It was for this breach of etiquette that he was regarded as not truly scholarly. But isn't it possible to escape this stigma and still do a good job of defending the majority text? Isn't it possible to drop Burgon's emphasis on the special, providential preservation of Scripture and rely solely on more accurate arguments? Hodges, Pickering and Van Bruggen seem to think this is possible, but in so thinking they are badly mistaken. The same thing must be said of them that has just been said of Dr Warfield. In spite of their good intentions, their thinking is pointed toward modernism and unbelief. For if the providential preservation of the holy Scriptures is unimportant for the defence of the New

Testament text, then it must be unimportant for the history of the New Testament text and hence non-existent and not a fact. And if the providential preservation of the Scriptures is not a fact, why should we suppose that the infallible inspiration of the Scriptures is a fact? For inspiration and preservation go together.

Hodges and Pickering try to substitute their theory of statistical probability for Burgon's doctrine of the special providential preservation of the Scriptures. According to these two scholars, statistical probability shows that whenever the transmission of an ancient book has been normal, the best text is found in the majority of the manuscripts. The transmission of the New Testament text has been normal. Hence the text found in the majority of the New Testament manuscripts is the best New Testament text.

In advancing this argument, however, Hodges and Pickering contradict themselves. For they both claim to believe in the providential preservation of the Scriptures, and if this providential preservation is a fact, then something is true of the New Testament which is not true of the transmission of other ancient books. Hence the transmission of the New Testament cannot have been normal. And even from a naturalistic point of view their argument is faulty. For the New Testament is a religious book, and the transmission of a religious book is never normal because it is transmitted mainly by believers who do not regard it as a normal book.

Scholasticism Versus the Logic of Faith

Conservative theological seminaries organised on the scholastic model, separating faith and reason, inevitably become modernistic and unbelieving. The area allotted to reason is steadily enlarged and that remaining for faith correspondingly decreased. The box labeled FAITH is emptied, while REASON'S box is crammed full. This process of deterioration cannot be avoided because as soon as we give reason an equal place with faith in our thinking we have no true faith at all. God is the Supreme Reality, the source of all things real, and therefore, we must believe on Him as such. We must allow nothing else to be as real as God. If we found even a part of our thinking on a set of rational principles which are independent of God, then we are no longer believing but doubting.

We see, therefore, that if Westminster Seminary is to preserve itself from modernism, it must purge itself from all remnants of scholasticism. It must rid itself completely from every tendency to separate reason from faith. And especially must it do this in the department of New Testament textual criticism. In this area particularly it must put away the naturalistic theories of Westcott and Hort and others like them and follow the logic of faith which runs like this: *Because the Gospel is true and necessary for the salvation of souls, the Bible which contains this Gospel was infallibly inspired and has been preserved by God's special providence, not secretly in holes and caves, but publicly in the usage of God's Church.*

Moreover, this special providence did not cease with the invention of printing. Therefore, the true New Testament text is found today in the majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts, in the *Textus Receptus*, and in the King James Version and other faithful translations of the *Textus Receptus*. And therefore also this same preserving providence is operating today through the agency of all true believers, however humble, who retain and defend the King James Version.

Dr Edward Freer Hills (1912-81) was a distinguished Latin and Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Yale University. He earned his theological degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary (BTh), Columbia Theological Seminary (ThM), and Harvard Divinity School (ThD). He also did doctoral work at the University of Chicago on New Testament textual criticism, and authored The King James Version Defended, and Believing Bible Study, both of which may be ordered from The Christian Research Press, P O Box 13023, Des Moines, Iowa 50310-0023, USA. The above article is printed by permission of Mrs Edward F Hills. She wrote in a kind letter (Oct 28 '97), "It is indeed very encouraging to learn that a Presbyterian College is a strong supporter of the KJV. Dr. Hills' book, The King James Version Defended, will furnish your students with the facts they will need for its defense. It may interest you to know that Dr. Hills and Dr. (Carl) McIntire were classmates at Westminster Seminary. For years we profited from the Christian Beacon and were saddened to see it out of print."

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