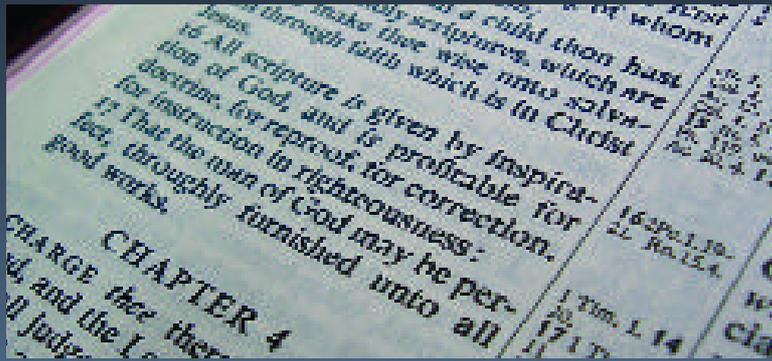


Trinitarian Bible Society
STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE
OF
Holy Scripture



Introduction

Over the last few years the Society's General Committee has spent a considerable amount of time examining in detail some of the many different aspects of the Society's work. This systematic review of the Society has not yet been

completed, and such is the breadth and complexity of the Society's operation, it is doubtful whether it will be concluded for several years. (In part this activity of the Committee follows the publication last year of the Investigating Committee's Report.)

It is important that the Society's members and friends understand the purpose of this comprehensive review. The

Committee is endeavouring to ensure that, subject to the Lord Himself being pleased to grant His indispensable blessing upon the work, the Society will be adequately prepared to face the particular difficulties and specific challenges of the coming years of this century. The prevailing situation in the visible church and among the nations today is very considerably different to what it was thirty years ago. It is far different to what it was in 1831. The indications today are that—unless the Lord is pleased to graciously intervene, withdraw His threatened judgements and revive His work—the situation (at least in the United Kingdom) during the next few years is likely to change very significantly.

In approaching this review of the Society's work and witness, the Committee has sought to ensure that nothing it does or proposes alters in any way the basic historical, spiritual foundation of the work. The Society's aim has been, is today, and (by God's grace) will continue to be in the future, as simply and yet comprehensively stated in the Society's Constitution drawn up in 1831:

The object of this Society is to promote the Glory of God and the salvation of men, by circulating, both at home and abroad, in dependence on the Divine blessing, the HOLY SCRIPTURES, which are given by inspiration of God, and are able to make men wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (Law II)

As the Society is a Bible Society engaged in the publication and distribution of the Bible, one of the first areas to which the Committee has given its attention is the all-important subject of the Society's position regarding the Holy Scriptures. This subject has been before your Committee month by month for the greater part of the last three years and has engaged their prayerful thought and discussion throughout this period.

The Society's Constitution states that:

This Society shall circulate the HOLY SCRIPTURES, as comprised in the Canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, WITHOUT NOTE OR COMMENT, to the exclusion of the Apocrypha; the copies in the English language shall be those of the Authorised Version. In promoting and editing new translations, and selecting versions in Foreign languages, the competency of the translators employed, and the faithfulness, textual basis and Christian character of the versions, shall be ascertained by the Committee, before the circulation of such versions is in any way aided by this Society. The aim shall be to produce or select versions whose textual basis is as close as possible to the Hebrew Masoretic and the Greek Received texts underlying both the English Authorised Version and translations of comparable standing made from these texts into other European languages at the time of the Protestant Reformation. (Law III)

It continues:

The MEMBERS of this Society shall consist of PROTESTANTS, who acknowledge in writing to the Society's Head Office their belief in the GODHEAD OF THE FATHER, OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST, THREE CO-EQUAL AND CO-ETERNAL PERSONS IN ONE LIVING AND TRUE GOD (as is more fully set forth in the Appendix to these laws); in the WHOLE BIBLE as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, the sole, supreme and infallible rule of faith and practice; and who unite to support the Society by contributing not less than FIVE POUNDS annually... (Law IV)

These paragraphs refer to the copies of the Holy Scriptures to be circulated by the Society and the beliefs of the Society's members. However, they do not explicitly state the Doctrine of Holy Scripture. This was probably because in 1831, when the Constitution was drawn up, the humble, God-fearing supporters of the Society generally understood the historic Protestant doctrine of Holy Scripture and there was no need to express more than that which is contained in the wording of the Constitution. The history of the decline of orthodox Christianity over the last two centuries is only a reflection of the decline in spirituality of the Lord's people. As Charles Hodge has stated, 'The departure from the doctrines of the church standards of the Protestant

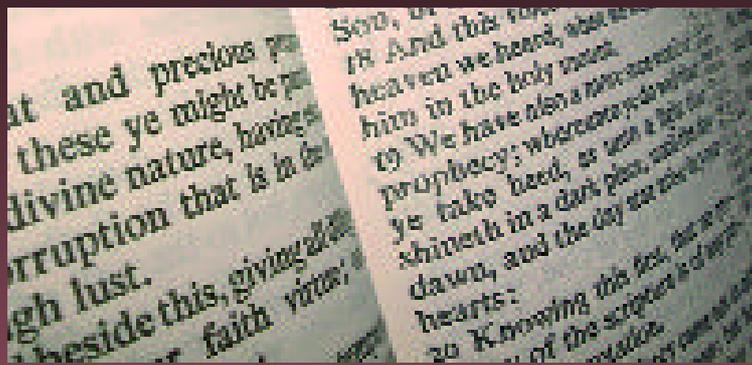
churches began early, with the decline of vital Godliness' (Charles Hodges, *Systematic Theology* [London: James Clarke & Co., 1960] 2:728).

Today, as has been stated, things are very different. The doctrine of Scripture has been, and is being, assailed on every side: not least from within many branches (including those taking the name of 'evangelical' and 'reformed') of the so-called 'Christian Church' of our day. The Committee, therefore, considers it necessary for the Society clearly and unambiguously to state where it stands on this most fundamental of all doctrines. It has consequently prepared the following Statement and Word List (the latter defining some of the technical terms referred to in the former). These documents do not contain anything that is novel but simply summarise the historical position of the Society.

It will be noted that the following documents have the unanimous support of the whole of the Society's General Committee. The Statement has therefore been signed by all the Members of the General Committee, the Vice-Presidents and the General Secretary. Copies are being given to all the Society's staff and speakers, and are being circulated to all the Society's personnel in each of its Branches and Auxiliaries.

D.P. Rowland
General Secretary

Trinitarian Bible Society
STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE
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Holy Scripture



Preface: The Reformation Confessions such as the Westminster (1647), the Savoy (1658), and the London Baptist (1689), state regarding Scripture that, 'The Old Testament in Hebrew, (which was the native language of the people of God of old,) and the New Testament in Greek, (which at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations,) being immediately inspired by God, and, by his singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical... (WCF 1:8). With this the Society is in full agreement, believing that it accurately summarises the following doctrine:

1. Only the self-interpreting Holy Scripture is competent to define Scripture. The Scripture's witness to itself can be briefly summarised in the following propositions:

- (1) The Bible is God's written revelation to mankind (Exodus 24:3-4; Psalm 119:140; Matthew 4:4).
- (2) Through the process of inspiration (which has the meaning 'breathed out by God'), a supernatural power was exerted by the Holy Spirit upon certain chosen men, governing and directing them to write the very words of God, without admixture of error (1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:21). This is not to deny that each of the biblical writers had a distinctive style and vocabulary, but it is to affirm that the divine superintendence was such that the end product (being of plenary and verbal inspiration) was the very Word of God, and as such, absolute and pure truth (Romans 3:2; 1 Corinthians 14:37).
- (3) The supernatural power involved in the process of inspiration, and in the result of inspiration, was exerted *only* in the *original* production of the sixty-six Canonical books of the Bible (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Peter 3:15-16).
- (4) In conformity to God's purpose, promise, and command, faithful and accurate copies were made (Deuteronomy 17:18; Proverbs 25:1) and, through God's special providential care, His Word has been preserved in all generations (Psalm 119:152; Matthew 5:18; 24:35; Luke 16:17; 1 Peter 1:25). The professing people of God under the Old and New Testaments have been the appointed custodians of His Word (Psalm 147:19,20; Romans 3:2; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27).
- (5) The Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles received the preserved and standard Hebrew text of the Old Testament as *Scripture* (Luke 4:16-19, 21; 2 Timothy 3:16). This serves as our pattern for accepting the historically received text of the New Testament also as *Scripture* (1 Timothy 5:18 cf. Luke 10:7; 2 Peter 3:15-16).
- (6) These texts of Scripture¹ reflect the qualities of God-breathed Scripture, including being authentic, holy, pure, true, infallible, trustworthy, excellent, self-authenticating, necessary, sufficient, perspicuous, self-interpreting, authoritative and inerrant (Psalm 19:7-9, Psalm 119). They are consequently to be received as the Word of God (Ezra 7:14; Nehemiah 8:8; Daniel 9:2; 2 Peter 1:19) and the correct reading at any point is to be sought within these texts.²

(7) Translations from the original languages are likewise to be considered the written Word of God in so far as these translations are accurate as to the form and content of the Original. Acts 8:32f, 15:14-18, Romans 15:8-12 include Old Testament quotations rendered in Greek, and yet they are still accorded the status of the Word of God by the Holy Spirit, as indicated by the usage of the expressions 'scripture' and 'it is written'. The variants found in these and other quotations in the New Testament have a divine warrant.³ In order to achieve the necessary accuracy in translation, the method to be followed should be that of formal equivalence, not dynamic equivalence. The translation should best reflect both the form and the content of the Original, by being as literal as is possible and as free as is necessary; that is, by translating the words, and following the arrangement and propositional content of the original text as much as is possible, and by being free of human invention, addition, and subtraction, except as is necessary.

NOTE 1. The Trinitarian Bible Society maintains that the providentially preserved true and authentic text is to be found in the Masoretic Hebrew and the Greek Received Texts. In so doing, it follows the historic, orthodox Protestant position of acknowledging as Holy Scripture the Hebrew and Greek texts consistently accessible to and preserved among the people of God in all ages. These texts had remained in common use in different parts of the world for more than fifteen centuries and they faithfully represent the texts used in New Testament times.

NOTE 2. Errors, omissions, and additions in particular manuscripts do not impinge upon the qualities of *Scripture*, including inerrancy, because the errors are, in fact, no part of inerrant Scripture.

NOTE 3. Translations made since New Testament times must use words chosen by *uninspired men* to translate *God's* words. For this reason no *translation* of the Word of God can have an absolute or definitive status. The final appeal must always be to the original languages, in the Traditional Hebrew and Greek texts (as defined in Note 1).

2. As affirmed above, the Lord Jesus endorsed the preserved and standard Old Testament of His day as 'scripture' (Luke 4:17-21), regarding it as reliable to each particular word and incapable of being 'broken' ('loosed' or 'untied') because pure, uncorrupted, and therefore absolutely trustworthy (John 10:34-36). Historically, and for many centuries, the Church rightly and necessarily regarded the recognised manuscripts of the Old Testament Hebrew and the New Testament Greek as the verbally inspired Word of God written, complete in the sixty-six Canonical books.

3. The Constitution of the *Trinitarian Bible Society* specifies the textual families

to be employed in the translations it circulates. The Masoretic Hebrew¹ and the Greek Received² Texts are the texts that the Constitution of the *Trinitarian Bible Society* acknowledges to have been preserved by the special providence of God within Judaism and Christianity. Therefore these texts are definitive and the final point of reference in all the Society's work.

NOTE 1. The Society accepts as the best edition of the Hebrew Masoretic text the one prepared in 1524-25 by Jacob ben Chayyim and known, after David Bomberg the publisher, as the Bomberg text. This text underlies the Old Testament in the Authorised Version.

NOTE 2. The Greek Received Text is the name given to a group of printed texts, the first of which was published by Desiderius Erasmus in 1516. The Society uses for the purposes of translation the text reconstructed by F.H.A. Scrivener in 1894.

4. As the scope of the Society's Constitution does not extend to considering the minor variations between the printed editions of the *Textus Receptus*, this necessarily excludes the Society from engaging in alteration or emendation of the Hebrew Masoretic and Greek Received Text on the basis of other Hebrew or Greek texts. Editorial policy and practice will observe these parameters.

5. In relation to 'promoting and editing new translations, and selecting versions in Foreign languages' the Constitution of the Society states: 'The aim shall be to produce or select versions whose textual basis is as close as possible to the Hebrew Masoretic and the Greek Received texts underlying both the English Authorised Version and translations of comparable standing made from these texts into other European languages at the time of the Protestant Reformation.' Editorial policy and practice will conform to this aim.

Approved by the General Committee at its meeting held on 17th January, 2005, revised 25th February, 2005 and including amendments approved by the General Committee at its meeting held on 21st November, 2005.

Signed:

M.H.Watts, Chairman

C. A.Wood, Vice-President

D. Silversides

B.G.Felce, Vice-Chairman

G. R. Burrows

J. P. Thackway

F. C. Farncombe, Vice-President

G. D. Buss

D. P. Rowland, General Secretary

G.Hamstra, Vice-President

M. J.Harley

D. Lartham, Assistant General Secretary

D. Oldham, Vice-President

A. K. Jones

E.T.Kirkland

WORD LIST

Ancient Versions: For example, the Septuagint (dated approximately between 250 and 150BC) and the Peshitta, Coptic (Sahidic or Thebaic, and Bohairic), Ethiopic, Old Latin (Vetus Itala), and Vulgate, produced in the first few centuries of the Christian era.

Apographs: Copies of the original and inspired manuscripts. The Trinitarian Bible Society (following the Traditional Text of the Protestant Church) regards the Masoretic Hebrew and Greek Received texts as the best representatives of the Autographs.

Autographs: The original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts written by the inspired writers, which are now unavailable.

Byzantine: The Byzantine era is 312-1453 AD. The texts produced by Erasmus, Beza etc., which in time

became known as forms of the Received Text, were to a very great extent derived from the Byzantine family.

Complutensian Polyglot: The Polyglot Bible, conceived in 1502 by Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros (1437-1517) and produced at Alcala (Latin: Complutum) in Spain, was an edition in which the Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin Vulgate texts appeared side by side. The fifth of the six volumes contained the text of the New Testament in Greek, and a Greek glossary with Latin equivalents. This was printed in 1514 (as the first printed Greek New Testament), but the Polyglot was not actually published until 1520 and then not generally circulated until 1522.

Critical texts: Texts constructed without adequate regard to the historical place given to manuscripts and partic-

ular readings within the Church of God, and relying on a few old, but nevertheless unrepresentative, manuscripts and readings which have lain in obscurity for many centuries. Critical texts are such as the Westcott/Hort or Nestle/Aland texts, both of which rely heavily upon Codex Sinaiticus, Aleph – 01 (4th cent.) and Codex Vaticanus, B – 03 (4th cent.).

Dynamic equivalence: The principle of translation that attempts to recreate on the reader of the receptor language the impact the original text had on the original recipients, without being bound literally to reproduce the words as nearly as possible. (The translator then assumes the role of interpreter, to determine the thought intended in the original. This often results in an interpretative paraphrase that has little or no relationship to the original language text.)

While all translations may need to employ dynamic equivalence to a limited extent, the *Trinitarian Bible Society* rejects the extensive and unnecessary use of this method of translation.

Eclectic: By definition, ‘selecting what is considered best from various sources’, but in practice, it usually means heavy dependence on Aleph and B. The differences between the Critical texts and the Eclectic texts are based very largely on nothing more than the editor’s subjective considerations.

Extant Copies: Copies of the Greek manuscripts that have survived until the present time. Although the extant copies are of various ages, completeness and accuracy, the great majority of them (over 90%) agree with the traditional form of the New Testament found in the printed editions of the Received Text.

Formal equivalence: The principle of translation that accepts every word

of Holy Scripture as being of divine origin and therefore takes into account every word in the original language to ensure that as far as possible the grammar, the form, the vocabulary and the syntax of the Hebrew and Greek are followed in the translation (‘As literal as possible, as free as necessary’). The Society believes this is the only acceptable method of translation.

Infallible/Inerrant: The word ‘infallible’ means ‘not liable to prove false, erroneous, or mistaken’, while ‘inerrant’ means ‘free from error’ or ‘unerring’. Historically, Protestant theologians have used the former term to affirm that Scripture is absolutely truthful and trustworthy. The words apply, in the first instance, to the Autographs, and then to the true Text providentially preserved within the Masoretic Hebrew and Greek Received Texts. In modern usage the terms are often used interchangeably, both declaring that God’s

written Word is wholly and completely true.

Inspired: The Greek is *theopneustos*, ‘breathed out from God’ (2 Timothy 3:16). Scripture is of Divine origin and authorship, the product of the Divine breath. Inspiration is ‘plenary’ (from the Latin, *plenus*, meaning ‘full’), which signifies that inspiration is complete and entire, so that the Scripture as a whole is the Word of God (‘all scripture’). Inspiration is also ‘verbal’ (from the Latin, *verbum*, meaning ‘word’), which signifies that the very words of Scripture are God-given, ensuring that His Truth has been correctly and properly communicated. ‘I...will put my words in his mouth’ (Deuteronomy 18:18; cf. 2 Samuel 23:1,2). ‘And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful’ (Revelation 21:5; cf. Jeremiah 30:2).

Majority Text: A text based on the majority of manuscript witnesses. *The Greek New Testament According to*

the Majority Text, edited by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad (1982), is a modern example of the Majority Text.

Although close to the Received Text, there are a number of differences and some of these are significant (e.g. John 7:53-8:11; Acts 8:36,37). Furthermore, as no detailed collation of all surviving manuscripts has taken place, the exact majority text cannot yet be determined; and even if one day that became possible, the resultant text could only be provisional and tentative, because the discovery of further manuscripts might change minority readings to majority readings, or vice versa. The doctrine of providential preservation, however, teaches that the Church *is*—and always has been—in possession of the true text of Scripture.

Manuscripts: Originally written on papyrus or vellum. The Greek manuscripts are divided into those known as Uncials, written in capital letters, and Minuscules or

Cursives, written in small, joined handwriting.

Masoretic: From the Hebrew, *masorah*, transmission. The Masoretes (Jewish scholars and scribes) were active from 500 AD (some think much earlier) to about 1000 AD and it was their purpose to hand on the Hebrew Text of the Old Testament as they had received it. One Masoretic text was edited by Jacob Ben Chayyim for the second rabbinic Bible published by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1524-25. This is the text underlying the Authorised Version.

Old Latin: The Old Latin translation was undertaken considerably before that of the Latin Vulgate so closely associated with Jerome (c. 342-420). The Old Testament was translated from the Septuagint, the New was one of the earliest translations of the Greek (quoted by Tertullian [d. c.220] and Cyprian [d. c.258]). It is available only in fragments today.

Providential

Preservation: See Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:8—‘The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic (Matthew 5:18)...’. As taught in Psalm 117:2 and Matthew 24:35 etc., God has preserved His Word through the ages. The professing people of God under the Old and New Testaments have been His instruments in its preservation (Psalm 147:19,20; Romans 3:2).

Thus the Hebrew Old Testament text used in the synagogues of our Lord’s time (and later preserved by the Masoretes) and the Greek New Testament text, acknowledged by the Greek Church throughout the Byzantine period [312-

1453 AD], and long after, and preserved in the overwhelming majority of existing Greek manuscripts, have historically been accepted by the people of God as the providentially preserved Scripture. The printed editions of the Greek text, commencing with Erasmus in 1516, although based on a relatively small group of available manuscripts, have been found faithfully to reflect the great majority of these manuscripts. Erasmus' first edition included, in a few cases, readings from the Latin Vulgate. This was largely due to the fact that some of the Greek manuscripts available to him were incomplete (e.g. his manuscript of Revelation was missing its last six verses). In Erasmus' fourth edition in 1527, however, he made use of the Complutensian Polyglot which contained an edition of the Greek text

based on a number of other Greek manuscripts and, in the light of the Complutensian, his Greek New Testament was thoroughly revised. However, a few readings taken from the Latin, for which there are now no extant Greek manuscripts, have always been included in the various printed editions of the Received Text.

Received Text: The Byzantine text was the text underlying the earliest printed editions of the New Testament. The various editions of the Received Text, or *Textus Receptus*, of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represented (with a few very minor differences) the Byzantine Text-type. Erasmus edited five editions of the New Testament text from 1516 to 1535, and others were produced by Estienne (the Latin form of his name is Stephanus), Beza, and

Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir. The phrase 'Received Text' comes from the Preface to Elzevir's second edition (1633). This title has been used over the centuries to classify all the printed editions of the Greek text of the same provenance.

Textus Receptus: See *Received Text*.

Translation: The rendering of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures in other languages which, when accurate, are to be received as the Word of God.

Approved and signed by the General Committee at its meeting held on 17th January, 2005, and including amendments approved by the General Committee at its meeting held on 21st November, 2005 (with amendment to section on 'Ancient Versions' April/May 2006).