

ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

By What Standard?



WILLIAM O. EINWECHTER

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Preface

ALITTLE over a century ago, the question of which is the best and most trustworthy English version of Holy Scripture did not even enter into the mind of the English-speaking Christian. At that time, there really was only one version in use, the Authorized (King James) Version. The Authorized Version had long since displaced the earlier English versions and was the recognized standard English Bible used and loved by nearly every English-speaking Christian in the world. The Authorized Version reigned unchallenged as the approved English version for nearly 300 years. During that period of time, the English-speaking church had many perplexing problems to consider, but one problem they did not have to deal with was the issue of which English version was the best and most faithful translation of Holy Scripture. Nor did the individual English-speaking believer have to wrestle with the decision of what version he should use.

How things have changed! Today the English-speaking church is confronted with a plethora¹ of versions with each claiming to be a “faithful” and “accurate” translation that makes the Word of God more “understandable” than previous versions. On top of this, a new translation seems to appear on the market every few years! For the thoughtful Christian, the situation regarding English Bible versions is troubling and perplexing. Further complicating the problem is the lack of clear guidance on the issue. There are many opinions on the subject, but very little scriptural analysis of the topic of Bible translation and of English versions.

The purpose of this book is to help fill this void by 1) setting forth the biblical doctrines that speak most directly to the issue of Bible translation and by 2) applying these doctrines to the subjects of translation philosophy, textual criticism, and English versions. By doing this, we hope to awaken the church to the theological issues that are at stake in the translation of the Bible into English and to provide the church with a biblical criterion for judging between the many English versions. Armed with the unchanging standard of God’s Word, the Christian will then be able to determine which English version is the best and most faithful representation of the Word of God in English.

¹ **plethora** – large or excessive amount or number.

This book is a concise presentation of the subject of English Bible translations: it does not pretend to be an exhaustive treatment. At the back of the book, a reading list provides the reader with a guide for more in-depth study of the topics and perspectives presented in this book. I have greatly profited from each of the books listed. I thank God for each author and for his contribution to my own understanding of the subject at hand.

Introduction

There are now at least eighteen major English versions of the Bible available² and well over sixty English translations of the New Testament.³ The question that faces the English-speaking church is this: Which of these many versions is the best (i.e., the most trustworthy)? Which English version of Holy Scripture should be considered the standard version?⁴ Which Bible should guide the English-speaking church as it seeks to apply the whole Bible to the whole of life? With the multiplicity of English versions, the inflated claims of the Bible publishers, and the widespread disagreement among Christians over which version is the best, a definitive answer to the question of which English ver-

² These versions are the Authorized (King James) Version (1611); the American Standard Version (1901); the Revised Standard Version (1952); the New American Standard Bible (1963); the Jerusalem Bible (1966); the New English Bible (1970); the New American Bible (1970); the Living Bible (1971); Today's English Version (1976); the New International Version (1978); the New King James Version (1982); the Revised English Bible (1989); the New Revised Standard Version (1990); the Contemporary English Version (1995); God's Word version (1995); the New Living Translation (1996); English Standard Version (2001); Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004).

³ David M. Scholer, *A Basic Bibliographic Guide for New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), p. 72. There have been many more NT translations into English since this count was made in 1973.

⁴ The ultimate and final standard is, of course, the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. The orthodox, Protestant view on the authority of the Hebrew and Greek text and the need for Bible translations is stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith: "The Old Testament in Hebrew (which, was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope." This confessional statement is reproduced verbatim in the London Baptist Confession of 1689 and in the Savoy Declaration (1658). This Reformed confession concerning the inspiration and authority of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, the providential care of God of those Scriptures, and the need for translations of the Word of God, is of utmost importance in the current debate over English Bible translations. Thus, those who hold that a translation of the Bible is of equal or even greater authority than the Hebrew and Greek texts are seriously mistaken and fully unorthodox in their views. The authority of a translation is based on its adherence to the original text.

sion is the most trustworthy may appear to be unattainable. Nevertheless, the question is of such far-reaching importance that it requires an answer.

However, some in the church believe that there is no such entity as “the best English version” and that even to ask the question of which is best is misguided. For example, Comfort states

...I am often asked, “Which translation is the best?” Invariably I respond, “Best for what? For reading? For studying? For memorizing? And best for whom? For young people? For adults? For Protestants? For Catholics? For Jews?” My responses are not intended to be complicated; rather, they reflect the complexity of the true situation. Whereas for some language populations, there is only one translation of the Bible, English-speaking people have hundreds of translations. Therefore, one cannot say there is *one* single *best* translation that is the most accurate. Accuracy of translation must be assessed in terms of the kind of translation being judged.⁵

Also, Kubo and Specht, after condemning the KJV as being “hopelessly out of date,” ask, “But if the KJV is abandoned, what version is to take its place? Perhaps no one version will be sufficient for today. This may well be an age when multiple versions are needed. If one asks, ‘Which version is best?’ we need to add the questions ‘Best for whom?’ and ‘Best for what?’”⁶ And Lewis contends that asking such questions as, “What version should I read?” or, “Are there doctrinal problems in this version or that?” are akin to asking, “What car shall I drive?”⁷ The choice of a version all depends, says Lewis, on what you want out of a translation and whether or not it meets your needs.⁸

Now, if choosing a Bible version is based solely on personal preference (like choosing a car to drive), and if there is no standard except man’s own autonomous⁹ reason for identifying the most trustworthy English version (and according to some, such a single best version does not exist), then perhaps it is better for us not to trouble ourselves any further on this matter. If Comfort, Lewis, Kubo, and Specht are right, let us simply encourage each Christian and each church to choose the version they like best; let them choose the English Bible that is right in their own eyes.

⁵ Philip W. Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1991), p. 89. Comfort himself suggests that a modern English Bible reader “would do well to use five or six translations” (ibid, p. 96).

⁶ Sakae Kubo and Walter F. Specht, *So Many Versions?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), p. 337.

⁷ Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible: From KJV to NIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 365.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ To be autonomous is to be independent in the exercise of authority; it is the right of self-government. Theologically speaking, man is autonomous when he exercises his mind and will independent of the authority of God and His Word. The autonomous man claims the authority of his own reason to be the arbiter of what is true and false, good and evil; the starting point of all of his thinking is that his own reason is the ultimate authority. Autonomy is the essence of man’s sin and rebellion against God. The Christian must reject the standard of autonomous man and bring his every thought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ and His Word. The ultimate faith commitment of every Christian must be to the absolute authority of God’s Word to interpret and define every aspect of life.

It is our conviction, however, that these men (and others who think like them) are seriously mistaken! We believe that the choice of which English version to use, like any other decision made by a Christian, is not a matter of personal preference, but a matter of personal obedience to scriptural principles. Let us not be deceived: God's Word gives clear guidance on the subject of Bible translations, and the Church must follow that guidance to the logical conclusion of determining the best and most faithful English version of the Bible. Nothing less than the integrity of revealed truth is at stake in this controversy. Casual acquiescence¹⁰ to a standard of personal preference in this debate is just as unacceptable as it is in the debate of moral issues, such as divorce, chastity, capital punishment, and abortion.

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate that there is an objective standard that will enable the church to cut through all the present confusion and uncertainty in regard to Bible translation and to determine which translation is the most faithful and reliable English version of Holy Scripture. Jesus Christ has not left His church without guidance in the crucial issue of Bible translation. In the first section of this book, we will establish the only proper standard for judging and evaluating English Bible translations. In the second and third parts of the book, we will apply this standard to the two primary issues of Bible translation. This procedure will enable us to decide which version is the most trustworthy English Bible. The question before us in this monograph is of great importance. The future of the English-speaking church demands our most diligent efforts to answer it.

1. The Standard for Judging English Bible Translations

How does the church go about determining the best and most faithful English translation of the Bible? By what standard can Christians evaluate the many different English versions? Should we use common sense and reason? Should we look to the sciences of linguistics, anthropology, hermeneutics,¹¹ or biblical criticism? Should ease of reading and comprehension be our standard? Or should the claims of Bible publishers and their colorful advertisements promoting particular versions be our light? Is there, after all, an objective standard that believers can use to judge among the many English versions? Is there an authoritative guide that will enable Christians to measure all the competing claims and come to a clear and definite decision on which version is best?

The Standard Defined

There *is* an authoritative standard for judging Bible translations, and this standard is the Word of God itself. God's Word provides the necessary doctrines and principles to guide Christians in their evaluation of English versions. As in any question facing the

¹⁰ **acquiescence** – consent.

¹¹ **hermeneutics** – the branch of theology that deals with the principles of Biblical interpretation.

church, we must go “to the law and to the testimony”; and if we do not, there will be “no light” in us (Isa 8:20). As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states:

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.

Surely, the issue of English Bible translation is a current controversy; and in this debate, the “supreme Judge” must be “the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.” Our rule must always be *sola Scriptura*! Therefore, the only authoritative criterion for judging and evaluating English translations of Scripture must be the biblical doctrines that bear directly on the issue of Bible translation. Or to state this necessity in other words, your standard for determining a faithful translation is either Biblical doctrine or it is something else; it is either Biblical truth or it is human reason. In the debate over which is the best English version, there is simply no place for any other standard than the revealed doctrines of Holy Scripture that directly relate to the theory and practice of Bible translation. Even in choosing which English version to use for personal study and public proclamation, the Christian should be “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2Co 10:5).

Several doctrines pertain to the issue of Bible translation; however, two major doctrines serve as the primary standards for assessing the quality and trustworthiness of the various English versions. These standards are the doctrine of the verbal-plenary inspiration of Scripture and the doctrine of the providential preservation of Scripture.

The Doctrine of Verbal-Plenary Inspiration

The Bible was not brought into being by the will of man nor was it produced like other books: the Bible is the product of divine inspiration. The doctrine of divine inspiration is that the Holy Spirit supernaturally guided the human authors of Scripture so that what they wrote was the very Word of God, free from all error and all omission. Packer says, “[I]nspiration is to be defined as a supernatural, providential influence of God’s Holy Spirit upon the human authors which caused them to write what He wished to be written for the communication of revealed truth to others.”¹² Hodge gives the orthodox view of the inspiration of Scripture: “On this subject the common doctrine of the church is, and ever has been, that inspiration was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of His mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God, that what they said God said.”¹³

¹² J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), p. 77.

¹³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint edition, 1981), 1:154

The doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Bible, which is taught throughout Scripture, is clearly set forth in the following Scriptures:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. (2Ti 3:16)

Knowing this first, that 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. (2Pe 1:20-21)

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. (1Co 14:37)

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (1Th 2:13)

These passages declare the divine origin and supernatural character of the Bible. The Apostles and Prophets did not write by their own will, but they wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; therefore, the Bible is the very Word of God. Calvin's comments on 2 Timothy 3:16 give an admirable summary of the Christian view of inspiration: "...[W]e know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being the organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare...the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit."¹⁴

The inspiration of the Bible reaches to every part of Scripture and to the very words of Scripture. The doctrine of the church is that inspiration is *verbal* (i.e., extends to the actual words), and it is *plenary* (i.e., extends to every word and to all parts). Every part and every word of the Bible is directly given by the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul teaches the verbal nature of inspiration when he says, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1Co 2:13). In this verse, Paul declares that he and the other Apostles speak the very words given to them by the Spirit of God.

The doctrine of *verbal-plenary inspiration* is denied by what is known as the *conceptual* or *dynamic* view of inspiration. This view of inspiration contends that God's revelation in Scripture is limited to the doctrines and concepts contained therein and does not extend to the actual words of the text. The proponents of this view claim that God only gave the writers of Scripture the thoughts and concepts He wanted to make known and then allowed the writers to express those ideas in whatever words they might choose.¹⁵

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint edition, 1989), pp. 248-249.

¹⁵ Pinnock gives expression to a conceptual view of inspiration when he states, "Inspiration should be seen as a dynamic work of God. In it God does not decide every word that is used, one by one, but works in the writers in such a way that they make full use of their own skills and vocabulary while giving expression to the divinely inspired message being communicated to them and through them." Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), p. 105; cf. also pp. 63-64.

Accordingly, the conceptual view teaches that the actual words used in the Bible are not essential to our faith: only the ideas or doctrines are necessary. Therefore, according to this view, men are bound only to what the Bible intends to teach and not to the words that the Apostles and Prophets actually used.

The conceptual (or dynamic) view of inspiration is surely in error. Aside from the obvious fact that thoughts and ideas must of necessity be communicated by the medium of words, the explicit claim of the authors of Scripture is that God has revealed His words to them. Jeremiah says, “Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth” (Jer 1:9). The Prophets did not claim that the *thoughts* of the Lord came unto them, but that the *word* of the Lord was given them. And as noted above, 1 Corinthians 2:13 clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit gave the Apostles the actual words that they were to write. Furthermore, the Scripture contains a warning against tampering with the words of Scripture (Deu 12:28, 32; Rev 22:18-19). It should also be noted that in the Bible, the entire argument in a passage is often based on a single word or even on a single letter (Mat 22:32; Gal 3:16). The conceptual view of inspiration is squarely at odds with these passages and cannot be defended from Scripture. It has been advanced to explain the human element in Scripture and what its proponents thought were errors in Scripture. It reduces the Bible to a book of inspired ideas communicated to us by uninspired words.

The doctrine of *verbal-plenary inspiration* is the first major standard for judging English Bible translations. It teaches that the words of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures were given by inspiration of God. It points to the fact that translators must focus on the word as the basic unit of translation since the word is the basic unit of inspiration. In the second section of this book, we will see that the doctrine of verbal inspiration is decisive in judging between the competing translation theories of dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence. A faithful and trustworthy English version of the Bible must be based on a theory and practice of translation that gives full weight to the doctrine of verbal inspiration—a doctrine that teaches us that every *word* of Scripture is important and to be handled with utmost care.

The Doctrine of Providential Preservation

Of equal importance in judging English versions is the doctrine of the divine, providential preservation of Scripture. This doctrine is expressed clearly in the *Westminster Confession* when it states that the inspired Hebrew and Greek Scriptures have been “by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages...” The doctrine of inspiration demands the corollary¹⁶ doctrine of divine preservation. Both of these doctrines are taught in Scripture, and both are essential to our faith. God not only inspired His Word, but He has also providentially preserved it so that His Word has not passed away, but has been kept in its essential purity throughout all generations. The relationship between inspiration and preservation is well stated by Edward Hills:

¹⁶ **corollary** – a practical consequence that follows naturally.

If the doctrine of the *divine inspiration* of the Old and New Testament Scriptures is a true doctrine, the doctrine of the *providential preservation* of the Scriptures must also be a true doctrine. It must be that down through the centuries, God has exercised a special, providential control over the copying of the Scriptures and the preservation and use of the copies, so that trustworthy representatives of the original text have been available to God's people in every age. God must have done this, for if He gave the Scriptures to His Church by inspiration as the perfect and final revelation of His will, then it is obvious that He would not allow this revelation to disappear or undergo any alteration of its fundamental character.¹⁷

Without God's providential preservation of the Scriptures, the doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration would be virtually meaningless; for apart from preservation, we could not be sure that we have the words of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures (which are the foundation of our faith and the basis of our English translations) in their essential purity after thousands of years of copying and transmission. What good is an originally inspired Bible if all that we now possess are corrupt and misleading editions of the Greek and Hebrew text? The doctrine of preservation removes these doubts; and with Owen, we are able to affirm that "the whole Word of God, in every letter and tittle, as given from Him by inspiration, is preserved without corruption."¹⁸

The fact that God, "by His singular care and providence," has kept His Word "pure in all ages" is clearly taught in the following Scriptures:

The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shall keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. (Psa 12:6-7)

For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. (Psa 119:89)

Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever. (Psa 119:160)

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. (Isa 40:8)

¹⁷ Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 4th ed. (Des Moines: The Christian Research Press, 1984), p. 2.

¹⁸ John Owen, *The Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, reprint ed., 1968), 16:301. Owen's statement does not deny the presence of variants in the existing manuscripts. Owen was fully aware of these, but said, "Where there is any variety it is always in things of less, indeed of no importance. God by his providence preserving the whole entire, suffered this lesser variety to fall out, in or among the copies we have, for the quickening and exercising of our diligence in our search into his Word" (ibid). Owen further stated, "We add, that *the whole Scripture*, entire as given out from God, without any loss, is preserved in the *copies of the originals* yet remaining...In them all, we say, is every letter and tittle of the word. These copies, we say, are the rule, standard, and touchstone of all translations, ancient or modern, by which they are in all things to be examined, tried, corrected, amended; and themselves only by themselves." John Owen, *Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 16:357.

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. (Mat 5:18)

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. (Mat 24:35)

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. (1Pe 1:23-25)

The doctrine set forth in these Scriptures brings great assurance to us that God has kept the original Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture in their essential purity down through history. By faith we know that God has preserved His Word for us in the existing manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, which are the basis for our English Bibles. As Turretin says, the chief reason we believe in the integrity of the Scriptures and the purity of the original sources “is the providence of God (Who as He wished to provide for our faith by inspiring the sacred writers as to what they should write, and by preserving the Scriptures against the attempts of enemies who have left nothing untried that they might destroy them), so He should keep them pure and uncorrupted in order that our faith might always have a firm foundation.”¹⁹

The doctrine of the *providential preservation* of the Scriptures is the second major standard for judging English Bible translations. And it is a very important standard, for it enables us to determine the proper Hebrew and Greek texts that ought to form the basis for our translations. A faithful and trustworthy English version of the Bible must rest upon editions of the original Hebrew and Greek texts that are determined in full accord with the doctrine of providential preservation. In the third section of this book, we will apply this standard to the current controversy over which is the “best” original text: the modern critical texts or the traditional texts of Holy Scripture.

The use of the doctrinal standards of *verbal inspiration* and of *providential preservation* will enable the church to recognize those translations that are to be considered trustworthy. These standards will make it possible for us to cut through all of the present confusion concerning Bible versions and to get to the heart of the issue. Having,

¹⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans George M. Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1992), 1:72. For Turretin, the presence of variants in the extant manuscripts does not in any way nullify the doctrine of providential preservation. He says: “Although we give to the Scriptures absolute integrity, we do not therefore think that the copyists and printers were inspired (*theopneustous*), but only that the providence of God watched over the copying of the sacred books, so that although many errors might have crept in, it has not so happened (or they have not so crept into the manuscripts) but that they can be easily corrected by a collation of others (or with the Scriptures themselves). Therefore the foundation of the purity and integrity of the sources is not placed in the freedom from fault (*anamartesia*) of men, but in the providence of God which (however men employed in transcribing the sacred books might possibly mingle various errors) always diligently took care to correct them, or that they might be corrected easily either from a comparison with Scripture itself or from more approved manuscripts. It was not necessary therefore to render all the scribes infallible, but only so to direct them that the true reading may always be found out. This book far surpasses all others in purity” (ibid, 1:72-73).

therefore, laid the doctrinal foundation for evaluating English translations of the Scriptures, let us now apply these doctrinal standards to the two most important factors that go into making a translation of the Bible into English.

2. The Standard for Judging English Bible Translations Applied, Part One: Translation Philosophy

The debate over which is the best English version ultimately revolves around the two primary elements that are necessary to produce a translation of the Bible. The first element is that of translation philosophy, and the second is that of the underlying Greek and Hebrew texts. These two components provide the basis for all English translations of Holy Scripture. The purpose of this chapter and the next is to examine the different views of translation theory and textual criticism (i.e., the method of establishing the true original text) and to determine which views are in accord with the doctrinal standards of verbal inspiration and providential preservation. If a translation is based on a theologically sound philosophy of translation and a Hebrew and Greek text that is established according to sound theological principles, and if the work is carried out with competence, then it follows that such a translation ought to be a trustworthy representation of the authentic Word of God.²⁰

Translation Philosophies

In the final analysis, there are really only two approaches to the issue of translation theory; that is, there are fundamentally only two philosophies of translation. The difference between the two is not simply a difference of degree, but rather an essential difference of *kind*.²¹ These two differing philosophies have been referred to by various descriptive labels: literal vs. para-phrase; word-for-word vs. thought-for-thought; form-oriented vs. content-oriented; formal equivalence vs. dynamic equivalence. For the purposes of this study we will refer to these differing approaches to translation as the **formal equivalence** method (henceforth, FE) and the **dynamic equivalence** method (hence-

²⁰ Turretin says, "An authentic writing is one in which all things are abundantly sufficient to inspire confidence; one to which the fullest credit is due in its own kind; one of which we can be entirely sure that it has proceeded from the author whose name it bears; one in which everything is written just as he himself wished." *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:113. Turretin states that only the autographs of the biblical authors and the faithful and accurate copies of the originals are fully authentic. Ibid, 1:113, 125-126. However, an English version of the Bible is also the true Word of God to the degree that it faithfully conforms to what the inspired Prophets and Apostles actually wrote. Therefore, we say that a translation of the Bible is God's authoritative and infallible Word to the extent that it faithfully and accurately reproduces what God said (revealed) when He gave His Word in the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. To the degree that a translation adds to or takes away from the inspired Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, to that degree it is not the Word of God.

²¹ Eugene H. Glassman, *The Translation Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), p. 47.

forth, DE).²² It is important that we understand that the difference in translation philosophy is not simply of academic interest to translators. Since FE and DE represent divergent approaches to translation, they produce noticeably different versions of the Bible in English; divergent philosophies (presuppositions) lead to different results. A reader of the Bible in English will use a Bible that was translated according to FE or DE. Therefore, Christians cannot be neutral on the issue of translation philosophy, for it affects their personal access to the true Word of God in English.

The Formal Equivalent Translation

A FE translation seeks to be a literal translation; that is, it seeks to be as literal as possible. The meaning of the word *literal* will therefore assist us in understanding the philosophy of FE. *Literal* comes from the Latin word *litera*, which means “letter.” A literal translation is concerned with the very letters (i.e., the actual words formed by the letters) that are to be translated, and seeks to follow and represent in translation the exact words of the original text. Therefore, in the FE method, the basic unit of translation is the word; accordingly, FE is a word-for-word translation. This means that FE seeks to translate each Hebrew and Greek word into its closest English equivalent. In FE translations, the translator attempts to parallel as closely as possible the wording and grammatical structure of the original Hebrew and Greek; he seeks to render nouns by nouns, verbs by verbs, etc. Martin gives the following explanation of the FE method of translation:

With this philosophical orientation, the translator is concerned that the elements of the finished translation match as closely as possible the elements of the original text. He is concerned that paragraph corresponds to paragraph, sentence to sentence, clause to clause, phrase to phrase, and word to word. The formal equivalence philosophy or method of translating attempts to say ‘what’ the original text says by retaining ‘how’ it says it (as far as English grammar allows). Although clear English expression does not always allow the formal equivalence translator to do so, he tries not to adjust the idioms which the original writer used; rather he attempts to render them more or less literally...²³

As Martin points out, FE is not only concerned with *what* God said in the original, but also with *how* He said it. This is because the form of the text is part of the transfer of meaning.²⁴

Therefore, a FE translation puts its greatest emphasis on the grammatical and literary form of the original Hebrew and Greek and seeks to make the English conform as closely as possible to the original. This commitment to the form of the Hebrew and

²² It should be noted that the application of each method varies from translation to translation. For example, both the TEV and the NIV are based on the DE method; yet it is clear that the TEV is more paraphrastic [that is, altered by saying the same thing using different words] than the NIV. Also, every version would have some elements of FE and DE. Nevertheless, each version is based on a definite translation philosophy of either FE or DE.

²³ Robert P. Martin, *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), p. 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Greek is due to the fact, as van Bruggen explains, “The Bible was composed in certain forms. Some passages were written in the form of prophecies, some songs, some letters, some narratives. There are also various forms within the smaller language units of Scripture: paragraphs, sentences, dependent and independent clauses, and prepositional phrases. By faithfulness to form it is meant that a reliable translation must render these forms as close to the way they are in the original as possible.”²⁵ Without such faithfulness to form, the message of Scripture can be weakened or even lost.²⁶ Because of its commitment to the form of the biblical text, a FE translation is, in essence, “biblical English.”

All translation involves some degree of interpretation. However, in the FE method, the element of interpretation is deliberately kept to a minimum. In FE, the role of the translator is not that of “an exegete who is interpreting the Bible for the church.”²⁷ Rather, “The proper role of the translator is to give the church an accurate translation upon which it may do exegesis.”²⁸ The FE view on interpretation and translation is well stated by Thomas:

In any work that is precisely called a translation, interpretation should be kept to a minimum. Otherwise, the role of the expositor is usurped, and the work becomes a commentary on the meaning of the text, not a translation into the closest equivalent of the receptor language... Commentaries are much needed, but it is a mistake to assume that a translation can function in that role without ceasing to be a translation... It is not the translator's job to mediate between God's Word and modern culture as the commentator and the expositor does.²⁹

It is important to understand that the FE method of translation does not advocate an absolutely literal translation, for there are elements of Hebrew and Greek that have no formal equivalent in English. A strictly literal translation would be, at times, nearly unintelligible to English readers. Therefore, those committed to FE in translation do not believe that the translator is always bound to the form, but only that the translator

²⁵ Jakob van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1978), pp. 99-100.

²⁶ van Bruggen explains the importance of form to meaning: “For example, Paul sometimes wrote very long sentences. He did not always do so, but when he did, he had a reason. In such sentences are described the riches of the Christian faith. These truths sometimes require an exalted form of expression and this is reflected in Paul's long sentences, which contain language that is solemn or hymnal. These long sentences, though difficult, contain many nuances of meaning that could be expressed in no other way. Therefore, the translator must strive to reproduce them as closely as possible. When such sentences are split up into short sentences, some of the meaning is lost.” Ibid., pp. 100-101. van Bruggen further says, “*Form* is a matter of the author's composition, his linguistic *usage*, and even his *style*. The long sentence is not a requirement of the Greek language; Greek allows both short and long sentences. Neither is the long sentence a stylistic cliché, which in Paul's case would be determined by the literary taste of his day. It is striking that Paul was not at all tied to long sentences, but at one time made them very short and at another very long. He chose his words and composed his forms according to the requirements of the meaning of his text” (ibid., pp. 103-104).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 106.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Robert L. Thomas, “Bible Translations: The Link between Exegesis and Expository Preaching,” *The Master's Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1990), p. 72.

should always make a “serious attempt to retain the form as much as possible.”³⁰ A FE translation strives to be as literal as possible.

The primary examples of English FE translations are the Authorized Version, the American Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the New King James Version.

The Dynamic Equivalent Translation

A DE translation does not seek to be a literal translation of the original text of Scripture. In DE, the primary concern of the translator, regarding the modern reader, is to convey the *meaning* of the original rather than to transfer the *words* of the original. According to the presuppositions of this method, the “dynamic” is in the meaning of the text and not in the words or grammatical form of the text. In fact, the form is not only seen as secondary, it is often regarded as a serious barrier to communication. Therefore, in DE, the focus of the translator is on the *intent* of the biblical writer and not on the *form* of the biblical text. DE is a content-oriented translation rather than a form-oriented translation. The basic unit to be translated is not the word but the thought; accordingly, DE is a thought-for-thought translation.

The goal of DE is not to give the modern reader a text that reproduces the form of the original text; rather the aim is to produce a response to the text in the modern reader equivalent to the reaction of the original hearers to the same text. Glassman explains the DE method:

What it means is that one tries to produce in the reader or hearer in the receptor language the same reaction to the message that the original author sought to produce in the immediate readers or listeners. It assumes that the original message was natural and meaningful and that the grammatical structure and words used were not discouragingly difficult but that people used them in their everyday lives.³¹

Since the goal is equivalence of response, the DE translator must give his primary emphasis in translation to the form of modern English. The translator is under no obligation to retain the form of the original Hebrew and Greek because such forms will sound strange and unnatural to modern man. According to the DE method, the English Bible must be in language that will communicate the meaning of Scripture in an easy and natural way. Therefore, the Bible should be translated into the everyday language of the common people.³²

³⁰ van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, p. 104.

³¹ Glassman, *The Translation Debate*, p. 52. Glassman explains the DE view on what constitutes a “faithful translation” by citing Beekman and Callow: “A translation which transfers the meaning and the dynamics of the original text is to be regarded as a faithful translation. The expression, *transfers the meaning*, means that the translation conveys to the reader or hearer the information that the original conveyed to its readers or hearers” (ibid, pp. 57-58).

³² Glassman contends that Bible versions should not be “in ambiguous, misleading, obscure, meaningless, or unnatural terms—in other words, in jargon seemingly known only to the church and to God. People read each other’s letters, their daily newspaper, or the latest paperback in the language of dai-

The heart of the DE method of translating is the process of analysis, transfer, and restructuring.³³ It is by this procedure that the translator is able to convey the meaning of the original Greek and Hebrew to modern man. To achieve a DE translation, the translator must first *analyze* or interpret the original text to determine what the words meant to those who first heard them. The translator must know the proper interpretation of the text before he can translate it.³⁴ Next, the translator has to *transfer* the meaning to today's readers. *Transfer* is a subjective process that takes place in the mind of the translator as he struggles to bridge the gap between the language and culture of the biblical text and the language and culture of the modern English reader.³⁵ The translator must decide on the best way to state the meaning of the original so that it will readily communicate to contemporary readers. Finally, the translator must *restructure*, in his translation, the form of the original so that he "will naturally transfer the whole content of the message to his readers."³⁶

This three-fold process of analysis, transfer, and restructuring is clearly expressed in the preface of the Today's English Version of the American Bible Society:

The primary concern of the translators has been to provide a faithful translation of the meaning of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. Their first task was to understand correctly the meaning of the original...After ascertaining as accurately as possible the meaning of the original, the translators' next task was to express that meaning in a manner and form easily understood by the readers...Every effort has been made to use language that is natural, clear, simple, and unambiguous. Consequently, there has been no attempt to reproduce in English the parts of speech, sentence structure, word order, and grammatical devices of the original languages.

The very same process of DE is evident in the translation philosophy of the New International Version.³⁷ Goddard, who served on the NIV Committee of Bible Translation, explains this philosophy as it was set down in the NIV Translators' Manual:

The translators will seek to communicate to their readers what the inspired Word was intended by God to communicate to those who read or heard it as originally given—no more and no less. They will approach a passage with this question: "What was the writer saying in his language to the people of his day?" They will then say, "How do we express the same

ly life. Why should they not have God's Word available to them in a language they can understand and respond to?" Ibid, pp. 116-117.

³³ Ibid, p. 52.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 59-60.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

³⁶ Barclay Newman, Jr., "The Old Way and the New Way," *The Bible Translator*, 28 (April 1977), p. 206. As cited by Glassman, *The Translation Debate*, p. 64.

³⁷ The Translators' Preface to the New International Version states, "The first concern of the translators has been accuracy of translation and its fidelity to the thought of the biblical writers. They have weighed the significance of the lexical and grammatical details of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. At the same time, they have striven for more than a word-for-word translation. Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the Bible demands frequent modification in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meaning of words."

meaning in our language today?” Sometimes equivalent words and the same sentence structure will suffice; at other times, they will prove inadequate. The translators, then, will not be tied to words but to meaning.³⁸

In essence, this DE method of analysis, transfer, and restructuring is a “scientific paraphrase” of the biblical text.³⁹

It should be evident that the translation process of DE requires the translator to be much more than one who simply seeks to transfer the words of Scripture into their closest English equivalent. In this method, the translator must become an interpreter who transfers the meaning of Scripture to his readers. In DE, the translator assumes the role of an exegete and expositor.

The primary examples of DE translations are the New English Bible, Today’s English Version (or the Good News Bible), the New International Version, the Jerusalem Bible, the Contemporary English Version, and the New Living Translation.

Verbal Inspiration and Translation Philosophy

The FE and DE philosophies present two very different approaches to the task of translation; thus, they produce two very different types of English Bibles. FE makes the word the basic unit of translation, while DE makes the thought the basic unit of translation. FE seeks to retain the grammatical form of the original, while DE is more than willing to set this form aside in favor of the form of contemporary English. FE is concerned to keep interpretation to a minimum, while DE makes interpretation the center of its method.

How are we to judge between these two philosophies of translation? The only proper standard by which to judge between them is the Word of God; specifically, the doctrine of verbal inspiration, for this doctrine bears directly on the issue of translation theory. Since the very *words* of Scripture have been inspired by God—not just the ideas or concepts of Scripture—it follows that this fact of verbal inspiration should be reflected in translation philosophy. If the word is the basic unit of inspiration, should not the word be the basic unit of translation? If God has been pleased to give to men His inspired words in the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, should not the translator strive to transfer as closely as possible those very words into English?

It is therefore evident that the FE method, which gives priority to translating the words and grammatical forms of Scripture into their nearest English equivalents, is in definite harmony with the doctrine of verbal inspiration.⁴⁰ While on the other hand, it is

³⁸ Burton L. Goddard, *The NIV Story* (New York: Vantage Press, 1989), pp. 38-39 (emphasis added).

³⁹ Martin states, “Frequent paraphrase is a mark of dynamic equivalence translation. Indeed, Price refers to the dynamic equivalence method as ‘scientific paraphrase.’ ” *Accuracy of Translation*, pp. 62-63. Martin has identified seven characteristics of a DE translation: the elimination of complex grammatical structures; the addition of words in translation; the omission of words in translation; the erosion of the Bible’s technical terminology; the leveling of cultural distinctions; the presentation of the interpretation of Scripture as Scripture; and the paraphrasing of the biblical text (*ibid.*, pp. 18-67).

⁴⁰ Thomas observes, “There is little doubt that the assured conviction that the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek autographs of the Bible are inspired, lies behind the dominance of formal-equivalence transla-

apparent that the DE method, which focuses on transferring only the meaning or thought of the original, implicitly denies (at least in practice) the importance of verbal inspiration and is really more consistent with the heretical view of conceptual inspiration.⁴¹

In order for the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Bible to be properly acknowledged in the work of translation, the primary unit of translation must be the word, not just the idea. Any method of translation that departs from that commitment is in serious conflict with the doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration...Plainly speaking, the formal equivalence method of translation is philosophically committed to regarding and guarding the individual words of the original text as the primary units of translation; the dynamic equivalence method is not.⁴²

If the philosophy of DE is not grounded on the doctrine of verbal inspiration, then what is it based on? According to van Bruggen, the theory of DE “is related to a view of God, man, and the world closely associated with modern philosophy and the sciences based upon it.”⁴³ And further, he states, that the DE “translation theory owes its influence and effect to the blending of modern theological prejudices regarding the Bible with data borrowed from communication theory, cultural anthropology, and modern sociology...”⁴⁴ Therefore, the theory and practice of DE is built upon the sands of conceptual inspiration and modern and often humanistic science and philosophy, while FE has a firm foundation in the biblical doctrine of verbal inspiration.

Consequently, when we apply the doctrine of verbal inspiration to the issue of translation philosophy, we come to the clear and definite conclusion that the only trustworthy versions of the Bible in English are those that are translated according to the practice of FE. Because DE is not based on sound scriptural principles and presuppositions, its practice in Bible translation leads to grave and serious consequences. On the one hand, it presents a translation that is really more of an interpretation; thus, it often

tions throughout the centuries of Christianity...The theological motive behind this type of translation is obvious.” Robert L. Thomas, “Dynamic Equivalence: A Method of Translation or a System of Hermeneutics?” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 1 (Fall 1990), pp. 169-170. Martin explains how the doctrine of verbal inspiration calls for FE in translation: “The fact that the Bible teaches a doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration must influence the work of the translator. An inspiration that extends to the divine choice of the words can only imply that God is concerned with much more than general ideas. It is clear that God intends that we understand Him exactly. The translator must keep in mind that he is dealing with truth exactly expressed. His job, therefore, is to express the same truth as exactly as possible in the language of his people, to express in the most precise form possible the same message in the vocabulary and grammatical forms of the target language.” *Accuracy of Translation*, pp. 14-15.

⁴¹ Martin states, “The tendency to de-emphasize or even to deny altogether verbal-plenary inspiration has an affinity to the dynamic equivalence method of translation, for the method itself elevates the primacy of ideas over the primacy of the exact words of the original text.” *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

⁴³ van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, p. 78.

⁴⁴ van Bruggen, *ibid.*, p. 151. van Bruggen’s book provides an excellent and incisive theological critique of the DE method of translation. See especially pp. 67-96, 99-110, 151-168. For the affinity of DE with modern theories of language and hermeneutics, see Thomas, “Dynamic Equivalence: A Method of Translation or a System of Hermeneutics?”

distorts God's Word and frequently leaves the English reader with the word of man because the DE translator has wrongly interpreted the meaning of the original Hebrew or Greek. When a DE translator errs in his analysis of the text, he does not transfer God's inspired Word to his readers, but only his own flawed understanding of the text.⁴⁵ Edgar explains this serious defect of DE translations:

The basic problem with such an approach to translation is that the reader is handed over, bound hand and foot, to the translator's interpretation without even a hint that it is merely the translator's interpretation. He thinks he is reading a translation of God's Word, when actually he is only reading what the translator thinks God meant, stated in the way the translator prefers...There are numerous verses which are capable of differing interpretations. The reader, unless he can read Greek and Hebrew, does not know in a given verse whether he is reading a translation of God's Word or the translator's commentary. If he can read Greek or Hebrew, however, he does not need a "dynamic equivalent" translation. If he cannot read Greek and Hebrew, he cannot really trust a dynamic equivalent translation for any serious Bible study since he has no way to differentiate God's Word from the translator's commentary.⁴⁶

On the other hand, DE seriously undermines the church's doctrine of verbal inspiration. DE in the church's Bible translations is the first step to the heresy of conceptual (or dynamic) inspiration in the church's doctrine. Will the crucial doctrine of verbal inspiration survive in a church that promotes a translation that in practice denies it? As Martin warns, "Where the dynamic method of translation is embraced, it is but one small step to the embracing the dynamic view of inspiration as well."⁴⁷

It is imperative that the church vigorously defends and proclaims the doctrine of verbal inspiration in its preaching and creeds; but this in itself is not enough. The church must also see the connection between its theology of inspiration and its philosophy of translation, lest it undermine the former by the latter. This is exactly what happens when an orthodox confessing church promotes the use of DE translations: its orthodox creed says "verbal inspiration," while its DE translation implies "dynamic inspiration." Therefore, the church must not only preach the doctrine of verbal inspiration, it must also teach how this doctrine commends the translation philosophy of FE, and then it must promote this doctrine by the public use of FE translations of Scripture.

The standard of verbal inspiration settles the debate over translation philosophy. It clears the fog, scatters the claims of Bible publishers, and puts to rest all appeals based on personal preference or ease of comprehension. The doctrine of verbal inspiration calls for the use of an English version that has been translated according to the philosophy of FE. A wise Christian and an obedient church will hear and act accordingly.

⁴⁵ Since all translation involves at least some interpretation, a FE translation may possibly at times also distort God's Word. But since FE endeavors to keep interpretation to a minimum, this danger is much less than in a DE translation that makes interpretation the core of its method.

⁴⁶ Thomas Edgar, "The Word of God or Merely Equivalent?" *Reflections* 5 (Fall 1983), p. 4.

⁴⁷ Martin, *Accuracy of Translation*, p. 69.

3. The Standard for Judging English Bible Translations Applied, Part Two: Textual Criticism

Textual criticism is the discipline of establishing the true wording of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Textual criticism is necessary because we no longer possess the original autographs of the books of the Bible. What we do possess are hand-written *copies* of the original manuscripts (apographs).⁴⁸ The task of textual criticism is to determine the true reading of the original text from these existing copies. The importance of textual criticism to Bible translation is obvious: if a translation is to be a faithful and trustworthy one, it must be based on an original text that accurately represents what the inspired authors of Scripture actually wrote. A translator who works from inferior Hebrew and Greek texts, regardless of his skill, can only produce an inferior translation.

At present, there is yet an essential and widespread agreement on the basic text of the Hebrew Old Testament (henceforth OT). Most would agree to the fact that the Masoretic text represents the true OT text.⁴⁹ However, there is a serious difference over what constitutes the true text of the New Testament (henceforth NT). There are basically two approaches to the task of NT textual criticism, and this has resulted in there being essentially two different printed texts of the NT. The one printed text is the modern critical text (hereafter MCT), which is currently represented in the United Bible Societies 4th edition of *The Greek New Testament*, and the Nestle-Aland 27th edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece*.⁵⁰ The other printed text represents the traditional NT text, and it is called the *Textus Receptus* (hereafter TR), or the “Received Text.”⁵¹ The differences between these printed texts are, in places, substantial and serious.⁵²

⁴⁸ There are currently over five thousand Greek manuscripts that preserve either a part or the whole NT text. In addition to these witnesses, we also have the testimony of the ancient versions of the NT and the citations of the NT by the church fathers. The NT is, by far, the best-attested book of the ancient world.

⁴⁹ All major English versions have been based on a Hebrew text that is essentially the Masoretic text. However, there has been an increasing tendency in some recent versions to depart, in places, from this text.

⁵⁰ The text of these editions of the MCT is the same text as is printed in the UBS 3rd edition and the N-A 26th edition. Only the textual apparatus has been revised.

⁵¹ There are also two other printed texts of the Greek NT available today, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, ed. Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, 2nd Edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), and *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform*, ed. Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont (Southborough, MA: Chilton Book Publishing, 2005). The edition of Hodges and Farstad and the edition of Robinson and Pierpont are, like the TR, based on the traditional Byzantine text, and thus all three present essentially the same text. However, there are some differences between them. *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* and *The New Testament in the Original Greek* both claim to follow the text represented in the majority of the Greek manuscripts of the Byzantine text, while the TR is an edition of the Byzantine text that does not always follow the majority reading of this text-type. For a discussion of the differences between *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* and the TR and the apparent motivation behind the publishing of the text by its editors, see Theodore Letis, “Introduction,” *The Majority*

Therefore, since there is a difference in the printed texts of the NT, and since our English translations of the NT are based on either the TR or the MCT, it is essential that we establish which text is the best and most trustworthy edition of the Greek NT. If the MCT text is the best representation of the original autographs, then those versions that are translated from the MCT should be considered superior to those translated from the TR. However, if the reverse is the case, then those versions translated from the TR must be regarded as the best representatives of the Word of God in English.⁵³ In the following portion of this book, we will take a brief look at the TR and MCT, and then apply the doctrinal standard of providential preservation so that we might judge between them.

The Textus Receptus

The TR is a printed edition of what is known as the Byzantine text. The name “Byzantine” is applied to this text because it is the text-type found in the family of NT Greek manuscripts that were used, transmitted, and preserved by the eastern Greek-speaking church. Because it was handed down and preserved by the church, it is also referred to as the “traditional text” or the “ecclesiastical text.” This text was in continuous use in the Greek Church from at least the 4th century until the time of the Reformation when Erasmus made this text the basis for the first printed edition of the Greek NT.

The TR represents the text-type that is found in the vast majority of the extant⁵⁴ Greek manuscripts (approximately 85-90% contain this text-type), and this is why it is often referred to as the Majority Text. Most of the Byzantine manuscripts are of a relatively late date (9th-14th centuries). However, a few facts need to be noted regarding this. First, the fact that the Byzantine manuscripts are of a late date says nothing in itself concerning the age of the text in these manuscripts. As van Bruggen explains, “One of the first things a student must learn regarding the textual history is the distinction between the age of the *manuscript* and the age of the *text* offered in that manuscript. A rather young manuscript can give a very old type of text.”⁵⁵ Therefore, “The fact that this text-form is known to us via later manuscripts is as such no proof for a late text-type...”⁵⁶

Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate, ed. Theodore P. Letis (Grand Rapids: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987), pp. 1-24.

⁵² Although many of the variants between the TR and MCT are not substantial and do not affect the sense of the text, there are some variants that are quite serious. In a helpful booklet by G. W. and D. E. Anderson, the authors compile a list of 575 important differences between the MCT and the TR that affect our English versions and their translation. Their list of variants is not complete, being limited to the most serious. G. W. Anderson and D. E. Anderson, *A Textual Key to the New Testament* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1992).

⁵³ Provided the Greek text is translated according to the FE method!

⁵⁴ **extant** – still in existence; surviving.

⁵⁵ Jacob van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament* (Winnipeg: Premier Printing, Ltd., 1976), p. 22.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24. van Bruggen provides an important discussion concerning the “Age of the Byzantine Type,” pp. 22-29, and concludes by saying, “*Summarizing* we must conclude that the codicology [the study of manuscripts] and the history of text-corruption and text-preservation plead in favour of the antiquity of the so-called Byzantine text-type; that the absence of this type in the more ancient ma-

Secondly, even the strongest critics of the Byzantine text believe that the age of this text-type goes back to the end of the 3rd or the beginning of the 4th century.⁵⁷ Thirdly, it has been demonstrated that many of the distinct readings of the Byzantine text, which were at one time considered to be evidence for the lateness of this text-type, are attested to in the papyri manuscripts of the 2nd and 3rd century.⁵⁸

The Byzantine text-type was the first Greek text to appear in a printed edition. Erasmus, using manuscripts of the Byzantine textual family, edited and published his Greek NT in 1516. Between 1519 and 1535, Erasmus published four more editions of the Greek NT. After him, Robert Stephanus published four editions of the Greek NT (1546-1551). The text of these editions was essentially the same as that of Erasmus. Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin, produced ten editions of the Greek NT during his lifetime (1519-1605). Beza's editions agreed closely with those of Erasmus and Stephanus. In 1633, the Elzevir brothers published their second edition of the Greek NT. The text basically followed that of Beza's editions, and it was in the preface of this edition that the phrase *Textus Receptus* was first applied to the printed form of the Byzantine text. The Elzevir brothers told their readers, "You have therefore the text now received by all: in which we give nothing altered or corrupt." Therefore, the TR is that printed text of the Byzantine text-type that is based on the editorial labors of Erasmus, Stephanus, and Beza.⁵⁹ The TR came to be recognized by all "Protestants" as the authentic NT text. The differences between the various editions of the TR are "very minor."⁶⁰ Therefore, the TR is a long-established text that is based on the text-type contained in the great majority of the manuscripts. The traditional text of the Greek NT as embodied in the TR is a very stable text; it is a "consensus text that has served as the Protestant canonical standard."⁶¹

The importance of the TR to the English-speaking church is that the TR formed the basis of the most widely used and influential English version ever: namely, the Authorized (King James) Version of 1611.⁶² All English versions from 1881 onward have reject-

juscles [a form of writing found in Greek and Latin manuscripts of the 3rd to the 9th century, using capital letters] and in the writings of some Egyptian Church Fathers before Nicea cannot be used as argument against this antiquity" (ibid, p. 29).

⁵⁷ Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 50-51. They refer to the Byzantine text as the Koine text.

⁵⁸ See Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), pp. 55-69. See also van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament*, pp. 27-28.

⁵⁹ For a survey of this history of the TR, see Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, pp. 193-208.

⁶⁰ Hills, ibid. p. 222. This is because there is a "high degree of uniformity which characterizes the Byzantine text (with frequent 100% agreement among manuscripts!)" Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 331.

⁶¹ Letis, *The Majority Text*, p. 17.

⁶² The NT text of the Authorized Version is based on the editions of Beza, particularly the 1598 edition, and the two final editions of Stephanus. The Trinitarian Bible Society has published this edition of the TR, *The New Testament: The Greek Text Underlying the English Authorised Version of 1611, which corresponds to the New Testament in the original Greek according to the text followed in the Authorised Version*, edited by F. H. A. Scrivener (Cambridge, 1894).

ed the TR and have been translated from some edition of the MCT. The only exception to this is the New King James Version, which is based on the TR.⁶³

The Modern Critical Text

The MCT represents a printed Greek text that is the result of the work of textual scholars reaching from Griesbach (1775) to Nestle-Aland (1979). The MCT is an eclectic⁶⁴ text; this means that it is a text that has been determined by scholars who employ certain “canons” (rules) of textual criticism⁶⁵ on a variant-by-variant basis to decide on which reading among the available witnesses is to be considered the true reading of the NT text.⁶⁶ Therefore, the work of the textual critic is central in determining the MCT. It is through the skill of the textual scholar in weighing the internal and external evidence that the text of the NT is established. Consequently, the current printed form of the MCT (the UBS 4th ed. [UBS4] and the Nestle-Aland 27th ed. [NA27]) was decided by a committee of five textual scholars.⁶⁷

The MCT, being an eclectic text, is not actually the text of any one textual tradition or family; rather, it combines in one *new* text readings that were originally found in the extant manuscripts of various text-types. Nevertheless, the textual critics who have determined the MCT give the greatest weight to the readings found in the Alexandrian family of manuscripts. These Alexandrian texts are early manuscripts (2nd-4th centuries) that were discovered within the last two hundred years. Textual scholars hailed their discovery as a return to a much closer form of the original NT text than the one preserved in the Byzantine text. Consequently, the traditional NT text (the TR), which had been in

⁶³ However, the true sympathies of the editors of the NKJV seem to be with *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, ed. by Hodges and Farstad. In the Preface to the NKJV the editors state: “A newer group of New Testament scholars are persuaded that the best guide to a precise Greek text is the close consensus of the majority of Greek manuscripts. The Greek text obtained by using this rule is called the Majority Text, which is similar to the Received Text. At important places where the Majority Text or the Alexandrian Text differs from the Received Text, the variants are recorded in footnotes.” It is significant to note that both the NKJV and the Majority Text are published by Thomas Nelson.

⁶⁴ **eclectic** – an approach to textual criticism that attempts to identify the original biblical text not by looking to any one manuscript or text-type, but by examining all the available variants and deciding among them.

⁶⁵ The basic canons of modern textual criticism are as follows: 1) the external evidence of the manuscripts is to be “weighed” (i.e., according to age and text-type) and not simply counted; 2) the shorter reading is to be preferred; 3) the more difficult reading is to be preferred; 4) the reading which best explains the other readings is to be preferred; 5) the reading which is most characteristic of the author is to be preferred. A moment’s reflection will be enough to indicate the highly *subjective* nature of these canons of criticism.

⁶⁶ For an enlightening look at the methods used by modern critics to establish the MCT of the NT see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1970).

⁶⁷ While the text of the MCT was established by a committee of scholars who often had to rely on a majority vote to determine the text, the text of the TR was established by the tradition and usage of the church.

constant use in the church for over a thousand years, was condemned as being a corrupt and secondary form of the text of the NT.⁶⁸ Due to this nearly total rejection of the value of the Byzantine text as a witness to the original autographs, the scholars have established the MCT on the basis of only 10-15% of the available manuscripts. Yet they justify this potentially embarrassing fact by claiming that they are using the “oldest and best” manuscripts.⁶⁹

Since the MCT is a text produced by textual critics employing an eclectic method, the text of the MCT is fluid and always open to change.⁷⁰ As new and “better” theories of the text are developed and new manuscripts are discovered, the MCT will have to be changed to accommodate these developments. The MCT, due to the presuppositions of modern textual criticism, will undoubtedly undergo many (and perhaps even radical) revisions in the future.⁷¹

The importance of the current MCT and its earlier editions to English Bible students is that these have formed the basis of the NT translation of all English versions since 1881 (except the NKJV). This means, for example, that the Revised Standard Version, The New American Standard Bible, the Today’s English Version, the New International Version, and the English Standard Version are all translated from the eclectic MCT.

Providential Preservation and Textual Criticism

The TR and the MCT present texts of the Greek NT that differ significantly in certain places. The question that must be faced by those who love the Word of God is this: which of these two printed forms of the text best preserves the true and original text of the NT? Regarding our discussion of English versions, this is a crucial question; for a trustworthy version of the NT must be translated from the authentic NT Greek text. But how are we to decide this question? How can we properly judge between the TR and the MCT? What *standard* can we apply that will settle this dispute concerning the text of the NT? As Christians, the starting point for all of our thinking for every question in life must be the revealed doctrines of Holy Scripture. All “facts” must be interpreted in the light of

⁶⁸ Two of the modern editors of the MCT have expressed their full agreement with their scholarly predecessors in condemning the TR. Aland states that the Byzantine text is “the most recent and the poorest of the various New Testament text types.” *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 4. Metzger declares that the TR is a “debased” form of the NT text. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 103.

⁶⁹ That the oldest extant manuscripts must present the purest form of the NT text appears to be an unquestioned presupposition of modern NT textual criticism.

⁷⁰ For example, more than five hundred changes were made between the 2nd and 3rd editions of the UBS Greek New Testament.

⁷¹ After Aland discussed the work of the committee that produced the MCT contained in NA26 and the UBS3, he candidly expressed his view on the open-ended nature of modern textual criticism saying, “Of course, the new text itself is not a static entity. The members of the editorial committee as well as all others responsible for the edition agree on the *tentative* nature of this publication...It remains to be seen what the *next developments* will be” (emphasis added). *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 35.

Scripture.⁷² Therefore, the consistently Christian approach to the issue of the NT text is to interpret the facts concerning the text in the light of the doctrinal standards of verbal inspiration and, especially, providential preservation. The Greek text that is to be considered the authentic Word of God is the text that bears the definite and consistent marks of being the providentially preserved text. Let us now judge the MCT and the TR by the standard of God's revealed truth so that we can determine which text ought to be considered the genuine text of Scripture.

The Textus Receptus and Providential Preservation

The TR is the Greek text that bears the marks of being the providentially preserved text of the NT. If we believe that divine providence is controlling the history and transmission of the inspired text of the NT so that it is "kept pure in all ages," then the "logic of faith"⁷³ leads us to embrace the TR confidently as the authentic representation of the original autographic text of the NT. Let us note these unmistakable evidences of divine preservation exhibited by the TR.

First, the TR is the text that is preserved in the vast majority of existing Greek manuscripts (85-90%). In these thousands of manuscripts, Burgon reminds us, God in His wisdom has provided the church with abundant external evidence "for the establishment of the truth of His written Word."⁷⁴ But of equal importance with the truth of the large predominance of the text-type found in the TR is the reason why this text-type appears in the great majority of extant manuscripts. The text-type represented in the TR is the text that was preserved and transmitted to us by the usage of the church. And it was the text used by the church because it was the text *recognized* by the church as being the authentic Word of God. The text of the TR is not, therefore, based on the theories and votes of textual scholars, but upon the clear and consistent testimony of the great majority of existing Greek manuscripts—manuscripts that were preserved for us because of their usage and acceptance by the Greek-speaking church.

⁷² As Cornelius Van Til has pointed out, there are no "neutral" facts. All facts are interpreted facts, and they are always interpreted according to the presuppositions of the interpreter. Therefore, faulty presuppositions will always lead to a misinterpretation of the evidence and thus to erroneous conclusions. This holds true for the facts (data) of history and science as it does for the facts of NT textual criticism. Consequently, just as all orthodox Christians insist that the facts of history and science be interpreted in light of the doctrines of creation and providence, so we insist that the facts of NT textual criticism be interpreted in the light of the doctrines of the divine inspiration and preservation of the Scriptures.

⁷³ Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 113. Edward Hills was a Reformed NT textual scholar who consistently applied the principles of Reformed theology, especially presuppositionalism, to the issue of NT textual criticism. For a review of Hills' life and work, see Theodore P. Letis, "Edward Freer Hills' Contribution to the Revival of the Ecclesiastical Text," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 12 (1989), pp. 21-172. It is appropriate at this point that I freely acknowledge my personal indebtedness to the work of both Hills and Letis. It was through their writings that I first clearly saw the need to apply the principles of Reformed theology to the question of the NT text.

⁷⁴ John W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (Paradise, Pa: Conservative Classics, reprint, nd.), p. 56.

Second, the TR presents a text of the NT that is ancient and theologically superior to the MCT.⁷⁵ It is also a text that is noted for its “lucidity and completeness” and “entirely blameless on either literary or religious grounds as regards vulgarised or unworthy diction...”⁷⁶ In other words, the TR is an ancient text of the highest quality.

Third, the TR has been used continuously in the church from the days of the early church until today. Because the text-type reflected in the TR was handed down and preserved in the churches, it can rightly be called the “church text.” The TR represents the only NT Greek text that has been in circulation and use in the church throughout the entire era of church history. The TR is the *only* form of the text that has been meaningfully available to the church in “all ages.”

Fourth, the TR was the first printed form of the Greek NT to be published. Erasmus produced this first edition in 1516 using manuscripts of the Byzantine traditional text. The TR was printed in approximately 160 editions over the next 150 years,⁷⁷ with each edition printing substantially the same text. The TR was the only printed Greek NT available until Lachmann printed the first of his two editions of the NT in 1831.

Fifth, and of special importance to Protestants, the TR was the NT text used by God to launch the Reformation with its cry of *sola Scriptura*! As van Bruggen notes, “The churches of the great Reformation deliberately adopted this ancient text when they took the Greek text as starting-point again.”⁷⁸ The TR provided the textual foundation for the preaching, theology, creeds, and all the Bible translations of the Reformation. William Tyndale used the TR for the first translation of the Greek NT into English.

Sixth, the TR was recognized by all the Protestant churches as the true, infallible, divinely preserved NT text. This is why it came to be called the *Textus Receptus*, or, the “Received Text”! The Byzantine text that had been in use in the Greek Church was received by the Reformation churches as the inspired Word of God and, thus, this text “served as the Protestant canonical standard”⁷⁹ (a position it continued to hold for three centuries). Because of the doctrines of inspiration and preservation, the Reformation church believed that God had delivered His infallible Word to them in the TR. In his defense of the TR against those who sought to undermine its authority, Owen, the great

⁷⁵ Even TR critic Gordon Fee concedes that the TR usually contains “the theologically fuller text.” Gordon D. Fee, “Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the Textus Receptus,” *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (March 1978), p. 24.

⁷⁶ B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek* (Peabody, Ma.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988, reprint of 1882 edition), pp. 134-135. Of course, in the reasoning of Westcott and Hort, the lucidity and completeness of the Byzantine text was an argument *against* its authenticity. The modern scholar Bruce Metzger completely agrees with the estimation of Westcott and Hort concerning the TR’s lucidity and completeness. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pp. xx-xxi.

⁷⁷ Metzger, *ibid.*, p. xxiii.

⁷⁸ van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament*, p. 36.

⁷⁹ Letis, *The Majority Text*, p. 17. For an excellent discussion of the canonical status of the TR and the Reformed Protestant approach to textual criticism see Letis’ two essays, “Theodore Beza as Text Critic: A View into the 16th Century Approach to New Testament Text Criticism,” and, “John Owen versus Brian Walton: A Reformed Response to the Birth of Text Criticism” (*ibid.*, pp. 113-190).

Puritan theologian, expressed his faith in “the purity of the present original copies of Scripture, or rather copies in the original languages, which the church of God doth now and hath for many ages enjoyed as her chiefest treasure...”⁸⁰ Turretin, one of the greatest of the Protestant scholastic theologians, defended the Masoretic text and the TR against the papists who sought to undermine the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* by their claims that the original texts of Scripture were so corrupt that the authority of the Roman Church and her Latin Vulgate is all that remains. In response to this attack on the authority of Scripture, Turretin argued from Scripture that the doctrines of inspiration and preservation assure us that the integrity of the original sources cannot be questioned.⁸¹ Turretin stated the view of the Protestant church concerning the purity of the Masoretic text and the TR:

By the original texts, we do not mean the autographs, written by the hand of Moses, of the prophets, and of the apostles, which certainly do not now exist. We mean their apographs, which are so called because they set forth to us the Word of God in the very words of those who wrote under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁸²

The Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675), which has been called “the epitome⁸³ of reformed scholastic theology,” upheld the doctrines of inspiration and preservation, and therefore declared the Masoretic OT text and the TR “the sole and complete rule of our faith and practice.”⁸⁴ And the most excellent doctrinal confession to come out of the Reformation, The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), affirmed on the basis of the doctrines of inspiration and preservation that the Masoretic text and the TR were the “authentic” Word of God.

Seventh, and of particular significance to English-speaking Christians, the TR was the text used by the translators of the Authorized Version (KJV). This English version came to be recognized as the standard English version, and it has done more to shape the English church than all the other versions combined.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Owen, *The Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of Scripture*, p. 353. See Appendix 2 for a fuller discussion of Owen’s defense of the Masoretic text and TR.

⁸¹ Turretin argues, “Nor can we readily believe that God, who dictated and inspired each and every word to these inspired (*theopneustois*) men, would not take care of their entire preservation. If men use the utmost care diligently to preserve their words (especially if they are of any importance, as for example a testament or contract) in order that it may not be corrupted, how much more, must we suppose, would God take care of his word which he intended as a testament and seal of his covenant with us, so that it might not be corrupted; especially when he could easily foresee and prevent such corruptions in order to establish the faith of his church?” *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:71.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1:106.

⁸³ **epitome** – a summary or condensed account of anything.

⁸⁴ Martin I. Klauber, “The Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675): An Introduction and Translation,” *Trinity Journal* 11NS (Spring 1990), pp. 103-123.

⁸⁵ The Authorized Version is a product of the Reformation, and it gathers in one excellent version the best of the versions that preceded it, i.e., Tyndale’s translation, Coverdale’s Bible, Matthew’s Bible, the Great Bible, and the Geneva Bible. All of these Reformation English translations were based on the TR.

How do we account for all these facts concerning the TR? How should we interpret the evidence, and what conclusions should we draw? There is really only one conclusion for the Christian who believes in the doctrine that God “by His singular care and providence” has kept His Word “pure in all ages.” The “logic of faith” leads to the definite judgment that the TR is the true, providentially preserved text of the NT.

The Modern Critical Text and Providential Preservation

The MCT does not fare well when scrutinized by the doctrinal standard of divine preservation. The MCT does not bear the marks of God’s providential preservation, but rather, it shows signs of human fabrication by textual critics. The doctrine of preservation and the MCT clearly are at odds with one another.

Is it possible to believe in the orthodox doctrine of preservation *and* to believe that the MCT is that divinely preserved text? Well, if divine preservation is a true doctrine, and *if* the MCT is the true text, then we must believe that God’s providence caused the worst and most depraved form of the Greek NT (i.e., the TR, for so the proponents of the MCT describe it) to be the text preserved in the overwhelming majority of the extant manuscripts; to be the text that is theologically superior; to be the text that has been in continuous use in the church; to be the text that was first printed and published; to be the text that provided the foundation for the Protestant Reformation; to be the text that achieved canonical status; and to be the text that was used in the most influential English version of all time. On the other hand, *if* the MCT is the true text, we are bound to hold that by God’s “singular care and providence” the genuine text of the NT was the text preserved in only a handful of existing manuscripts; was the text that was theologically inferior; was the text that was lost to the church for over a thousand years; and was the text restored to the church by the use of Enlightenment naturalistic textual critical principles and the majority vote of scholars!

The point is simply this: while the history and facts of the TR are easily explained by reference to the doctrine of preservation, the history and facts concerning the MCT are not so easily explained. Perhaps this is why the defenders of the MCT do not rely on the doctrine of preservation in any way to establish the validity of their text. In fact, they seem very annoyed and even indignant that someone would be so “unscholarly” as to appeal to biblical theology in defense of the biblical text! The advocates of the MCT appeal only to the “evidence” and to the methods of modern textual criticism.⁸⁶ The standpoint of the modern critic is that “a theological *a priori* has no place in textual

⁸⁶ All one has to do is read any standard work on NT textual criticism written by those who advocate the MCT to observe that these scholars consider the doctrines of verbal inspiration and preservation as unimportant, irrelevant, or even a hindrance in determining the true text of the NT. In most of their works, these doctrines are not even mentioned. For example, Fee, an evangelical scholar who adheres to the MCT, makes no reference to inspiration or preservation in his entire article on NT textual criticism. Gordon D. Fee, “The Textual Criticism of the New Testament,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1979), 1:419-433.

criticism.”⁸⁷ But the rejection of the doctrine of preservation⁸⁸ in favor of the “neutral” scientific principles of textual criticism leads to serious consequences for the church.

The first danger associated with the MCT and its naturalistic principles is that, having rejected the traditional text of Scripture that was handed down by the church and confirmed by centuries of usage by believers, it empowers a handful of textual scholars to determine a new text of Scripture for the church. Because of the presuppositions of the modern critics, “the text of centuries is replaced by the text of yesterday,”⁸⁹ and a few scholars claim for themselves the authority to give the church a “better” NT text. R. J. Rushdoony wisely states,

Consider what happens when the Received Text is set aside and scholars give us their reconstruction of the text. The truth of revelation has thereby passed from the hand of God into the hands of men. Scholars then establish the true reading in terms of their presuppositions...The denial of the Received Text enables the scholar to play god over God. The determination of the correct word is now a scholar’s province and task. The Holy Spirit is no longer the giver and preserver of the biblical text: it is the scholar, the textual scholar.⁹⁰

Rushdoony continues:

The historic belief of Christians has been that the God Who gave the Word preserved the Word. This is the doctrine of the preservation of the Word of God. The Word gives the direct and authentic Word of God. Now preservation has a new meaning. The biblical scholars hold that theirs is a word of restoration, so that preservation requires their restorative

⁸⁷ Daniel B. Wallace, “The Majority-Text: History, Methods and Critique,” *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 37 (June 1994), p. 204. Wallace believes that textual criticism is an issue of historical inquiry; and unless we keep faith and orthodoxy out of the picture, we cannot objectively interpret the evidence (*ibid.*). What Wallace fails to see is that his position of categorically rejecting faith and orthodoxy from the discipline of textual criticism is *not* an *objective* view of the matter. The statement that theological presuppositions about the nature of the Bible have no place in the work of determining the text of the Bible is in itself a theological *a priori*. It assumes that the Bible is to be treated like any other book and that the history and transmission of the text of Scripture can only be interpreted according to “neutral” scientific principles. These are the assumptions of a theological liberalism that denies the verbal inspiration of the Bible. As far as we know, Wallace is not a theological liberal, but a conservative Christian who believes in verbal inspiration. However, his method of textual criticism is not in line with orthodoxy, but with unorthodoxy. One wonders if Wallace would also argue that “a theological *a priori* has no place” in the study of biology, psychology, or world history. Would Wallace chide the Christian biologist for approaching the question of the origin of man with the theological presupposition of the special creation of man by God on the sixth day? Would he rebuke the Christian psychologist for assuming man’s fallen state as he interprets man’s behavior? The Word of God says that Scripture is entirely sufficient to equip the Christian for every good work. And we believe that this includes the good work of textual criticism, i.e., determining the true text. The starting point for the Christian regarding textual criticism must be the revealed doctrines of inspiration and preservation.

⁸⁸ See Edward F. Hills, *Believing Bible Study*, 3rd ed. (Des Moines: Christian Research Press, 1991), pp. 36-38, for a discussion of how certain conservative scholars have vainly sought to reconcile preservation with naturalistic text criticism.

⁸⁹ van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament*, p. 11.

⁹⁰ Rousas J. Rushdoony, “The Problem of the Received Text,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 12 (1989), p. 8.

word. The triune God is replaced by scholarly men. Thus, the denial of the Received Text is no small matter. It rests on a religious revolution with far-reaching implications. This means that many men of Reformed and Arminian theologies, who profess the orthodox doctrines of their communions, hold to a position which undermines their faith. It should not surprise us that seminaries and biblical scholars have for generations led their churches into various forms of humanism. By playing god over God, they begin with the essence of original sin and humanism, man as his own god, determining the validity of everything, including the Word of God, for himself (Gen 3:15). In effect, they say, “Yea, hath God said?” (Gen 3:1) of the best of Scripture. The issue of the Received Text is thus no small matter, nor one of academic concern only. The faith is at stake.⁹¹

The second danger associated with the MCT is that the rationalistic, Enlightenment principles of modern textual criticism lead to skepticism concerning the text of Scripture.⁹² Because the task of establishing the true NT text is not approached from the perspective of faith in God’s providential preservation of His Word, but from the perspective of “neutral” science (unbelief?), there can never be any certainty concerning the true text of Scripture. Since the MCT is determined by the reason of autonomous⁹³ man, it suffers the same fate that attends all human inquiry into knowledge that sets the authority of man’s reason over the authority of Scripture: uncertainty and relativism. The text of Scripture is now relative to the most recent theories and changing opinions of textual scholars. The sea of uncertainty in which the naturalistic critics swim is illustrated in the words of Eldon Jay Epp:

One response to the fact that our popular critical texts are still so close to that of Westcott-Hort might be that the kind of text arrived at by them and supported so widely by subsequent criticism is in fact and without question the best attainable NT text; yet every textual critic knows that this similarity of text indicates, rather, that we have made little progress in textual *theory* since Westcott-Hort; that *we simply do not know how to make a definitive determination as to what the best text is*; that we do not have a clear picture of the transmission and alteration of the text in the first few centuries; and, accordingly, that the Westcott-Hort kind of text has maintained its dominant position largely by default.⁹⁴

The inherent skepticism of modern textual criticism is also exemplified in Soulen’s definition of textual criticism:

The function and purpose of TC [textual criticism] is of a dual nature: (1) to reconstruct the original wording of the Biblical text; and (2) to establish the history of the transmission of the text through the centuries. The first of these two goals is *in fact hypothetical and*

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹² For a good discussion of the skeptical nature of NT textual criticism, see Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, pp. 62-86. Hills concludes, “As far as the recovery of the original New Testament text is concerned, pessimism is the order of the day. As G. Zuntz (1953) remarks, ‘the optimism of the earlier editors has given way to that skepticism which inclines towards regarding the ‘original text’ as an unattainable mirage’ ” (ibid., p. 67).

⁹³ **autonomous** – self-governing; free from external control and constraint.

⁹⁴ Eldon Jay Epp, “The Twentieth Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism,” *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, 93 (September 1974), pp. 390-391 (emphasis added).

unattainable. In every instance, the original copy (called the autograph) of the books of the Bible is lost, hence *every reconstruction is a matter of conjecture*.⁹⁵

Those who use the MCT or an English version based on the MCT are, by that use, giving assent to this skepticism concerning the NT text. They are using a NT that is the result of scholarly conjecture⁹⁶ and are, in effect, agreeing that the authentic NT text has not been providentially preserved in the TR. Thus, all that they can hope for is a hypothetical reconstruction of the text by men. Those who reject “the logic of faith” in textual matters and the TR to which it leads are left with a NT text that is tentative, uncertain, and relative to the changing opinions of textual scholars. Hence, they are often left with the nagging question concerning their NT text, “Hath God said...?” Those who rely on the MCT willingly exchange the TR, which has been received for centuries by the church as the verbally inspired Word of God possessing canonical authority, for the text of yesterday that was constructed by scholars who can only say “that the new text represents the best that can be achieved in the present state of knowledge.”⁹⁷ The truth is:

The recent printed editions of the Greek New Testament [MCT], which we can buy, give a text which never existed as a manuscript of the New Testament. They are all reconstructions based on their editor’s choice of readings from Manuscripts they had at their disposal, or which they elected to concentrate on.⁹⁸

Conservative scholars who adhere to the MCT and the textual critical principles it is based upon often seek to hide the skepticism inherent in their position by saying that no major doctrine is affected by the rejection of the TR in favor of the MCT. This, however, is simply not true. Doctrine is affected (though it may be that no doctrine is entirely lost) when the TR is set aside on account of the MCT. Our ability to defend the faith is weakened when we use the MCT and its theologically inferior text. But, even more important than this, the doctrines of verbal inspiration and providential preservation are undermined dangerously by the MCT and its textual principles.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976), p. 161 (emphasis added).

⁹⁶ Any who would want to deny this ought first to study Metzger’s *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. In this work, Metzger informs us that the text of the current editions of the MCT was often determined by “a majority of the committee” who “judged,” “interpreted,” “preferred,” “thought,” “deemed,” “considered,” or “decided” that a certain reading was preferable to a competing reading. Also of interest to the user of the MCT is, for example, that out of the 454 select variants chosen for the apparatus of the UBS 3rd ed. in the Greek text of John, Romans, and Acts, the committee of five scholars, concerning the correctness of the readings they chose, had a “considerable degree of doubt” 204 times, and a “very high degree of doubt” 39 times!

⁹⁷ Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 34.

⁹⁸ J. K. Elliott, “The Original Text of the Greek New Testament,” *Fax Theologica* 8 (1988), p. 6. As cited by Theodore Letis, “The Ecclesiastical Text Redivivus?” in *A Comprehensive Faith*, ed. Andrew Sandlin (San Jose: Friends of Chalcedon, 1996), p. 41.

⁹⁹ The liberal NT scholar Frederick Grant uses the modern skepticism concerning the actual wording of the biblical text to attack boldly the doctrine of verbal inspiration: “Textual criticism is both a science and an art; but it is first of all a science. At the same time, the uncertainty of the text is just enough to do away with the old-fashioned idea of ‘verbal’ inspiration and an infallible ‘letter’ of Scripture. If, say, five or ten percent of the language of the Bible may be slightly different from its

The doctrine of verbal inspiration loses its full significance when it is said that no one can ever be sure about the actual *wording* of the original; that we must be content only to know that no essential doctrine has been lost. It seems then, according to the scholars who promote the MCT, that we cannot claim *verbal* inspiration for our present NT text, but that we only can claim that its teaching or concepts are inspired. Owen, in answer to those who would only defend the present knowledge of the NT text to the point of saying that it preserves the essential doctrines of Scripture, says,

But to depress the sacred truth of the originals into such a condition as wherein it should stand in need of this apology...will at length be found a work unbecoming a Christian, Protestant divine. Besides the injury done hereby to the providence of God towards His church, and care of His Word, it will not be found so easy a matter, upon a supposition of such corruption in the originals as is pleaded for, to evince unquestionably that the whole saving doctrine itself, as first given out from God, continues entire and incorrupt. The nature of this doctrine is such, that there is no other principle or means of its discovery, no other rule or measure of judging and determining any thing about or concerning it, but only the writing from whence it is taken, it being wholly of divine revelation, and that revelation being expressed only in that writing. Upon any corruption, then, supposed therein, there is no means of rectifying it...In things of pure revelation—whose knowledge depends solely on their revelation—it is not...enough to satisfy us, that the doctrines are preserved entire; every tittle and *iota* in the Word of God must come under our care and consideration, as being, as such, from God.¹⁰⁰

The doctrinal standard of the divine providential preservation of the Word of God leads us to reject the MCT as an often corrupt and untrustworthy representation of the divinely inspired original Greek NT, and causes us to accept confidently the TR as the authentic canonical text of the NT Scriptures.¹⁰¹ Therefore, only those English versions that are based on the Masoretic text in the OT and the TR in the NT are to be considered trustworthy translations of the Word of God. Any English version that is based on texts other than these traditional texts must be judged as a translation that often corrupts the Word of God and undermines the church's faith in the providence of God and the present purity of our Scripture texts.

original, though not sufficient to bring any Christian doctrine into question, it is enough to destroy a bibliolatrous literalism. Uncertainty, even of a tenth of one per cent, must mean the end of infallibility." Frederick C. Grant, *Translating the Bible* (Greenwich: The Seabury Press, 1961), p. 122. Grant's denial of verbal inspiration and infallibility is heretical; but for Grant, who adheres to the MCT and its textual principles, it is a logical and sound deduction. Grant's statement graphically illustrates how naturalistic textual criticism, with its rejection of orthodox theological presuppositions from its methods and its sole reliance on the autonomous reason of man, undermines the church's faith in a providentially preserved and verbally inspired text.

¹⁰⁰ Owen, *The Divine Original*, pp. 302-303. Turretin gives a similar response in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, p. 71.

¹⁰¹ Even though there are some minor variations in the editions of the TR, and though there might be some need for minor revision in the TR, this should not affect in any way our standing with the Reformation church in recognizing the TR as the providentially preserved text and regarding its authority as *canonical*. The doctrine of preservation should cause us to accept the TR reverently as the inspired Word of God and to treat this text with great care.

Conclusion

The purpose of this book has been to demonstrate that there is an objective and authoritative standard that will enable the English-speaking church to judge between the many English versions and to determine the most faithful and trustworthy English translation of Holy Scripture. In the first section of the book, this standard was defined as being the biblical doctrines that directly bear on the issues of Bible translation. As in all things, the church's rule must ever be *sola Scriptura!* The two major doctrines that ought to serve as the standard for judging translations were identified as being the doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration and the doctrine of providential preservation. In the second and third part of the book, we applied these doctrines to the issues of translation philosophy and textual criticism and concluded that only those versions translated according to the formal equivalence method and translated from the traditional texts of Holy Scripture—the Masoretic text in the OT and the *Textus Receptus* in the NT—are to be considered faithful and reliable English versions. It only remains for us to apply these conclusions to specific English versions and to determine which version is the best and most trustworthy English version available.

According to the doctrinal standards of verbal inspiration and providential preservation, it is evident that the following versions are relatively untrustworthy because they often misrepresent the original Hebrew and Greek and corrupt the Word of God:

- The American Standard Version because it is based on the MCT;
- The Revised Standard Version because it is based on the MCT;
- The New American Standard Version because it is based on the MCT;
- The Jerusalem Bible because it is based on the MCT and DE;
- The New English Bible because it is based on the MCT and DE;
- The New American Bible because it is based on the MCT;
- The Living Bible because it is based on the MCT and DE;
- The Today's English Version because it is based on the MCT and DE;
- The Revised English Version because it is based on the MCT and DE;
- The New International Version because it is based on the MCT and DE;
- The New Revised Standard Version because it is based on the MCT;
- The Contemporary English Version because it is based on the MCT and DE;
- The God's Word version because it is based on the MCT and DE;
- The New Living Translation because it is based on the MCT and DE;
- The English Standard Version because it is based on the MCT;
- The Holman Christian Standard Bible because it is based on the MCT.¹⁰²

It should be noted that those versions that are based on both the MCT and DE must be judged as the *least* trustworthy of all.

¹⁰² The Holman Christian Standard Version follows a translation philosophy called "optimal equivalence." This method seems to be an essential compromise between FE and DE. Therefore, it is not as trustworthy as more literal FE translations and not as interpretive as some DE translations.

It is of particular importance to observe that the New International Version is judged to be one of the least trustworthy. Special notice is taken of the NIV because it is currently a very popular and best-selling English version. Many churches are adopting this version for their public worship services, as are many Christians for their personal use. This is truly an alarming development, and it demonstrates how far the English-speaking church has drifted from the doctrines of the Reformation. It is yet another evidence of the decline of the church and of the increasing influence of modernism and liberalism in many of our evangelical and Reformed churches.

But which version is the best? Which version ought to be considered the standard English version? Which Bible should guide the English-speaking church as it seeks to apply the whole Bible to the whole of life? The doctrinal standards of verbal inspiration and providential preservation lead to the conclusion that the Authorized (King James) Version is the *best* and *most trustworthy* English version of Holy Scripture.¹⁰³ The Authorized Version is firmly based on the traditional, providentially preserved original texts of Scripture (the Masoretic text and the *Textus Receptus*), and it is an excellent formal equivalent translation;¹⁰⁴ therefore, it ought to be received as a true and faithful presentation of the Word of God in English. No other version can surpass or even match the Authorized Version's faithfulness to the form of the original: its quality English, its completeness, its loyalty to the traditional texts; its spirituality, its authoritativeness, and its ecclesiastical usage.¹⁰⁵ Hills summarizes it well: "The King James (Authorized) Version is an accurate translation of the *Textus Receptus*. God has placed the stamp of His approval

¹⁰³ No claim is here made for the absolute perfection of the Authorized Version, nor do we place it on the same level of authority as the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. All we claim is that the Authorized Version is the most faithful, accurate, and authoritative representation of the Word of God in English and that it can be fully trusted by those who read the English Bible. It should be considered the *standard* English version. We basically agree with the position of the Trinitarian Bible Society concerning the Authorized Version: "While perfection is not claimed for the Authorised Version (known in some countries as the King James Version), or for any other version, it is known that the translators of the Authorised Version acknowledged the divine inspiration, authority and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures, the fruitful use of their translation for nearly 400 years is evidence of the Lord's blessing upon their work. It is the most accurate and trustworthy translation into English available..."

¹⁰⁴ The New King James Version, which claims to be a revision of the AV, is also based on the TR and FE. As such, it is much more trustworthy than the other modern versions. However, because its translation does not appear to be as faithful; because it presents textual notes that cast doubt over the true wording of the NT text; and because it presents the reading of the MCT as having equal importance to the TR, the NKJV cannot be considered superior or even equal to the AV. For a more detailed comparison of the AV and NKJV, see the Trinitarian Bible Society's review article No. 110, "What Today's Christian Needs to Know about the New King James Version," by G.W. and D.E. Anderson, 1995. They conclude their article by saying: "The Trinitarian Bible Society believes that the NKJV has significant grammatical and translational problems and is not a complete and adequate improvement upon the excellence and authority of the AV. The NKJV removes too much that was excellent in the older version and therefore does not achieve the same standard of accuracy as is to be found in the Authorised Version of the Bible" (*ibid.*, p. 22).

¹⁰⁵ See van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, pp. 97-142, for an excellent discussion of these characteristics of a reliable translation.

on it through the long continued usage of English-speaking believers. Hence, it should be used and defended by Bible-believing Christians.”¹⁰⁶

The goal of this book has been to establish that there is a standard for judging between English versions. Hopefully, it has shown that personal preference (autonomy) as a normative standard in choosing a translation is just as wrong and rebellious as personal preference as a normative standard in making ethical choices. Hills rightfully asks Christians, “Where, oh where, dear brother or sister, did you ever get the idea that it is up to you to decide which Bible Version you will receive as God’s holy Word”;¹⁰⁷ for in regard to this decision, “It has already been decided for you by the workings of God’s special providence. If you ignore this providence and choose to adopt one of the modern versions, you will be taking the first step in the logic of unbelief.”¹⁰⁸ Regarding the issue of English Bible translations, the question “By what standard?” goes to the very core of our faith. That is why it is such a vital question for today.

The abandonment of the Authorized Version in favor of one of the modern versions is really a serious departure from the doctrines of verbal inspiration and providential preservation. It is, in the end, a departure from the Word of God; for those who use a modern version are using a version that has been influenced by the principles of modernism; and these principles often lead to a corrupting of Scripture and leave the Christian, in many places, with man’s word instead of God’s Word. But those who use the Authorized Version can be confident that they have the authentic Word of God in English.

May it please God to return the English-speaking church to the use of the Authorized Version as the standard English Bible.¹⁰⁹ If there is to be a new Reformation among English-speaking people, it will need to begin with a return to the faith and theology of the Reformation and to the English Bible which that faith produced: the Authorized Version—a superior FE translation of the verbally inspired and providentially preserved original text of Holy Scripture. ❧

¹⁰⁶ Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Some believe that the “archaic” language and obsolete words make the Authorized Version an unacceptable Bible for today. However, the difficulty of some of the language in the AV is really not as great as certain ones make it out to be. With minimal effort, this “problem” can be overcome (but, alas, many modern Christians are not willing to give such minimal effort!). For a helpful discussion of how the obsolete words in the AV could be dealt with, and on the issue of revising the AV for the purpose of updating its language, see Hills, *ibid.*, pp. 217-219, and Hills, *Believing Bible Study*, pp. 83-87. The Trinitarian Bible Society suggests that, “The problem of obsolete vocabulary could in the future be partly solved...by the insertion of alternative renderings, either as a glossary or in the margin, for a number of the words which might be found difficult by a reader who is not familiar with classical English usage. The size of the problem has often been greatly exaggerated.” Andrew J. Brown, *The Word of God Among All Nations* (London: The Trinitarian Bible Society, 1981), p. 119.

Appendices

Appendix 1: John Owen's Defense of the Traditional Texts

John Owen's treatise, *Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture*,¹¹⁰ is an important work that gives to the church a strong theological defense of the Masoretic text and the *Textus Receptus*. The fact that this discourse of Owen (1616-1683), the preeminent Congregationalist Puritan theologian, is virtually unknown and unread in our day—even by Reformed Christians—is a keen indicator of the surrender of the church to the principles of Enlightenment naturalistic textual criticism. To help remedy this shameful capitulation,¹¹¹ to expose our readers to Owen's work, and to bolster the argument presented in the main body of the book, this appendix seeks to provide a general overview of Owen's valuable treatise.¹¹²

The immediate occasion for Owen's treatise was the publication of the Polyglot¹¹³ Bible edited by Brian Walton in London (1655-1657) that printed the original Hebrew and Greek text along with various ancient versions and translations, and included an Appendix (vol. 6) that listed all the variant readings of the NT that Walton and his helpers could amass. The larger context for understanding Owen's book is the attempt by the Roman Church to undermine and discredit the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura* by pointing to the variants in the existing Greek manuscripts as evidence that the Greek NT (the TR) was too corrupt to be considered authoritative. The goal of the papists was to pull down all confidence in the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures so that they could re-establish the authority of their church and the Latin Vulgate and thus derail the Reformation; their chosen means to accomplish this nefarious end was the discipline of textual criticism.¹¹⁴ Owen's response to the Polyglot of Walton, the Anglican and bitter foe of the Puritans, and to the Roman attack on *sola Scriptura* (an attack that Walton's work implicitly supported), is very relevant to the assault on the authority of Scripture

¹¹⁰ John Owen, *Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, reprint ed., 1968), 16:345-421. For a superior essay on this work by John Owen the reader is strongly encouraged to see Theodore P. Letis, "John Owen Versus Brian Walton: A Reformed Response to the Birth of Text Criticism," in *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate*, ed. Theodore P. Letis (Grand Rapids: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987), pp. 145-190. Letis does a fine job of explaining the historical and theological context of Owen's book and of summarizing its contents; his essay is a "must read."

¹¹¹ **capitulation** – the act of surrendering or ceasing to resist an opponent.

¹¹² It is hoped that the reader will be motivated to read Owen's treatise for himself, particularly pages 347-370.

¹¹³ **Polyglot** – a collection of versions of the Bible in different languages.

¹¹⁴ As can be seen, the practice of textual criticism has never been a neutral enterprise, but has been based on definite theological presuppositions and has been directed to definite ends!

that is implicit in the methods and results of the modern Enlightenment practice of textual criticism.

Owen believed that the starting point for the Christian in dealing with the question of the original texts of Scripture is not to be found in the “neutral” text critical principles determined by man’s reason, but in the revealed doctrines of verbal inspiration and providential preservation. He lays the foundation for his discussion of textual criticism, and for his defense of the purity of the original texts of Scripture that were considered the standard canonical texts by the Protestant church at that time (i.e., the Masoretic text and the TR), by saying:

The sum of what I am pleading for, as to the particular head to be vindicated, is, That as the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were immediately and entirely given out by God Himself, His mind being in them represented unto us without the least interveniency¹¹⁵ of such mediums and ways as were capable of giving change or alteration to the least iota or syllable; so, by His good and merciful providential dispensation, in His love to His Word and church, His whole Word, as first given out by Him, is preserved unto us entire in the original languages; where, shining in its own beauty and lustre (as also in all translations, so far as they faithfully represent the originals), it manifests and evidences unto the consciences of men, without other foreign help or assistance, its divine original and authority.¹¹⁶

Owen is clear on the matter of textual criticism: we must presuppose the inspiration and preservation of Scripture if we are to interpret the evidence aright. According to Owen, a theological *a priori* does have a place in the textual criticism of the biblical text!

Having stated his theological presuppositions, Owen immediately goes on to impress the importance of these doctrines to the church. He says,

Now, the several assertions or propositions contained in this position are to me such important truths, that I shall not be blamed in the least by my own spirit, nor I hope by any others, in contending for them, judging them fundamental parts of the faith once delivered to the saints; and though some of them may seem to be less weighty than others, yet they are so concatenated¹¹⁷ in themselves, that by the removal or destruction of any one of them, our interest in the others is utterly taken away. It will assuredly be granted that the persuasion of the coming forth of the Word immediately from God, in the way pleaded for, is the foundation of all faith, hope, and obedience. But what, I pray, will it advantage us that God did so once deliver His Word, if we are not assured also that that Word so delivered hath been, by His special care and providence, preserved entire and uncorrupt unto us, or that it doth not evidence and manifest itself to be His Word, being so preserved? Blessed, may we say, were the ages past, who received the Word of God in its unquestionable power and purity, when it shone brightly in its own glorious native light, and was free from those defects and corruptions which, through the default of men in a long tract of time, it hath contracted; but for us, as we know not well where to lay a sure foundation of believing that this book rather than any other doth contain what is left unto us of that Word of His, so it is

¹¹⁵ **interveniency** – intervention; an entry into a situation in order to influence events.

¹¹⁶ Owen, *The Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture*, pp. 349-350 (emphasis his).

¹¹⁷ **concatenated** – connected like the links of a chain.

impossible we should ever come to any certainty almost of any individual word or expression whether it be from God or no. Far be it from the thoughts of any good man, that God, Whose covenant with His church is that His Word and Spirit shall never depart from it (Isa. lix. 21, Matt. v. 18, 1 Pet. i. 25, 1 Cor. xi. 23, Matt, xxviii. 20), hath left it in uncertainties about the things that are the foundation of all that faith and obedience which He requires at our hands.¹¹⁸

After he establishes the theological framework for interpreting the evidence, Owen then expresses his horror that any *Christian* scholar would advance the notion that the transmission of the biblical text has come about in the same way as any other book. Owen's comments on this point are very instructive because the idea that the Bible should be treated as any ordinary book in regard to its textual criticism, and that, therefore, the same "neutral scientific" principles should be applied, is at the heart of the Enlightenment method of textual criticism that reigns today among NT critics and biblical scholars. For Owen, the doctrine of preservation requires the recognition of the "extraordinary manner" in which the biblical text was transmitted. Owen contends that

For the first transcribers of the original copies, and those who in succeeding ages have done the like work from them, whereby they have been propagated and continued down to us, in a subserviency¹¹⁹ to the providence and promise of God, we say not, as is vainly charged by Morinus and Cappellus, that they were all or any of them *anamartetoï* and *theopneustoi*, "infallible and divinely inspired," so that it was impossible for them in anything to mistake. It is known, it is granted, that failings have been amongst them, and that various lections [readings or variants] are from thence risen; of which afterward religious care and diligence in their work, with a due reverence of Him with Whom they had to do, is all we ascribe unto them. Not to acknowledge these freely in them, without clear and unquestionable evidence to the contrary, is high uncharitableness, impiety, and ingratitude. This care and diligence, we say, in a subserviency to the promise and providence of God, hath produced the effect contended for; nor is any thing further necessary thereunto. On this account to argue, as some do, from the miscarriages and mistakes of men, their oscitancy¹²⁰ and negligence in transcribing the old heathen authors, Homer, Aristotle, Tully, we think it not tolerable in a Christian, or any one that hath the least sense of the nature and importance of the Word, or the care of God towards His church. Shall we think that men who wrote out books wherein themselves and others were no more concerned than it is possible for men to be in the writings of the persons mentioned, and others like them, had as much reason to be careful and diligent in that they did as those who knew and considered that every letter and tittle that they were transcribing was part of the Word of the great God, wherein the eternal concernment of their own souls and souls of others did lie? Certainly, whatever may be looked for from the religious care and diligence of men lying under a loving and careful aspect from the promise and providence of God, may be justly expected from them who undertook that work. However, we are ready to own all their failings that can be proved. To assert in this case without proof is injurious.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 350.

¹¹⁹ **subserviency** – serving as a means to an end.

¹²⁰ **oscitancy** – drowsiness manifested by yawning.

The Jews have a common saying among them—that *to alter one letter of the law is no less sin than to set the whole world on fire*; and shall we think that in writing it they took no more care than a man would do in writing out Aristotle or Plato, who for a very little portion of the world would willingly have done his endeavour to get both their works out of it? Considering that the Word to be transcribed was every *iota* and tittle of it, the Word of the great God; that that which was written, and as written, was proposed as His, as from Him; that if any failings were made, innumerable eyes of men, owning their eternal concernment to lie in that Word, were open upon it to discover it, and thousands of copies were extant to try it by; and all this known unto and confessed by every one that undertook this work—it is no hard matter to prove their care and diligence to have outgone that of other common scribes of heathen authors. The truth is, they are prodigious things that are related of the exact diligence and reverential care of the ancient Jews in this work, especially when they intrusted a copy to be a rule for the trial and standard of other private copies.¹²¹

Owen draws his discussion on the transmission of the biblical texts to a close by emphatically rejecting the view that the question of the history of the conveyance of the original texts is strictly a matter of historical investigation and that the doctrine of providential preservation should be kept entirely out of the picture. He states:

It can, then, with no colour of probability be asserted (which yet I find some learned men too free in granting), namely, that there hath the same fate attended the Scripture in its transcription as hath done other books. Let me say without offence, this imagination, asserted on deliberation, seems to me to border on atheism. Surely the promise of God for the preservation of His Word, with His love and care of His church, of whose faith and obedience that Word of His is the only rule, requires other thoughts at our hands.¹²²

Owen then sets down twelve propositions that describe the way in which he believed divine providence operated to ensure that the Scripture was “kept pure in all ages”:

1. The *providence of God* in taking care of His Word, which He hath magnified above all His name, as the most glorious product of His wisdom and goodness, His great concernment in this Word answering His promise to this purpose; 2. The *religious care* of the church (I speak not of the Romish synagogue) to whom these oracles of God were committed; 3. The care of the first writers in giving out *authentic copies* of what they had received from God unto many, which might be rules to the first transcribers; 4. The *multiplying copies* to such a number that it was impossible any should corrupt them all, wilfully or by negligence; 5. The preservation of the *authentic copies*, first in the Jewish synagogues, then in the Christian assemblies, with reverence and diligence; 6. The *daily reading* and studying of the word by all sorts of persons, ever since its first writing, rendering every alteration liable to immediate observation and discovery, and that all over the world; with, 7. The consideration of the many *millions* that looked on every letter and tittle in this book as their inheritance, which for the whole world they would not be deprived of: and in particular, for the Old Testament (now most questioned [i.e., in Owen’s day]); 8. The care of Ezra and his companions, *the men of the great synagogue*, in restoring the Scripture to its purity when it had met with the greatest trial that it ever underwent in this world, considering the paucity of the copies then extant; 9. The *care of the Masoretes* from his days and

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 355-356.

¹²² Ibid., p. 357.

downward, to keep perfect and give an account of every syllable in the Scripture... 10. The *constant consent* of all copies in the world, so that, as sundry learned men have observed, there is not in the whole Mishna, Gemara, or either Talmud, any one place of Scripture found otherwise read than as it is now in our copies; 11. The security we have that no mistakes were voluntarily or negligently brought into the text before the coming of our Saviour, Who was to *declare* all things, in that He not once reproves the Jews on that account, when yet for their false glosses on the Word He spares them not; 12. Afterward the watchfulness which the two nations of Jews and Christians had always one upon another—with sundry things of the like importance, might to this purpose be insisted on.¹²³

Because of this wonderful working of divine providence in the preservation of the Biblical text, Owen and the Reformers were convinced of “the purity of the present original copies of the Scripture, or rather copies in the original languages, which the church of God doth now and hath for many ages enjoyed as her chiefest treasure...”¹²⁴ He confidently asserted “that *the whole Scripture*, entire as given out from God, without any loss, is preserved in the *copies of the originals* yet remaining...In them all, we say, is every letter and tittle of the Word.”¹²⁵ Because of “the providential preservation of the whole book of God...we may have full assurance that we enjoy the whole revelation of His will in the copies abiding amongst us...”¹²⁶ Surely, “every letter and tittle of the Word of God remains in the copies preserved by His merciful providence for the use of His church.”¹²⁷ When Owen speaks of the “copies of the originals” preserved unto the church by God, he is referring to the manuscripts of the Byzantine NT text and of the Masoretic OT text. Therefore, by these statements Owen is defending the purity and authority of the TR and Masoretic text and is rejecting the idea that it is proper to amend these received texts by human conjecture, by readings in obviously corrupt codices¹²⁸ (such as codex D), by readings that differ from “the concurrent consent of...all others that are extant in the world”¹²⁹ (i.e., from the consent of the manuscripts of the Byzantine textual family), or by translations of the biblical text. For Owen and the Reformed church, the common received texts of Scripture were the sole standard of truth for judging doctrine, translations, or textual variants. Owen states:

Let it be remembered that the vulgar¹³⁰ copy we use was the public possession of many generations—that upon the invention of printing it was in actual authority throughout the world with them that used and understood that language...let that, then, pass for the standard, which is confessedly its right and due...¹³¹

¹²³ Ibid., p. 358.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 353.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 357.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 367.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 359.

¹²⁸ **codex** or **codices** (*pl.*) – the book form, as opposed to a scroll, of an ancient manuscript.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 366.

¹³⁰ **vulgar** – common language.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Letis points out that “Owen was calling for a *canonical* view of the text, or the text as canon, by which to assess variants—but variants from the providentially preserved, canonical form of the texts of Scripture.”¹³²

Owen fully understood the grave danger to the authority of Scripture if the doctrine of providential preservation was set aside and with it the canonical view of the original texts. He, as a good Calvinist, knew of “the vanity, curiosity, pride, and naughtiness of the heart of man,”¹³³ and that the boldness of the critics in attacking the received text by collecting and publishing variants from that text was not primarily due to a desire to give the church a better text, but rather to publish them as evidence of their own scholarship and diligence. More significantly, Owen saw that this rejection of the doctrine of preservation and the acceptance of the supposition that the received texts were corrupt was theologically motivated, and that this premise would lead to all kinds of mischief and be used as a principal tool of Satan for the overthrow of the souls of many. Owen declared that:

What use hath been made, and is as yet made, in the world, of this supposition, that corruptions have befallen the originals of the Scripture, which those various lections at first view seem to intimate, I need not declare. It is, in brief, the foundation of Mohammedanism (Alcor. Azoar. 5), the chiefest and principal prop of Popery, the only pretense of fanatical anti-scripturalists, and the root of much hidden atheism in the world. At present there is sent unto me by a very learned person, upon our discourse on this subject, a treatise in English with the Latin title of “*Fides Divinia*,” wherein its nameless author, on this very foundation, labours to evert¹³⁴ and utterly render useless the whole Scripture. How far such as he may be strengthened in their infidelity by the consideration of these things [i.e., the supposed corruption of the originals] time will manifest.¹³⁵

Surely, says Owen, the assumption that the received texts are corrupt will be:

as an engine suited to the destruction of the important truth before pleaded for [i.e., verbal inspiration and providential preservation], and as a fit weapon put into the hands of men of atheistical minds and principles, such as this age abounds withal, to oppose the whole evidence of truth revealed in the Scripture. I fear, with some, either the pretended *infallible judge* [the Roman Church] or the *depth of atheism* will be found to lie at the door of these considerations.¹³⁶

Owen, unlike his Reformed descendants of today, was keenly aware of the theological issues at stake in the textual criticism of the original language texts of the Bible. He had witnessed firsthand the way in which the Roman Catholics attacked the authority of Scripture by means of textual criticism. He said, “Papists have ploughed with their heifer to disparage¹³⁷ the original, and to cry up the Vulgar Latin.”¹³⁸ He also believed that natu-

¹³² Letis, “John Owen Versus Brian Walton: A Reformed Response to the Birth of Text Criticism,” p. 161.

¹³³ Owen, *The Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of Scripture*, p. 363.

¹³⁴ **evert** – overthrow.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 352-353.

¹³⁷ **disparage** – to represent as being of little worth.

realistic text criticism principles, which set aside preservation and the canonical texts of the Reformation and sought to indicate the corruption of these texts, undermined the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, and worked “to frighten poor unstable souls into the arms of the pretended infallible guide.”¹³⁹ Owen solemnly warned the Protestant Church: “We went from Rome under the conduct of the *purity* of the originals; I wish none have a mind to return thither again under the pretense of their *corruption*.”¹⁴⁰

The textual criticism of the Bible has never been and never will be a neutral enterprise carried out by scholars who just want to know the “facts.” In truth, every textual critic approaches the matter with definite presuppositions concerning the nature of Scripture and concerning the locus¹⁴¹ of authority for determining the true text. Owen’s work helps us to understand that there are really only three approaches to the textual criticism of the original texts of Scripture: 1) the Protestant approach which presupposes the authority of Scripture to delimit the true text by means of the doctrines of divine inspiration and preservation; 2) the Roman Catholic approach which presupposes the authority of the Roman Church to define the text of Scripture by means of the pronouncement of the Pope or Councils; and, 3) the “antiscripturalist” (or “atheist”) approach which presupposes the authority of man’s reason to determine the text of the Bible according to the scientific method.

In our day, the third method reigns supreme among both liberal and evangelical scholars—though many of those who hold to this system would be indignant at having their “scholarly” method labeled as the “anti-scripturalist” or “atheist” approach to text criticism, yet it is undeniable that their methodology is naturalistic to the core. This method arose during the era of the Enlightenment (the period between the close of the 17th and the 18th centuries) when men sought to cast off the authority of the revelation of God in Scripture and replace it with the absolute authority of human reason. The Enlightenment advocated full human autonomy and the power of man’s intellect to establish truth and morality. Biblical scholars applied this perspective to textual criticism; consequently, they rejected the doctrines of verbal inspiration and providential preservation (or at least considered them irrelevant to the task of textual criticism), declared that the Bible should be treated like any other book, and established certain canons of criticism that should be used to determine the true text. These scholars were adamant in their belief that the TR was a corrupt and debased form of the NT text and were united in their goal to “dethrone” the Protestant canonical text and replace it with one of their own making. The results of this Enlightenment (“anti-scripturalist”) approach to textual criticism can be seen today in the N-A and UBS editions of the Greek NT. It is upon these editions that the modern English translations of the NT are based.

But Owen’s treatise challenges us to see modern Enlightenment textual criticism for what it truly is. Owen calls the church to return to the Reformed and Protestant ap-

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 362.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 365.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 370.

¹⁴¹ **locus** – place in which something is situated.

proach to textual criticism and to the canonical texts of the Reformation: the Masoretic Text of the OT and the *Textus Receptus* of the NT. A recovery of the Reformed approach that is based on the theological foundations of verbal inspiration and providential preservation will enable the church to cast off the unsound (humanistic) theories and methods of modern textual criticism and the modern critical text. Freed from the grip of naturalistic textual criticism¹⁴² the church will once again confess its faith in the purity of the original texts of Scripture that have been received for centuries as the authentic Word of God; the church will exchange the skepticism of the text of yesterday (i.e., the MCT) for the certitude of the text of centuries (i.e., the TR and Masoretic text); the church will again have a “canonical” view of the original text instead of the current “cannot know for sure” view of the text.

The recovery of the confessional Reformed view of God’s providential preservation of the Scriptures as taught by Owen is necessary if the church is to get on with the task of fulfilling the Great Commission of discipling the nations. If we are to build the kingdom of God in heathen lands and rebuild the kingdom of God in those lands where the church once flourished, we can only do this on the sure foundation of faith in the purity of our present Scripture texts. Andrew Sandlin put it well: “...[I]f we expect to rebuild Christian civilization on the Bible, we must espouse an understanding of the Bible that guarantees its verbal inspiration and infallibility...We cannot expect to rebuild Christian civilization apart from a verbally inspired Bible *in which we have confidence as such*.”¹⁴³

Appendix 2: The “King James Only” Error

In this book, *English Bible Translations: By What Standard?*, we have argued for the superiority of the Authorized Version (KJV) of the English Bible over all other ancient and modern English translations of the Bible. We have specifically stated,

The doctrinal standards of verbal inspiration and providential preservation lead to the conclusion that the Authorized (King James) Version is the best and most trustworthy English version of Holy Scripture. The Authorized Version is firmly based on the traditional, providentially preserved original texts of Scripture (the Masoretic text and the *Textus Receptus*), and it is an excellent formal equivalent translation; therefore, it ought to be received as a

¹⁴² Modern textual criticism has a great dilemma on its hands. On the one hand, it strives to reconstruct the original autographic text of Scripture. Yet on the other hand, it believes that the actual reconstruction of the autographs is “an unattainable mirage.” Modern naturalistic textual critics are, therefore, working to attain what they believe is unattainable! All of their scholarly effort is expended to reconstruct something they believe they cannot reconstruct and to discover something that they could not recognize even if they did discover it. The “quest” of textual critics to discover the historical original text of Scripture is akin to the “quest” of the liberal critics to find the “historical Jesus.” The church must repudiate both of these futile quests, along with the unbiblical presuppositions that motivate them, and rest in the words and doctrines revealed in the Scriptures delivered to the church by the good providence of God.

¹⁴³ Andrew Sandlin, “The Reconstructionist View of Scripture,” *Chalcedon Report* 367 (February 1996), p. 4.

true and faithful presentation of the Word of God in English. No other version can surpass or even match the Authorized Version's faithfulness to the form of the original; its quality English; its completeness; its loyalty to the traditional texts; its spirituality; its authoritativeness; and its ecclesiastical usage.

On this basis, we have called the English-speaking church to return to the AV (i.e., the KJV) as the standard English Bible, to use this Bible in its public reading and preaching, and to exhort the members of the church "to use the Authorized Version in their homes and to bring this Bible to the public services and gatherings of the church."

This measured but definitive stance on the subject of English Bible translations will be understood by many, no doubt, to be a variety of what is called the "King James only" position. However, such a conclusion would be false and based on a misunderstanding of the position taken in this book. Therefore, to make sure we are not mistaken as a "KJV only" view, this appendix will state in summary form our overall perspective on the KJV in relation to the original language texts of Scripture, to the confessions of the English Reformed churches, and to other English translations.

God's revelation was given in the OT in Hebrew and in the NT in Greek. Therefore, these original texts hold a unique place in the plan of God and hold a position of supreme authority in the church. All versions of the Bible, whether they are ancient (e.g., Syriac, Coptic, Latin, Armenian) or modern (e.g., German, Dutch, French, English), are based on and translated from the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Hence, all translations of the Bible are subordinate to the Hebrew and Greek texts, because it is from these original texts that they derive their being and authority. Without the prior existence of the originally inspired Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, they could not exist and would have no authority at all. The fidelity of a Bible translation to these original texts determines the quality of the translation. A translation is good or bad depending on its adherence to the text and meaning of the original. Consequently, a translation of the Bible is the infallible and all-sufficient Word of God to the degree that it conforms to the text of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, in word, grammatical structure, and meaning.

Because the KJV is an outstanding translation of the originally inspired and providentially preserved texts of Holy Scripture (the Masoretic text of the Hebrew OT and the Received Text of the Greek NT), it is a trustworthy and authoritative version. In fact, when all things are considered and when all the available English versions are judged on the basis of the doctrines of verbal inspiration and providential preservation, the KJV proves itself superior to all the other versions. Therefore, the position taken in this book is that it should be considered the *standard* English Bible. However, no matter how high we regard the KJV, it is still subordinate to the Masoretic text of the Hebrew OT and the Received Text of the Greek NT upon which it is based.

This perspective on the final authority of the original language texts of Scripture is the position taken in the major doctrinal confessions of those adhering to the Reformed faith in the English-speaking world. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Savoy*

Declaration, and the *London Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689) all contain the following declaration:

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal to them.

This doctrinal confession asserts three very important things about the Hebrew OT and the Greek NT. First, these texts (and these alone) are immediately (directly) inspired of God. The miracle of inspiration applies only to the original writings of the men who wrote the Hebrew OT and the Greek NT. The quality of inspiration is present in translation, but only to the degree that the translation conforms to the original language texts of Scripture.

Second, these immediately inspired texts have been kept pure in all ages by the supernatural work of divine preservation. The God Who inspired the original writings has not permitted these writings to be lost, but has exercised such a care over their transmission that they have been available in their essential purity in every age. Therefore, translations of the Scripture are faithful to the Word of God to the extent that they are based on the providentially preserved Hebrew and Greek texts.

Third, the immediately inspired, providentially preserved original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures are the court of final appeal in the church. This does not mean that translations have no authority or that the church is not to appeal to them in deciding the truth of God. What it means is that translations, as good and faithful as they may be, are yet subordinate to the originals they are based on. Because a translation may err here and there or may not present the Word of God with the same clarity as the original texts, the church's doctrine and practice must ultimately rest on the providentially preserved Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture.

This important doctrinal confession on the inspiration, preservation, and authority of the original Hebrew and Greek Bible provides significant support for the perspective on Bible translations set forth in this book: the doctrines of verbal-plenary inspiration and providential preservation are the basis for judging the faithfulness of a translation to the originally inspired Word of God. Verbal inspiration leads to formal equivalence as the method of translation. Providential preservation leads to the received, ecclesiastical, original language texts of the Old and New Testaments as the basis for translation. Because the KJV is a formal equivalent translation of the received, canonical texts of the church's Scripture, it is an authoritative translation that should be used and defended by Bible-believing Christians. None of the modern translations upholds in theory or in practice the doctrinal confessions of the Reformed English-speaking church, as does the KJV.

The confessional stance on the final authority of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures is at odds with the "KJV only" camp—where some claim that the KJV is immediately inspired (i.e., the KJV translators were inspired in same way the biblical au-

thors were inspired). Some even claim that the text of the KJV is superior to extant texts of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures. Such views are heretical in nature and have their origin in the imaginations of men.

Furthermore, the place of the KJV in the history of the English Bible and its relationship to previous English versions is a factor that is often ignored by the “KJV only” advocates. The KJV did not appear in a vacuum, nor is its language the sole product of the men who produced this version. The KJV stands in the line of the great English translations of the Reformation era that began with the outstanding work of William Tyndale and continued up through the Geneva Bible, the direct predecessor of the KJV. The purpose of the KJV translators was not to make a new translation but to build on the labors of those who went before them. Here is how they themselves defined their work in their “Translators to the Reader” preface to the KJV:

But it is high time to leave them, and to shew in brief what we proposed to ourselves, and what course we held, in this our perusal of the Bible. Truly, good Christian reader, we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one...but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against, that hath been our endeavour, that our mark.

The “good one” that they had in mind was the Geneva Bible, and the fact is that the KJV takes over a great portion of the text of Geneva. In doing so, they were incorporating much of the original work of Tyndale because the Geneva Bible itself is based largely upon Tyndale. William Tyndale and the translators of the Geneva Bible were operating on the same theological assumptions about inspiration, preservation, and translations, as were the men who produced the KJV. They were all guided by the same biblical theology and the same divine providence, and they all translated according to the formal equivalence method and from the same received original Hebrew and Greek texts. In consequence, their versions, though not identical, were essentially the same. The unique place of the KJV is that it was the capstone of the Reformation era’s efforts to translate the Bible into English. The KJV translators had a number of factors in their favor, the chief being that they could stand on the shoulders of those who went before them. As such, the KJV surpassed these previous versions; and, in the providence of God, it came to be recognized as the best English Bible due to its own intrinsic merit.

In conclusion, then, the position taken in this book is not what is often called the “KJV only” view and is, in fact, opposed to the “KJV only” perspective. The view presented here is *not* that the KJV is the *only* representation of the Word of God in English (e.g., we believe that the Geneva Bible is also God’s Word in English), but that, all things considered, the KJV is the *best*. The KJV (as all versions are) is subordinate to the Masoretic text of the OT and the Byzantine text of the NT. There is *only one final authority* in the church—the immediately inspired and providentially preserved original language texts of the Bible.

The view on English Bible Translations argued for here is based on the theology and confessions of the Reformed church concerning the inspiration, preservation, and trans-

lation of the Bible. You could say that we take a *confessional view* of Bible translation in this book, and that this confessional view leads us to the conclusion that the KJV is the most faithful and authoritative version of the Bible in English.

Appendix 3: A Sample Church Policy on Translations

The following statement is intended as a guide for churches that desire to take a clear stand with the confessing Protestant church on the issue of English Bible translation, and that also desire to promote the use of the most faithful version available to English-speaking Christians. This pronouncement could be added to a church's confessional documents, or as a separate policy declaration. This statement is only suggestive and can be modified to fit each particular church context and situation.

1. This church confesses its faith in the divine, verbal inspiration and providential preservation of the original Hebrew and Greek texts of Holy Scripture. These original texts, having been kept pure in all ages by God's singular care and providence, are the authentic Word of God and the final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

2. However, because most Christians are not able to understand the original languages of the Bible and must read God's Word in an English translation, and because there are so many English translations of varying quality, it is important for the sake of the truth and unity that this church take a definite position on Bible translation and the accepted English version for church use.

3. There are two primary factors that go into making a translation of the Bible: the translation philosophy to be employed and the determination of the authentic Hebrew and Greek texts to be translated. This church believes that the doctrine of verbal inspiration calls for the translation philosophy of formal equivalence (as opposed to dynamic equivalence), and that the doctrine of providential preservation leads to the acceptance of the traditional received texts of Scripture, the Masoretic text in the Old Testament, and the *Textus Receptus* in the New Testament (as opposed to the modern critical texts).

4. Therefore, only those English versions of the Bible that are based on the traditional received texts and are translated according to the formal equivalent method can be considered faithful and trustworthy representations of the Word of God in English.

5. The English version that *best* meets these standards of translation is the Authorized (King James) Version.

6. Therefore, the accepted English version for use in this church will be the Authorized Version. This means that of all the English translations, only the Authorized Version is to be used in the public reading and teaching of the Scriptures and in all the services and ministries of the church. Furthermore, all members of the church are urged to use the Authorized Version in their homes and to bring this Bible to the public services and gatherings of the church.

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