

IN RESPONSE - THE AUTHORIZED VERSION & THE RECEIVED TEXT, PART 1

by Dennis Prutow

Volume IV, Number 10

October, 1995

Several times during the past several years I have been asked to give my views concerning the so called Received Text, or Textus Receptus, the Greek New Testament standing behind the venerable King James Version of the Bible. One fellow wrote to tell me he would not support a ministry which does not use the King James Bible and does not hold to the Received Text.

A growing number of people within the visible body of Christ adhere to the Authorized Version of the Bible because they believe the Greek text standing behind the Authorized Version was especially preserved by God's providence.

As background in this area of study I venture to suggest several books for further reading. There are two fine volumes which "hold that the Textus Receptus (Traditional Text) is nearest to the Original Manuscripts." They are edited by David Otis Fuller and you may obtain them through Grand Rapids International Publications. The first is simply called *Which Bible?* In an advertisement, it is billed as "a long overdue defense of the worth of the old Authorized Version . . . a defense that is grounded upon the trustworthiness of its underlying text and the faithfulness of the translation." The second book, the dedication of which contains the first quote, is called *True or False? The Wescott-Hort Textual Theory Examined*.

On the other side of the question, I suggest four books. The first two are by Bruce M. Metzger. They are *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* published by Oxford University Press and *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* published by the United Bible Societies. The other two volumes by J. Harold Greenlee are published by Eerdmans. They are: *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* and *Scribes, Scrolls, and Scripture: A Student's guide to New Testament Textual Criticism*. The latter book is more of a layman's guide.

Why discuss these matters? The question keeps coming up. Dear brothers and sisters who hold to the Authorized Version are forming churches with this as a distinctive. What are we to say? It is not

my desire to be divisive here but hopefully irenic. I am simply asked my perspective. I offer it as asked.

The history of the so called Received Text is quite interesting. The first major product of the famous Gutenberg printing press was a "magnificent edition of the Bible. The text was Jerome's Latin Vulgate, and the volume was published at Mayence (Mainz) between 1450 and 1456."¹ In 1514 a Greek New Testament was printed as part of a project in Spain. A cardinal commissioned a Bible in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin, a Polyglot Bible. Because this New Testament was part of a larger project, it was not put on the market immediately.

The first published, marketed, Greek New Testament, was prepared by the Dutch scholar, a humanist, Desiderius Erasmus.

It cannot be determined exactly when Erasmus first decided to prepare an edition of the Greek Testament, but on a visit to Basle in August 1514 he discussed (probably not for the first time) the possibility of such a volume with the well-known publisher Johann Froben. Their negotiations seem to have been broken off for a time, but were resumed in April 1515 while Erasmus was on a visit at the University of Cambridge. It was then that Froben importuned him through a mutual friend, Beatus Rhenanus, to undertake immediately an edition of the New Testament. Doubtless Froben had heard of the forthcoming Spanish Polyglot Bible and, sensing that the market was ready for an edition of the Greek New Testament, wished to capitalize upon that demand. . . .

The printing began on 2 October 1515, and in a remarkably short time (1 March 1516) the entire edition was finished, a large folio volume of about 1,000 pages. . . .

The reception accorded Erasmus' edition, the first published Greek New Testament, was mixed. On the one hand, it found many purchasers

throughout Europe. Within three years a second edition was called for, and the total number of copies of the 1516 and 1519 editions amounted to 3,300. The second edition became the basis of Luther's German translation. On the other hand, in certain circles Erasmus' work was received with suspicion and even outright hostility. . . .

Among the criticisms levelled at Erasmus one of the most serious appeared to be the charge of Stunica, one of the editors of Ximenes' Complutensian Polyglot [the Spanish Polyglot], that his text lacked part of the final chapter of 1 John, namely the Trinitarian statement concerning "the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth" (1 John V. 7-8, King James Version). Erasmus replied that he had not found any Greek manuscript containing these words, though he had in the meanwhile examined several others besides those on which he relied when first preparing his text. In an unguarded moment Erasmus promised that he would insert the *Comma Johanneum*, as it is called, in future editions if a single Greek manuscript could be found that contained the passage. At length such a copy was found—or was made to order! As it now appears, the Greek manuscript had probably been written in Oxford about 1520 by a Franciscan friar named Froy (or Roy), who took the disputed words from the Latin Vulgate. Erasmus stood by his promise and inserted the passage in his third edition (1522) but he indicates in a lengthy footnote his suspicions that the manuscript had been prepared expressly in order to confute him.²

Erasmus' Greek New Testament became the basis for the King James Version.

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¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 95.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 98-101.

IN RESPONSE - THE AUTHORIZED VERSION & THE RECEIVED TEXT, PART 2

by Dennis Prutow

Erasmus produced a fourth and fifth versions of his Greek New Testament. His work was popular because “it was the first on the market and was available in a cheaper and more convenient form.”¹

The famous Parisian printer and publisher, Robert Estienne, latinized as Stephanus (1503—59), issued four editions of the Greek Testament. . . . [T]he third edition (1550) approaches more closely the text of Erasmus’ fourth and fifth editions. As it happened, Stephanus’ third edition became for many persons, especially in England, the received or standard text of the Greek Testament.²

Through Theodore Beza, the Stephanus New Testament gained wider acceptance. “The importance of Beza’s work lies in the extent to which his editions tended to popularize and to stereotype the Textus Receptus. The king James translators of 1611 made large use of Beza’s editions of 1589—9 and 1598.”³

Finally, in 1624, two brothers and printers by the name of Elziver published a Greek New Testament. They based their text on the 1565 edition of Beza.

The preface to the second edition makes the boast that ‘[the reader has] the text which is now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted’. Thus from what was more or less a casual phrase advertising the edition (what modern publishers might call a ‘blurb’), there arose the designation “Textus Receptus”, or commonly received, standard text. Partly because of this catchword the form of Greek text incorporated in the editions that Stephanus, Beza, and the Elzevirs had published succeeded in establishing itself as “the only true text” of the New Testament, and was slavishly reprinted in hundreds of subsequent editions. It lies at the basis of the king James Version. . . .⁴

This Received Text carries with it the disputed words in 1 John 5:7-8. Compare

the King James Version with the New American Standard Version.

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one

Notice the words in italics do not appear in the New American Standard Version: “For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.”

Have the editors of the New American Standard Bible deleted part of the Word of God? Do they stand condemned by the Holy Spirit in Deuteronomy 4:2?

You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

Does the Holy Spirit warn these editors of their error through the apostle John?

If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, (Revelation 22:19).

Historical and textual evidence shows Erasmus was correct in his initial evaluation of 1 John 5:7-8.

The passage is absent from every known Greek manuscript except four. . . . The passage is quoted by none of the Greek Fathers, who, had they known it, would most certainly have employed it in the Trinitarian controversies (Sabelian and Arian). Its first appearance in Greek is in a Greek version of the (Latin) Acts of the Lateran Council in 1215. . . . The passage is absent from the manuscripts of all the ancient versions. . . . The earliest instance of the passage being quoted as a part of the actual text of the Epistle is in a fourth century Latin treatise.⁵

Why did Erasmus include this spurious text? He did not include these words

on the basis of the best evidence he had at his disposal. Our terminology would be he did so to be *politically correct*. Can I therefore endorse the so called Received Text as *the* text of the Greek New Testament preserved by God through the ages? The evidence weighs in against this conclusion.

I agree with the Westminster Confession of Faith and its exposition of this problem and the explanation given by G. I. Williamson. Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8 says in part,

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.

Does this mean all the copies were kept pure or that a certain set of the copies of the New Testament were kept pure? No. Errors inevitably crept in because copyists of Scripture were not themselves inspired nor were they perfect.

And so, while the true (or perfect) original text would not be entirely reproduced in any single copy, yet it would not be lost or inaccessible. . . . The true text would be perfectly preserved within the body of witnesses.⁶

I therefore do not receive the Received Text. I am thankful for the labours of textual scholars who bring us face to face with the “authentic” Scriptures. As one of my seminary professors said, “We know more accurately what the New Testament writers gave us than we know for sure what Shakespeare wrote.” For this reason among others, I prefer the technical analysis of thousands of Greek manuscripts to political correctness.

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¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.103.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

³ *Ibid.* p. 105.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975), pp. 715-716.

⁶ G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), p. 16.

IN RESPONSE - A CAPPELLA PSALMODY AND HERMENEUTICS

by Dennis Prutow

One of the criticisms raised against a cappella psalmody is that the word *psalm* means to *sing praise with a musical instrument*. For example, we should understand Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14:26, to say, "When you come together, each one has a psalm (a sacred song, sung to musical accompaniment). . . ." End of argument. A cappella singing is contrary to the very meaning of the word *psalm*.

How do those of us who hold to the a cappella singing of psalms answer? We might simply say words change their meaning. We know this is true. It is not inconceivable the word *psalm* once referred solely to sacred songs sung to musical accompaniment. To this we heartily agree. However, the word is no longer used with this specific denotation. The word *psalm* simply refers to the songs found in the Old Testament Psalter. The word no longer carries with it the connotation of instrumental accompaniment.

This is a perfectly legitimate way to interpret the word *psalm* in the New Testament if we can display the reason for the change in meaning; and if we can show the hermeneutical procedure used in the process of establishing the change in meaning is valid. The theological reason for the change was given in previous lessons.¹ We now look at the interpretive procedure, the hermeneutics.

Generally, we are dealing with Old Testament commands carried into the New Testament. A. A. Hodge gives us the principle of interpretation involved.

When the continued obligation of any commandment is asserted or practically recognized in the New Testament, it is plain that the change of dispensations has made no change in the law. Thus the provisions of the moral law are constantly recognized in the New Testament. On the other hand, when the enactment is specifically repealed, or its abrogation implied by what is taught in the New Testament, the case is also made plain.²

When we speak of the law of God in general, we recognize three aspects of that law in the Old Testament, the ceremonial, civil, and moral.³ Regarding Israel and the civil law, the Westminster Confession of Faith says,

To them also, as a body politic, He [God] gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of the people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.⁴

The civil law was set aside when the ancient nation of Israel expired. As a result, we no longer enforce the civil law in our present culture according to its ancient specificity. We do not punish infidelity by stoning. A. A. Hodge explains,

That the judicial laws of the Jews have ceased to have a binding obligation upon us follows plainly, from the fact that the peculiar relations of the people to God as a theocratical King, and to one another as fellow-members of an Old Testament Church State, to which these laws were adapted, now no longer exists.⁵

Here is an example of Old Testament commandments set aside in the New Testament.

We find the same thing to be true regarding the ceremonial law. The burden of the Old Testament ceremony was to typify Christ and the manifold grace of God through Christ. When Christ came, fulfilling the typological significance of these Old Testament ceremonies, their obligatory nature ceased. Scripture is quite clear on this. The writer to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 40:6-8 and then interprets the Psalm for us.

After saying above, 'Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast not desired, nor hast Thou taken pleasure in them' (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Thy will.' He takes away the first in order to establish the second (Hebrews 10:8-9).

The ceremonial law is taken away in order to establish the work of Christ by which it is superseded. Here is another example of Old Testament ordinances abrogated by New Testament teaching.

What about the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments?

[T]he moral law continues of unabated authority, not only because its elements are intrinsically binding, but because, also, of the authority of God, who still continues to enforce it. And

Christ, instead of lessening, has greatly increased the obligation to fulfill it.⁶

Christ explains the pervasive extent of the requirements of the moral law (Matthew 5:17-48). Christ does not set aside the moral law; He affirms it.

Within the moral law we have the same principles operative regarding the Fourth Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). This Commandment, along with the rest of the moral law, remains binding upon Christians today. However, two significant changes have been made as we move from the Old Testament dispensation into the New Testament. First, the day of observance is changed from the seventh day to the first. Second, the Fourth Commandment is stripped of its ceremonial baggage. For example, there were, in the Old Testament, several distinctively ceremonial Sabbaths. We do not observe these. Nor do we observe the Sabbath in exactly the same way ancient Israel did with particular sacrifices and offerings. Yet we still observe the Sabbath minus these ceremonial appendages.

This is exactly the situation with a cappella psalmody. We still rejoice in the psalms minus their ceremonial accouterments, instrumental accompaniment. There is good reason, hermeneutical and theological, to see a change in the meaning of the word *psalm* as we pass from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

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¹ See 'In Response' Volume IV, Number 9, September 1995, *A Cappella Singing in Worship*.

² A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), p. 256.

³ Westminster Confession of Faith, XIX:I-IV.

⁴ Westminster Confession of Faith, XIX:IV.

⁵ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), p. 256.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

IN RESPONSE - SYNOD'S RESOLUTION "IN THE LORD"?

by Dennis Prutow

A former president of the United States said, "If you can't take the heat, stay out of the kitchen." So it is. I have taken a lot of heat for my outspoken criticism of the resolution approved by the 1995 Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church "that ecclesiastical discipline and exclusion from office be suspended for all who take exception to the abstinence clause of Query #8 for conscience sake. . . ."

Some have called me to repent of my position. Others have indicated my statements open me to charges in the courts of the church. On the other side, many statements of approval and support have crossed my desk. One prominent member of the denomination wrote in support and went so far as to call Synod's resolution "at worst nefarious."

One respondent stated regarding the Resolution, "At Synod I do not recall anyone challenging it as an unconstitutional move . . . unwise, yes; sudden, yes; too late, yes. . . ." This statement is in keeping with others maintaining the Resolution was approved by Synod in a desire to follow Scripture. I respond that such a position is oxymoronic. If the Resolution passed by Synod was in fact unwise, sudden, and too late, then it was *not done in the Lord* (1 Corinthians 7:39).

First Corinthians 7:39 has to do with the requirements for marriage, specifically the requirements placed upon widows. "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." The final phrase places a vital prerequisite upon the selection of a life long mate. There are two related interpretations of this phrase.

In the first place, the primary stipulation is that both the subjects of marriage be Christians. To marry *in the Lord* is to marry a believer. This is in keeping with the injunctions given to Israel through Moses in Deuteronomy 7:1-4.

When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven

nations greater and stronger than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.

There is a second interpretation worthy of our consideration and attention. Calvin says with regard to the phrase *in the Lord*,

People take it for granted that this is added to let Paul warn them, in passing, that they must not enter on the yoke of marriage with unbelievers, or be eager for their companionship. Although I acknowledge the truth of that, my opinion is that these words include more than that, viz. that they should enter on this second marriage reverently and in the fear of the Lord. For it is in that way a favourable start is given to marriage.¹

There is a cloud of witnesses surrounding this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:39. *In the Lord* "forbids union with heathen; it also forbids any union formed with un-christian motives and otherwise than under Christ's sanction."² So the phrase *in the Lord* involves heart attitude in addition to outward action. *In the Lord* also refers to our union and communion in the body of Christ. "In Marriage, as in all else, the Christian must be mindful that he acts as a member of Christ's body."³ All our action affect the greater body of Christ.

In addition, Matthew Henry adds, In our choice of relations, and change of conditions, we should always have an eye to God. Note, marriages are likely to have God's blessing only when they are made in the Lord, when persons are guided by the fear of God, and the laws of God, and act in dependence on the providence of God. . . .⁴

Charles Hodge tells us, "[T]he phrase may be taken adverbially as expressing manner, *as becomes those who are in the Lord*, i.e. in a Christian manner."⁵

I suggest we examine the Resolution of Synod in this light. Was it unwise? Yes. Sudden? Yes. Too late? Yes.

Was it unwise? Since, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10); and because, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7), to act *in the Lord*, according to Calvin, would be to act with wisdom and prudence. But our respondent admits the Resolution of Synod *was unwise*. It was therefore out of accord with Scripture. It was not done *in the Lord*.

Was it sudden? It was certainly unanticipated. Some thought it was rash. Was the Resolution brought late in the day? We counsel our youth not to make crucial decisions when we are weary and unable to think through all the ramifications. Sudden, unexpected, impulsive actions are generally unwise. They are not done *in the Lord*. So Synod's Resolution.

I am well aware my detractors will turn this argument against me. Did I make my critique *in the Lord*? Was I wise in my analysis and properly cautious in my publication? I take the critique seriously. I pray those who support the Resolution of Synod approach the matter with equal seriousness?

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¹ John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 168.

² *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), vol. II, p. 838.

³ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 123.

⁴ *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), vol. VI, p. 544.

⁵ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 134.