

The Textual Controversy

Verse No.	Version of the Bible					
	KJV	NIV	NASV	NCV	NRSV	RSV
Matthew 17:21	YES			REMOVED		
Matthew 18:11	YES			REMOVED		
Matthew 23:14	YES			REMOVED		
Mark 7:16	YES			REMOVED		
Mark 9:44	YES			REMOVED		
Mark 9:46	YES			REMOVED		
Mark 11:26	YES			REMOVED		
Mark 15:28	YES			REMOVED		
Luke 17:36	YES			REMOVED		
Luke 23:17	YES			REMOVED		
John 5:4	YES			REMOVED		
Acts 8:37	YES			REMOVED		
Acts 15:34	YES			REMOVED		
Acts 24:7	YES			REMOVED		
Acts 28:29	YES			REMOVED		
Romans 16:24	YES			REMOVED		

This is the next chapter of the book, [The Foundations Under Attack: The Roots of Apostasy – By Michael de Semlyen](#)

Chapter 9 The Textual Controversy

In the Preface of the NIV we read, “the Greek text used in translating the New Testament was an eclectic one.” Eclectic refers to the practice of using a number of differing manuscripts to select verses or portions of Scripture at the sole discretion of those scholars appointed to the task. The Preface further explains, “the translators made their choice of readings according to accepted principles of New Testament textual criticism.” The “accepted principles” refer to those laid down for posterity by Westcott and Hort. The controversial theories of these two men have determined the accepted method of New Testament criticism for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and beyond.

Unlike 1611, when there was total unanimity among the group of scholars—godly men who were sold out for Christ and who worked entirely in the open—the 1881 committee, which met secretly, was not united. One indicator as to why unity was not achieved was the inclusion of a Unitarian at the insistence of both Westcott and Hort. They had both made this a resigning issue. The minority, dissenting view was publicly represented by John Burgon, Dean of Chichester, a strenuous upholder of the Majority (Byzantine) Text, the Textus Receptus, which he called the Traditional Text. Burgon, who is ranked among Victorian textual scholars alongside Tregelles, Scrivener, and Tischendorf, was sufficiently challenged by the Oxford Movement’s assault on the Scriptures to dedicate his life to the defence of what he regarded as the infallible Word of God. He believed that the traditional text was the true text, which by perpetual tradition, generation by generation, had been handed down by God’s grace and providence, unfailingly, from the time of the apostles. God had fulfilled His promise to preserve His Word.

"I am utterly disinclined to believe," wrote Dean Burgon, "that after 1800 years, 995 copies out of every thousand, suppose, will prove untrustworthy; and that the one, two, three, four or five that remain ... will be found to contain what the Holy Spirit originally inspired. I am utterly unable to believe, in short, that God's promise has so entirely failed, that at the end of 1800 years much of the text of the Gospel had in point of fact to be picked out of a wastepaper-basket by a German critic [Professor Tischendorf] in the convent of St Catherine."¹

¹ Professor Tischendorf's account states that Sinaiticus was discovered among other manuscripts stored in St. Catherine's Roman Catholic convent near Mount Sinai in Egypt.

In his book *Revision Revised*, Burgon wrote in the dedication to his friend Viscount Cranbrook:

"My one object has been to defeat the mischievous attempt, which was made in 1881 to thrust upon this Church and Realm a revision of the Sacred Text, which recommended though it be by eminent names, I am thoroughly convinced, and am able to prove, is untrustworthy from beginning to end. The English (as well as the Greek) of the newly revised version is hopelessly at fault. It is to me simply unintelligible how a company of scholars can have spent ten years in elaborating such an unsatisfactory production. Their uncouth phraseology and their jerky sentences, their pedantic obscurity and their unidiomatic English, contrast painfully with the 'happy turns of expression, the music of cadences, the felicities of the rhythm' of our Authorised Version.



Dean John Burgon

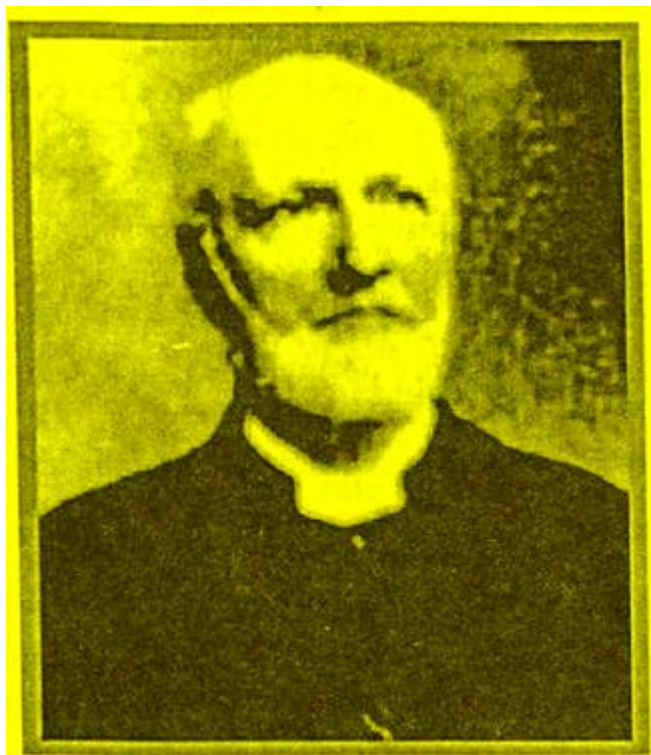
"The transition from one to the other, as the Bishop of Lincoln (Christopher Wordsworth (1807-1885), author of *Is The Papacy Predicted by St Paul?* and *Rome Babylon and the Apocalypse*,) remarks, is 'like exchanging a well-built carriage for a vehicle without springs, in which you get jolted to death on a newly mended and rarely traversed road.' But the Revised Version is inaccurate as well; exhibits defective scholarship, I mean, in countless places.

"It is, however, the systematic depravation of the underlying Greek which does so grievously offend me; for this is nothing else than the poisoning of the 'River of Life' at its sacred source. Our Revisers, (with the best and purest intentions, no doubt) stand convicted of having substituted for them fabricated readings, which the Church has long since refused to acknowledge, or else has rejected with abhorrence; and which only survive at this time in a little handful of documents of the most depraved type. ... We venture to assure the reader without a particle of hesitation that Aleph [Sinaiticus], B [Vaticanus], and D [Bezae] are three of the most scandalously corrupt copies extant; exhibit the most shamefully mutilated texts which are to be met with; and have become by whatever process (for their history is wholly unknown) the depositaries of the largest amount of fabricated readings, ancient blunders and intentional perversions of truth which are discoverable in any known copies of the word of God."

However Dean Burgon's views and those of the Bishop of Lincoln failed to carry the day and the "revised editions" were published in Britain and the United States to widespread acclaim. The stakes in that momentous controversy simply could not have been higher. "If Burgon was right and Hort wrong, then Hort pulled off the tour de force of all time," was one commentator's summary of what had taken place. If this were so, it would prove to be, in Burgon's words, "the most astonishing, as well as the most calamitous literary blunder of the Age."

The American Revision Committees – Dr. Philip Schaff

The American Revised Version and its Committees followed on from the radical work of its English counterpart. As in England, two companies were formed for Revision—one for the Old Testament, the other for the New Testament. Bishop Ellicott and Dr. Angus of the English Revision Committee asked Dr. Philip Schaff to take the lead in America and in conjunction with them he selected the other committee members, drew up the provisional draft of the Constitution and organised the first American meeting. He often travelled to England to confer with Ellicott, Westcott, and Hort. Like the two Cambridge Professors who were dominant on the English committee, Schaff was the prime mover for all the work of both Old Testament and New Testament Committees in America and chaired them both. One Old Testament Committee member, Dr. T.W. Chambers, remarked that, "the Christian public is indebted to Philip Schaff more than to all other persons together."



Dr. Philip Schaff

Dr. Schaff's theology seems to have been as deviant from orthodoxy as that of his two colleagues in England, Westcott and Hort. Like both English professors he was a liberal evolutionist, and he also declared himself a follower of the pantheistic German theologian Schleiermacher, whom he described as "the greatest theological genius since the Reformation." His life's work, *The History of The Apostolic Church*, begun in 1853, reveals theories and doctrines so startling that several leading theological journals in America and Canada denounced them as anti-Scriptural and anti-Protestant. In classifying the sources of history, he puts in the first rank "the official letters, decrees and bulls of Popes," pronouncing them "pure, original utterances of history."

Schaff was twice tried for heresy by his denomination and taught at the very liberal Union Seminary. As chairman of the revision committee, Dr. Schaff not only was greatly influenced by Westcott and Hort, but also by the Unitarians Ezra Abbot and Joseph Thayer, of Harvard, as well as other liberals whom he placed on the committee. Most new versions since that time have adopted the same presuppositions as did those 19th century revisers.

The unease about the suitability of Dr. Schaff as Head of the American Standard committee was expressed in the 1854 New Brunswick Review. "Through the misty drapery of Dr. Schaff's philosophy, every essential feature of the papal system stands forth with a prominence so sharply defined, as to leave doubt impossible and charity in despair," said one reviewer. The following quotation from contemporary writers of standing present the danger of Schaff's teachings:

"It is quite time that the churches of our country should awake to the extent and the tendencies of this movement in the midst of American Protestantism.

After a series of advances and retractions, strongly resembling the advances of the Tractarian party in England, we have at length a bold avowal of the 'Primacy of Peter', the fundamental and test doctrine of the Papacy, followed by a concession of every vital point of Christianity—Church, Ministry, Worship, Sacraments, and the Right of Private Judgment—to Romanism, and that, too, while the name and the forms of Protestantism are (as far as possible) studiously retained."

Dr. B. G. Wilkinson, in his 1930 book, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, described the Gnostic influence that could be traced from Origen and the third-century corrupted text through to the Oxford Movement, Newman, and the textual bias of the Revisionists in England and America:

"As the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are evidently the product of Gnosticism, what would be more natural than that the Catholicism of Newman and the Gnosticism of his followers, who now flood the Protestant churches, would seek, by every means possible, to reinstate in leadership Gnosticism's old title-papers, the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus? Cardinal Newman believed that tradition and the Catholic Church were above the Bible. Westcott and Hort, great admirers of Newman, were leaders of the Revision Committee. ... Dr. Schaff sat in the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, in 1893, and was so happy among the Buddhists, Confucianists, Shintoists, and other world religions, that he said that 'he would be willing to die among them.' The spirit of the Revisionists on both sides of the ocean was an effort to find the Word of God by the study of comparative religions. This is the spirit of Gnosticism; it is not true faith in the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible."

The Effect of Textual Criticism on Contemporary "Bibles"

Few Christians are aware of how in many respects the New International Version (NIV) is very much closer to the New World Translation (NWT), the Bible of the Jehovah's Witnesses, than it is to the King James. The same verses at odds with those in the KJV are again and again to be found in both versions. The same omissions are made, except that whereas the NIV often records the verse omitted as a footnote, the NWT leaves it out altogether. As Reverend Charles Salliby writes in his 1994 book *If the Foundations Be Destroyed*, "the NIV is clearly an 'Interdenominational (and ecumenical) masterpiece' that can cross any church threshold and make all within happy with whatever they believe. With this translation you could prove or disprove the Virgin Birth, or indeed the Deity of Jesus. ... Something to ponder: I do not know of one Christian who uses a New World Translation nor have I ever heard that such a Christian exists. Have you? Yet the NIV, whose contents so closely resemble those of the NWT, is the best selling Bible in the English speaking world today. If that is not a paradox, what is? (Charles Salliby: *If the Foundations be Destroyed*)

Not many Christians are aware of the extraordinary views held and expressed by Dr. Robert Bratcher, chief translator of the Good News Version, published in 1966 by the American Bible Society. In 1953 Dr. Bratcher had written in a Brazilian Baptist publication that, "Jesus Christ would not enjoy omniscience. That is an attribute of God. ... Jesus did not claim He and the

Father to be one – which would be absurd.”

In a letter to Julius C. Taylor, Dr. Bratcher wrote, “Of course I believe what I wrote in *The Journal Batista* of July 9th 1953.” In 1981 he is quoted as saying: “Only willful ignorance or intellectual dishonesty can account for the claim that the Bible is inerrant and infallible. To invest the Bible with the qualities of inerrancy and infallibility is to idolatry it, to transform it into a false god.” (The Baptist Courier, April 2, 1981.)

The uproar following these and other remarks was such that Dr. Bratcher apologised in a press release. However, his apology was made because he had offended people, not in any way a retraction of the content of the many things that he had written and said. Dr Bratcher, of course, as Westcott and Hort before him, is fully entitled to his beliefs and enjoys the freedom under Christ to express them. However, such liberal beliefs **must inevitably influence the interpretation and translation of Holy Scripture**, and have done so, as we shall demonstrate.

Without venturing any deeper into the complex controversy among textual critics regarding the integrity of the different Greek manuscripts and their deployment in the many new versions, we simply seek to present comparisons of the English translations that speak for themselves.

Continued in [Bible Verse Comparisons](#)

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