

# The Modern Versions – Origins and Influences



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

## Chapter 8 The Modern Versions – Origins and Influences

The 1881 committee that produced the Revised Version, the mother of the majority of today's modern versions, was unimpressed with the weight of the evidence supporting the Received Text, which had been used for English translations by William Tyndale, John Rogers, and Miles Coverdale, as well as later by the 1611 translators.

### The Revising Committee and the Minority Texts

Led by Anglo-Catholic Cambridge Professors Westcott and Hort, the 1881 Revising Committee convinced most of the Church that the "Alexandrian" and "Western" Greek texts should replace the Received Text where the versions differed. Arguing that these Minority Texts were the oldest and therefore the most accurate and pure,<sup>1</sup> they often substituted what may well have been the third century corrupted text of Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome whenever the manuscripts differed. These texts had been rejected by the church fathers of the Antioch School and were also rejected by the Protestant Reformers.

<sup>1</sup> Textus Receptus Traced Back to the Year AD 350 – Surprisingly, of all people, Dr. Hort, testifies to the fact, to which all authorities must agree, that the Greek New Testament of the Textus Receptus type can be traced back very positively to the year AD 350 and is as old as any known manuscript. Hort says; "The fundamental text of the late extant Greek MSS [manuscripts] generally is beyond all question identical with the dominant Antiochian or Graeco-Syrian text of the second half of the fourth century. The community of text implies, on genealogical grounds, a community of parentage; the Antiochian Fathers and the bulk extant MSS written from about three or four to ten or eleven centuries later must have had, in the greater number of extant variations, a common original, either contemporary with or older than our oldest extant MSS, which thus lose at once whatever presumption of

exceptional purity they might have derived from their exceptional antiquity alone," – *Hort's Introduction*, p.92. This gives a greater antiquity to the TR than to the Greek Text of the Revised Version.

Origen, the best known leader of the Alexandrian School, and now very much back in fashion in our theological colleges, taught that Christ was a created being—divine, but in a lesser sense than the Father—although at the same time he did teach the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. Steeped in Gnosticism, he edited a six-column Bible called the *Hexapla*, with a different version of the Bible in each column, and was continually changing Bible verses to accommodate his own philosophical and mystical ideas. Dr. Philip Schaff, who became head of both American Revising Committees (Old and New Testaments) as we shall see, shared many of Origen's Gnostic ideas and wrote of Origen, "his predilection for Plato led him into many grand and fascinating errors."

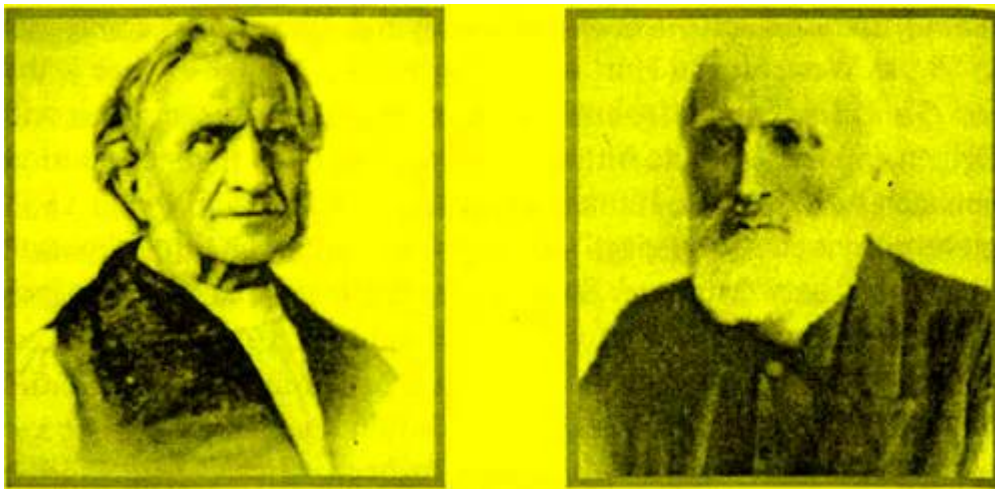
The fifth column of the corrupted Hexapla was copied by Eusebius for Emperor Constantine's new State Church in AD 331. Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, the two key Greek New Testament manuscripts used in the 1881 Revised Bible, may well have derived directly from this source or even have been two of the fifty prepared by Eusebius and others at that time. Many textual authorities believe that Jerome's Latin Vulgate Bible, favoured always by the Church of Rome, also originated from this family of manuscripts, as it is largely in agreement with the Minority Texts.

One of the newly authenticated manuscripts, Codex 'B' or Vaticanus, discovered in 1481 in the Vatican library in Rome and kept there ever since, was of central importance to the revising work. Erasmus, who, along with Beza, Stephanus, and the Elzevirs, edited the *Textus Receptus*, had had access to 'B', also known as Vaticanus, at the beginning of the Reformation, but had rejected it. 3 Manuscripts of the same stable were available to the 1611 translators too, but they also refused to make use of them. Yet to these manuscripts the Westcott and Hort Committee assigned supremacy. American New Testament scholar, Dr. Herman C. Hoskier, who in 1913 had written the lengthy volume *Codex 'B' - A Study and Indictment*, is quoted as saying, "We always come back to 'B', as Westcott and Hort is practically 'B'. My thesis then is that 'B' (Vaticanus) and Aleph (Sinaiticus) and their forerunners, with Origen, who revised the Antioch text, are Egyptian revisions current between AD 200 and 400 and abandoned between 500 and 1881, merely revived in our day." In fact there are over three thousand differences between Aleph Sinaiticus and B Vaticanus in the Gospels alone.

### **Westcott and Hort**

Bruce Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, both brilliant and respected scholars of their day, were dominant on the 1881 Revising Committee. We can learn much about their views and theological positions from their letters and biographies published by their respective sons. Both Cambridge professors were liberal theologians of the new higher critical school, who were greatly influenced by the Oxford Movement, the forerunner of the Ecumenical movement within the Church of England. Both men were anti-Protestant, sacerdotalist, and had pronounced leanings to Mariolatry.

Professor Westcott wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury, "It does not seem to me that the Vaudois [the Waldensians] claim an ecclesiastical recognition. The position of the small Protestant bodies on the Continent is no doubt one of great difficulty. But our church can, I think, only deal with churches growing to fuller life." Hort wrote to Westcott, on September 23, 1864, "I believe Coleridge [Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet <https://www.jamesjpn.net/wp-admin/post-new.php>] was quite right in saying that Christianity without a substantial church is vanity and disillusion; and I remember shocking you and Lightfoot not so long ago by expressing a belief that 'Protestantism' is only parenthetical and temporary." Hort harboured a lifetime hatred of the Received Text, which as early as 1851 he described as "vile, leaning on late manuscripts" and "villainous".



Bruce Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort

Professor Westcott wrote in another letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, "I wish I could see to what forgotten truth Mariolatry bears witness." He saw the Virgin as another manifestation of God. In writing to his fiancée in 1847 about his religious experiences in France, he described a small oratory housing a life-size "Pieta" (Madonna and dead Christ) with place only for one person to kneel. "Had I been alone I could have knelt there for hours."

Professor Hort, who called the doctrines of evangelicals "perverted rather than untrue", described himself as "a staunch sacerdotalist" and declared that "the pure Romish view of the sacraments seems to me nearer, and more likely to lead to the truth than the evangelical... We dare not forsake the sacraments or God will forsake us." He also had been "persuaded for many years that Mary-worship and Jesus-worship have very much in common in their causes and results."

Both men rejected the substitutionary nature of Christ's atonement. In line with Roman Catholic dogma they believed that it was not through Christ's death that He atoned for sin, but through the Incarnation. As Hort wrote to Westcott in 1860, "Certainly nothing could be more unscriptural than the modern limiting of Christ's bearing our sins and sufferings to his death; but indeed that is only one aspect of an almost universal heresy."

Both men favoured the Darwinian hypothesis and the new Old Testament higher criticism and were opposed to a literal interpretation of the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. Neither Westcott nor Hort ever stated that the Bible was verbally inspired or inerrant. Professor Westcott's pioneer work on subjecting the sacred text to critical and sceptical analysis helped to usher in the school of modernism and the work of well-known liberal scholars, like Wellhausen, Karl Barth, Bultmann, and more recently Hans Kung, Dr. John Robinson (author of *Honest To God*), and David Jenkins, who, like Westcott, was a former Bishop of Durham.

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