

**B. G. WILKINSON'S**

**OUR AUTHORIZED BIBLE VINDICATED**

**A Critique**

**by Alden Thompson**

**March 24, 1995**

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## B. G. WILKINSON'S OUR AUTHORIZED BIBLE VINDICATED

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### INTRODUCTION

In the resurgent debate over modern Bible translations, those who claim the King James Version as the only "safe" Bible rely heavily on Benjamin G. Wilkinson's Our Authorized Bible Vindicated (1930)<sup>i</sup>. Not only is Wilkinson a leading source for those writing from an Adventist perspective, such as H. H. Meyers in Battle of the Bibles (1993)<sup>ii</sup> and Russell and Colin Standish in Modern Bible Translations Unmasked (1993)<sup>iii</sup>, but he is also highly esteemed by at least one non-Adventist author as well. The last half of David Otis Fuller's Which Bible? (1970, 1990), for example, is simply a reproduction of key chapters from Wilkinson.<sup>iv</sup>

Is the King James Version the only "safe" Bible for Christians to use? Are modern translations part of a massive and subtle conspiracy to undermine God's Word?

Many devout Christians would answer no. This review of Wilkinson's book and the Standish work based largely upon it seeks to explain why.

### 1. THE POINT OF THE BOOK

Wilkinson's "Foreword" states that he intends to provide evidence of "how

God, through the centuries, intervened to transmit to us a perfect Bible." His "fervent hope" is to "confirm and establish faith in God's Word," a crucial task "in these days when faith is weakening and the Bible is being torn apart."

The title of the first chapter reveals his basic approach: "Fundamentally, Only Two Different Bibles." Bluntly put, he simply means the "pure" Protestant Bible and the "corrupt" Roman Catholic one. Arguing that "down through the centuries there were only two streams of manuscripts," he claims that the pure stream is represented by the Received Text (Textus Receptus) and can be traced from the apostolic church through a succession of "enlightened believers" down to the Waldenses and the Reformers, and finally is manifested in the King James Version.

The corrupt stream, Wilkinson declares, is found in the work of Origen (d. 240), in the Latin Vulgate of Jerome (d. 420), the Roman Catholic Rheims-Douai English translation (1582; 1609-10), the Revised Version (1881-85), and the American Standard Version (1901). He also places the famous fourth-century Greek manuscripts, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, in the same "corrupt" stream.

Wilkinson vividly and consistently contrasts the merits of the Received Text over against the evils of the corrupt line. Though quotations could be multiplied to illustrate his point, two suffice for our purposes here: "The Received Text is harmonious. It agrees with itself, it is self-proving, and it creeps into the affections of the heart" (p. 180). By contrast: "The Revised Version bears the stamp of intentional Systematic Depravation" (p. 182).

Before analyzing Wilkinson's thesis, we should look briefly at the man and at some key factors that shaped his thinking. His thesis departs so dramatically from the generally accepted history of the Bible, that some background information may prove helpful.

## 2. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMES

The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia<sup>v</sup> describes Benjamin G. Wilkinson (1872-1968) as "dean, administrator, evangelist, and author," a man who gave 56 years of active service to his church. Born in Canada, he served in a number of positions of leadership: dean of theology at three Adventist Colleges: Battle Creek College in Michigan, Union College in Nebraska, and Washington Missionary College (Columbia Union) in Washington D.C.; leader of the work in Canada and in Haiti; for four years president of the Latin Conference (Southern European Division), starting work in Rome, Paris, and in Spain; president of local conferences in Kansas and Pennsylvania, and for ten years, president of the Columbia Union (1909-1918). His 24 years of continuous service at Washington Missionary College included 10 years as president (1936-1946).

Wilkinson was one of only a few Adventists of his era to have earned a PhD (George Washington University, 1908). But his two major books, Our Authorized Bible Vindicated (1930) and Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness (1944)<sup>vi</sup>, are both marked by an evangelistic fervor that transcends mere academic interest. Indeed, a few lines in the "Foreword" reveal that urgency took precedence over precision. Producing the book under "great pressure" while continuing as theology professor and pastor of a city church, Wilkinson states that he wrote "in response to urgent requests." And then the tell-tale admission: "It may be possible that there are a few technical mistakes." But he goes on to say that he has "strong confidence" that "the main lines of argument are timely, and that they stand on a firm foundation."

As discussed below, Wilkinson had good reason to fear the presence of "technical mistakes." But this review moves beyond the mere technical and suggests that there are weighty reasons for questioning his "firm foundation" as

well.

His book is dominated by a vigorous two-pronged attack against Catholicism and "modernism." Ironically, writing at a time when official Catholicism was as strident in its opposition to modernism as Wilkinson himself, he portrays Catholics as a major force in the modernist plot. In Our Authorized Bible Vindicated, he argues that the cornerstone of that plot is the attempt to replace the King James Version with revised versions of Scripture.

Wilkinson's anti-Catholicism is rooted in his Adventist heritage. Envisioning a Catholic-Protestant coalition that would enforce Sunday-keeping on pain of death, Adventists had watched with high interest as the United States Congress debated Sunday law bills in 1888 and 1889. Senator Blair, author of the 1888 bill, declared before Congress that "only a homogeneous people can be great. No nation can exist with more than one religion."<sup>vii</sup>

And the problem went beyond rhetoric: between 1885 and 1896, American Adventists spent a total of 1438 days in jail and 455 days on chain gangs for working on Sunday. Ellen White's The Great Controversy no doubt fueled the sense of alarm with its vivid portrayal of the aims of the papacy. The 1888 revision, for example, quotes Pope Pius IX as saying in 1854 that liberty of conscience was a "most pestilential error."<sup>viii</sup>

Given the threat to Adventism from the prevailing culture, Wilkinson had good reasons for his keen interest in the "wilderness" church, an interest evident in both his books. Furthermore, when he enrolled in Battle Creek College in 1891, he was in a position to be influenced by W. W. Prescott, President of Battle Creek College, and A. T. Jones, a leading religious liberty spokesperson, both powerful rhetoricians and outspoken critics of Catholicism.

By the time Wilkinson published Our Authorized Bible Vindicated in 1930, another significant factor had a bearing on his work: Fundamentalism was leaving

its mark on American culture and on Adventism. The appearance of the Revised Version in Britain (1881-1885) and the American Standard Version (1901), though both cautious revisions of the 1611 King James Version, had contributed to the turmoil. Those believers who wanted no changes at all in their Bible blamed the revisions on the "modernists." And for Wilkinson, the Catholics were among the chief culprits.

According to H. H. Meyers, one of Wilkinson's modern admirers (1993), the mainstream Adventist community in the 1920s endorsed the new versions. Meyers cites a booklet entitled "Doctrines for use in Seventh-day Adventist Colleges," published in 1926 by the Berrien Springs College Press, which says that the American Revised Version is "more accurate, more scholarly, more valuable" than the King James Version.

Wilkinson, however, was of quite a different opinion. When he privately published Our Authorized Bible Vindicated in 1930, the church was quick to reject it. To quote Meyers: "Incredibly, although his book enjoyed wide acceptance among his ministerial colleagues, it was rejected outright by a 'Committee of Review' set up in 1930 by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists."<sup>ix</sup>

It is possible that W. W. Prescott had influenced Wilkinson toward verbal inspiration and Fundamentalism. W. C. White, in a 1928 letter to L. E. Froom, credits Prescott with presenting the views of Francois Gaussen, a flamboyant defender of verbal inspiration, to the students at Battle Creek when Prescott was president there. According to White, Prescott's "very forceful" presentations had "resulted in bringing into our work questions and perplexities without end, and always increasing."<sup>x</sup>

Can one edit, indeed, "improve" writings that have come as a result of inspiration? Prescott himself was forced to adopt a more moderate position on that question when he was asked to update, improve, and annotate the historical



quotations for the 1911 edition of The Great Controversy. The minutes of the 1919 Bible Conference reveal that Prescott had worked his way through the crisis to a settled, "practical" position.<sup>xi</sup> But if Prescott had moderated his position, it evidently had no effect on Wilkinson, for Our Authorized Bible Vindicated constitutes a vigorous defense, not only of the King James Version, but of verbal inspiration as well.<sup>xii</sup> We turn now to a closer examination of Wilkinson's defense of the King James Version.

### 3. WHY REVISE THE KING JAMES VERSION?

Though the public generally responded enthusiastically to the English Revised Version (1881-85) and the American Standard Version (1901), a vocal minority viewed both versions as a direct attack on truth. Wilkinson shared that minority perspective.

From the standpoint of the Revisers, however, the appearance of the revised versions was both natural and helpful, indeed overdue. In a formal sense, the work of revision was sparked on February 10, 1870, when the Upper House of the Convention of Canterbury voted to study the desirability of revising the Authorized Version. The rationale for a revision can be summarized under three headings:

#### A. CHANGES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Though minor unofficial corrections had been made from time to time in the King James Version since it was first published in 1611, the last major revision had been that of Benjamin Blayney in 1769, a revision involving spelling, punctuation, and some changes in expression. But the English language had changed much since 1611. To be faithful to the intent of the King James translators themselves,

the Bible must be in the language of the people.

## B. IMPROVED KNOWLEDGE OF BIBLICAL LANGUAGES

Though the KJV translators were excellent Greek scholars, they were less skilled in Hebrew and Aramaic. Since 1611, however, Christian scholars had significantly improved their skills in Semitic languages. It was time to take a fresh look at the translation of the Old Testament.

## C. SIGNIFICANT MANUSCRIPT DISCOVERIES

Especially for the New Testament, many manuscript discoveries had enhanced the possibility of moving closer to the original biblical text. In particular, the world had been electrified by Tischendorf's dramatic mid-century discovery of Codex Sinaiticus, a fourth-century Greek Bible found in the Monastery of St. Catharine on Mt. Sinai. From the standpoint of the underlying "original" text of Hebrew and Aramaic in the Old Testament, Greek in the New Testament, the new manuscript discoveries meant that the Revised Version would reflect more changes in the New Testament than in the Old.

In the twentieth century, further manuscript discoveries have opened up fresh possibilities for understanding the language of the Old Testament and the text of both Testaments. The Ras Shamra tablets, dating to the time when Israel was entering Canaan (ca. 1400), were discovered in 1929 at the site of ancient Ugarit in northern Palestine. The tablets shed light on ancient Canaanite, a language closely related to biblical Hebrew, and also illumined Canaanite religious thought and practice.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947 (and after) near Qumran by the Dead Sea, have provided a rich store of Old Testament manuscripts dating between 200 BC and AD 100, a full thousand years before our earliest manuscripts of the Hebrew Masoretic text.

For the New Testament, two important collections of papyri fragments from the second and third centuries have come to light in this century: the Chester Beatty Papyri (1930-31) and Bodmer Papyri (1955-56). Some of the papyri fragments have been dated to within a century of the original New Testament documents.

While all these factors could be described as "significant" and as having a "profound" effect on our Bible, we should not conclude that the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts used by the King James translators were fatally flawed. From a technical perspective, the text certainly can be improved. But if considered from a "practical" perspective, the Received Text (Textus Receptus) is quite adequate.

Regrettably, however, the heat of battle has spawned bitter words on both sides which have worked against the truth. J. A. Hort, for example, the great nineteenth-century scholar who contributed so much to the modern study of the New Testament text, in a youthful outburst <sup>B</sup> he was twenty-three at the time <sup>B</sup> called the Received Text of the New Testament "villainous" and "vile." Again and again Wilkinson recalls those bitter words (e.g. pp. 168, 180). Wilkinson can quote the same Hort approvingly: "An overwhelming proportion of the text in all known cursive manuscripts except a few is, as a matter of fact, identical" (p. 100). Though Wilkinson may not have fully understood the implications of Hort's words, he at least reacted positively to the statement. Still, it has been the "vile" and "villainous" words that have set the tone for much of the debate.

Wilkinson recognizes that Hort's bitter words are not necessarily typical of all

those who wish to replace the Received Text. He also quotes, for example, one of his contemporaries, A. T. Robertson, a New Testament scholar favoring the new versions: "It should be stated at once that the Textus Receptus is not a bad text. It is not an heretical text. It is substantially correct."<sup>xiii</sup>

Wilkinson is not prepared, however, to accept a Bible that is "substantially correct." He wants one that is entirely correct: "Even the jots and tittles of the Bible are important. God has pronounced terrible woes upon the man who adds to or takes away from the volume of Inspiration" (p. 175). Ironically, the scholars responsible for the new versions would wholeheartedly agree that the integrity of the biblical text is crucial. Indeed, the Revisers sought to eliminate additions and restore deletions in the text of Scripture, basing their decisions on the sober evaluation of the best of ancient manuscripts.

But Wilkinson does not take kindly to their efforts, claiming that "the Revisers apparently felt no constraint on this point, for they made 36,000 changes in the English of the King James Version, and very nearly 6000 in the Greek Text" (p. 175). The Revisers would argue that they simply were seeking to recover the original. But for Wilkinson, the familiar had become the original. Thus, for him, any change in the familiar KJV was an attack on the original.

Not surprisingly, then, in spite of a strong interest in historical development, Wilkinson does not reveal that the "KJV only" sentiment is simply a recurring theme in the history of Bible translations. The highlights of that history are worth noting, especially since Wilkinson's perspective on the history of the Bible obscures the issues as well as the role of key participants.

#### 4. NEW TRANSLATIONS: THE BATTLE AGAINST CHANGE

The call to translate a sacred text into another language presents believers with a dilemma, for the power to translate is the power to interpret, and the power to interpret is the power to shape the truth. Scholars know that by analysis; ordinary believers sense it intuitively. Islam maintains the "pure" solution to the problem by insisting that the Koran is inspired only in the original Arabic. There is no such thing as an "authorized" translation of the Koran.

The wide-spread dispersion of the Jews into other cultural settings, however, made the Islamic solution less likely. By Jesus' day, Greek and Aramaic translations of the Old Testament were already circulating widely in Jewish circles. The use of such translations no doubt weakened the tendency to think in terms of an unchanging sacred text, though the idea of a verbally inspired original can still be found in the writings of first-century Jews such as Philo and Josephus.

But what is particularly interesting in connection with Wilkinson's thesis is the explicit claim in the Letter of Aristeas (200 BC to AD 100) that the Septuagint translation, the Old Testament in Greek, was an "authorized version" destined to stand unchanged for all time. Aristeas, telling the story of the origin of the Septuagint translation, includes this comment from the Jewish leaders at the dedication of the new translation: "Since this version has been made rightly and reverently, and in every respect accurately, it is good that this should remain exactly so, and that there should be no revision."

Aristeas then describes the response of the people:

There was general approval of what they said, and they commanded that a curse should be laid, as was their custom, on anyone who should alter the version by any addition or change to any part of the written text, or any deletion either. This was a good step taken, to ensure that their words were preserved completely and permanently in

perpetuity.<sup>xiv</sup>

Moses warned Israel against adding anything to or taking anything away from the law (Deut. 4:2). John similarly warns the Christian readers of Revelation (Rev. 22:18-19). In Aristeas, that warning is now applied to an unchanging translation.

Yet that very translation proved both useful and malleable in the hands of the Greek-speaking New Testament writers. Apparently escaping the more rigid view of a fixed sacred text or translation, the New Testament writers cited the Old Testament with remarkable creativity, generally quoting the Septuagint or other Greek versions instead of the Hebrew original, and often adapting the quotations to their particular purpose.

By using the Greek Septuagint as a ready source-book of sermonic and proof-text material, the New Testament writers helped popularize the Greek Old Testament, making it the Bible of choice among Christians in the early years of the church. It was a practical choice, too, for the Jews and Jewish Christians who lived outside of Palestine were more at home with Greek than they were with Hebrew.

As Christianity spread into Latin-speaking lands, however, it soon became evident that Greek was as difficult for the Latins as Hebrew had been for the Greeks. Thus new Latin translations of both Testaments sprang up, almost always based upon the Greek and often quite poorly done.

Appalled by the diverse and uneven Latin Bibles circulating in his day, Jerome (d. 420) attempted to restore the pure text of the Old Testament by returning to the original Hebrew as the basis for his Latin Vulgate. But critics vilified Jerome because his translation of the Hebrew differed in some instances from translations based on the Greek. To speak in a thinly-veiled parable, his "Revised Version" differed from the traditional "KJV" and the people didn't like it!

Eventually, however, Jerome's superior translation won its way into popular

usage and became the new "authorized version," destined one day to be the same kind of roadblock to the Reformation translators that the old Latin translations had been for Jerome.

Thus, in time, just as Christians had once departed the Hebrew for Greek, then Greek for Latin, so the "modern languages" B English, German, and French B became tempting as replacements for Latin. Scholarly Reformers vowed to give the Bible to the people in their own language. Furthermore, they determined to base these new "popular" translations on the Hebrew and Greek originals.

Church critics attacked the Reformers on both counts. The first line of defense was to insist that only the "real" Bible was the "authorized" Latin. But when the people greeted modern-language versions with such enthusiasm, church authorities fell back to a second line of defense: any translations into the language of the people must be based on that "authorized " Latin, not on the Hebrew and Greek originals.

Wilkinson seems unaware that he is simply repeating history when he claims that his Bible, the Authorized King James Version, is the only true one. Furthermore, because of his conviction that there are "fundamentally only two different Bibles," Wilkinson obscures the sophisticated and conscientious ways in which both his friends and foes honestly sought to preserve the true text of Scripture. And it is to that topic that we now turn.

## **5. SEEKING THE TRUE BIBLE: GOOD MEN AND BAD**

When Wilkinson attempts to divide up his scholars as supporters of either the "pure" Bible or the "corrupt," he arrives at puzzling results. By his assessment, Origen (d. 254) and Jerome (d. 420) were both corrupters; Wycliffe (d. 1384) was

tainted. The pure ones were those who worked with the Received Text, namely, Erasmus (d. 1536) and the translators of the 1611 King James Version. We will look more closely at each of these key actors, working back chronologically from 1611.

## **A. THE TRANSLATORS OF THE KING JAMES VERSION OF 1611**

The original preface to the 1611 King James Version, "The Translators to the Reader,"<sup>xv</sup> addresses many of the issues discussed in Wilkinson's book. The approach of the translators, however, differs significantly. They were, after all, agents of change, while Wilkinson was a defender of the status quo. The key issues fall into three categories.

### **1) Traditional Resistance to Change**

The KJV translators faced their own storm of protest by venturing to produce a new translation. The Preface opens with a discussion of the problem of "change." Anyone meddling with religion, especially the word of God, they wrote, "setteth himself upon a stage to be gloated upon by every evil eye, yea, he casteth himself headlong upon pikes, to be gored by every sharp tongue." In short, translators lead a hard life. The KJV people knew that.

### **2) NEW Does Not Mean OLD Is Bad**

In 1611, critics of the KJV were saying that producing a new version implied condemnation of the old. The translators responded: "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."

Responding in several different ways, the KJV translators made their point about good and bad translations, or good and better ones. For one, they referred to the apostles's use of a translation that needed "correction," namely, the Septuagint. But, notes the Preface, the apostles still used it because it was in the people's language and was "for the greatest part true and sufficient."

Making their point in another way, the KJV translators compared their own work to the king's speech delivered before parliament. When the king's words are translated into different languages, some versions will be more skillfully translated than others. But, they said, in whatever language the speech appears, and however poorly translated, it "is still the King's speech." Bible translations are like that. Though some will be better than others, even the poorest "is still the King's speech."

### 3) Even Heretics Can (Sometimes) Be Trusted

The KJV translators had to face the accusation that the translators of the English Bible were heretics. From the standpoint of the "official" church, the critics were right, and the church had executed many of these "heretics." Someone has noted that of all the early Reformation translators of the English Bible, only Miles Coverdale died a natural death in bed.

But the heresy label doesn't matter, declared the KJV translators. If something is good, we'll use it, even if it comes from a heretic, and they quoted Tertullian (d. 225) and St. Augustine (d. 430) for support. For years "Origen [d. 254] and the whole church of God" used Old Testament translations produced by "the most vile heretics," namely, Symmachus and Theodotion. In short, they said, when a heretic does good work, we will call it good and use it because it is good,

quite apart from the source.

Here it should also be noted that the KJV translators also made use of the Roman Catholic Rheims English New Testament (1582). (Its counterpart, the Douai Old Testament was published in 1609-10, too late to be useful). As a translation from the Latin Vulgate, the Rheims-Douai retained a heavy Latin flavor, and generally is credited with supplying many of the KJV Latinisms.<sup>xvi</sup>

Though the Catholic and Protestant translators often traded barbed comments with each other -- the Protestants against the Catholics for keeping the Bible from the people, and the Catholics against the Protestants for destroying the sanctity of Scripture -- they still benefitted from each other's work. The KJV Preface itself states outright that if the Bible is to be translated into English, "Catholics are fittest to do it. They have learning, and they know when a thing is well." But the Preface chides the Catholics for finally giving believers a "gift" (the Bible in English) only to require a "license" before allowing the believers to use it! "Yea, so unwilling they are to communicate the Scriptures to the people's understanding in any sort," exclaims the Preface, "that they are not ashamed to confess, that we forced them to translate it into English against their wills."

But for all the strong language, the two sides managed to benefit each other, even if at arm's length. As Professor Isaacs notes in his discussion of sixteenth-century English versions, Gregory Martin, the chief Catholic translator of the Rheims New Testament, "was a careful student of the earlier English versions, and of the Bishops' Bible and the Geneva Bible, and through them the earlier translations from Tindale [sic] onwards contributed much to the Catholic New Testament." Isaacs goes on to say that this Catholic New Testament which was much influenced by the earlier Protestant translations was then in turn "extensively used" by the scholars who produced the King James.<sup>xvii</sup>

The attitude of the KJV translators towards heretics and Catholics is

significant because it reveals the admirable quality of judging a person's work on its merits rather than by the person's label. Jesus' example is instructive in that respect, for when he saw a good Samaritan, an honest tax collector, or a repentant prostitute, he did not balk at the label but wholeheartedly endorsed the good which he saw.

Those gripped by a conspiratorial attitude toward the world find it much more difficult to recognize such goodness. And that is true of Wilkinson in this instance.

In his study of the "wilderness" church, he apparently became so horrified at the sins of the Catholic Church that for him, at any rate, virtue could not carry a Catholic label. Thus he rejected out of hand any possibility of "Catholic" influence on the KJV:

Any thought that Catholicism had any influence over the King James Bible must be banished not only upon remembering the circumstances of its birth but also by the pleas from its translators to King James for protection from a papish retaliation (p. 98, footnote).

That same horror at admitting anything positive in Catholicism not only led Wilkinson to ignore the principles and methods of the King James translators themselves, but also the significant contributions of those who went before them. Indeed, it led Wilkinson to label as "corrupters" some who made great sacrifices in order to ensure the purity of God's Word.

If Wilkinson had been willing to listen more carefully to Erasmus and to the King James translators, men who played key roles in producing the so-called Received Text and the King James Version, he would not have had to damn Wycliffe with faint praise, and he could have recognized the value of the monumental work which Origen (d. 254) and Jerome (d. 420) did in seeking to

honor, preserve, and recover the true Word of God.<sup>xviii</sup>

## B. ERASMUS (1469-1536)

### 1) The Man and His Work

Erasmus was a remarkable person. But any attempt to link his scholarly contributions directly to his moral and religious character is faced with monumental challenges. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church gives a helpful overview of his life.<sup>xix</sup> Always a Catholic, Erasmus was an Augustinian monk in his early years. Though ordained a priest in 1492, he left the monastery with the approval of his superiors. In 1495 he began to study in Paris, then for several years immersed himself in scholarly pursuits in England, France, and Italy. In 1521, after spending time in Brussels, he settled permanently in Basle, Switzerland B permanently, that is until the Reformation was introduced there in 1529. According to the ODCC, he then "fled to Freiburg im Breisgau [Germany], where he lived till 1535, continually advocating religious peace."

His "celebrated" Greek New Testament with his own translation into classical Latin appeared in 1516. The ODCC comments: "Though based on insufficient MS. material and not without bias, it exercised a profound influence on theological studies and was several time revised during Erasmus's lifetime." The third edition (1522) became known as the Received Text and was the formal basis for the King James Version of 1611.

Erasmus was known for writing bitter satire on monasticism and the corruptions of the Church, thus helping "to prepare the way for the Reformation," as the ODCC puts it. But according to the ODCC, "Next to his Greek NT, his most

important work was probably his attempt to put into print reliable texts of the Fathers, among them his favourite St. Jerome (9 vols., 1516)." Also included in his works was a Latin version of Origen (1536).

The ODCC describes him as "the most renowned scholar of his age," "a man of vast if not always deep erudition, of uncommon intellectual powers." But for our purposes here, the ODCC concluding summary is perhaps most significant:

Though he had himself paved the way for the Reformation by his merciless satires on the doctrine and institutions of the Church, his scholarly character, which abhorred violence and sought tranquility, prevented him from joining the Protestants, and threw him back on the tradition of the Church as the safeguard of stability. In later years he became suspect to both parties.

Compared with that sober scholarly assessment, Wilkinson's glowing treatment of Erasmus presents a remarkable contrast: "Endowed by nature with a mind that could do ten hours work in one, Erasmus, during his mature years in the earlier part of the sixteen century, was the intellectual dictator of Europe" (p. 53). And again: "Europe was rocked from end to end by his books which exposed the ignorance of the monks, the superstitions of the priesthood, the bigotry, and the childish and coarse religion of the day" (p. 53).

Wilkinson claims that "it is customary even today with those who are bitter against the pure teachings of the Received Text, to sneer at Erasmus, no perversion of facts is too great to belittle his work." But Wilkinson does not hesitate to move to the opposite extreme, noting that while Erasmus was still alive,

Europe was at his feet. Several times the King of England offered him

any position in the kingdom, at his own price; the Emperor of Germany did the same. The Pope offered to make him a cardinal. This he steadfastly refused, as he would not compromise his conscience. In fact, had he been so minded, he perhaps could have made himself Pope. France and Spain sought him to become a dweller in their realm; while Holland prepared to claim her most distinguished citizen (pp. 53-54).

A similar exuberance marks Wilkinson's comments on Erasmus's New Testament:

Astonished and confounded, the world, deluged by superstitions, coarse traditions, and monkeries, read the pure story of the Gospels. The effect was marvelous. At once, all recognized the great value of his work which for over four hundred years (1516 to 1930) was to hold the dominant place in an era of Bibles. Translation after translation has been taken from it, such as the German, and the English, and others. Critics have tried to belittle the Greek manuscripts he used, but the enemies of Erasmus, or rather the enemies of the Received Text, have found insuperable difficulties withstanding their attacks (p. 54).

When Wilkinson actually comments on the primary criticisms of Erasmus's Greek NT, namely, that he based his work on a few manuscripts of relatively late date, Wilkinson's evangelistic zeal overwhelms all caution:

There were hundreds of manuscripts for Erasmus to examine, and he

did; but he used only a few. What matters? The vast bulk of manuscripts in Greek are practically all the Received Text. If the few Erasmus used were typical, that is, after he had thoroughly balanced the evidence of many and used a few which displayed that balance, did he not, with all the problems before him, arrive at practically the same result which only could be arrived at to-day by a fair and comprehensive investigation? Moreover, the text he chose had such an outstanding history in the Greek, the Syrian, and the Waldensian Churches, that it constituted an irresistible argument of God's providence. God did not write a hundred Bibles; there is only one Bible, the others at best are only approximations. In other words the Greek New Testament of Erasmus, known as the Received Text, is none other than the Greek New Testament which successfully met the rage of its pagan and papal enemies (pp. 54-55).

To be blunt, Wilkinson simply has stated what he wished to be true. But the facts point to a more cautious and complex conclusion. As brilliant as Erasmus was, this man who "fled" the Reformation when it came to Basle was a human being, capable of careless work. And that carelessness is reflected in his Greek New Testament, especially the first edition. Yet Erasmus was also a scholar, and in later editions he corrected many of the mistakes, though not all the corrections found their way into the so-called Received Text. Those are the matters we will consider next.

## 2) Wilkinson on Erasmus's New Testament: An Analysis

We will analyze Wilkinson's statement on Erasmus's Greek New Testament in

three steps: a) Address his assumption that God wrote only "one Bible"; b) Survey the New Testament manuscript scene to clarify the issues; c) Look at the event itself, namely, the actual production of Erasmus's Greek New Testament.

#### a) The Deadly All-or-Nothing Argument

Perhaps the most dangerous roadblock to an appreciation of the history of the Bible is the conviction expressed by Wilkinson above: "God did not write a hundred Bibles; there is only one Bible, the others at best are only approximations." Such an attitude forces the evidence to fit a pre-conceived conclusion, rather than allowing the evidence to shape the conclusion. If Wilkinson somehow could have heard and accepted the position of the King James translators themselves rather than just defend the Bible which they produced, he could have avoided many serious errors.

The contrast between Wilkinson's all-or-nothing, "one Bible only" view, and the attitude of the King James translators is well illustrated by quotations from the KJV Preface:

We do not deny, nay we affirm and avow, that the very meanest translation of the Bible in English, set forth by men of our profession...containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God. As the King's speech, which he uttereth in Parliament, being translated into French, Dutch, Italian and Latin, is still the King's speech, though it be not interpreted by every Translator with the like grace, nor peradventure so fitly for phrase, nor so expressly for sense, everywhere.



A man may be counted a virtuous man, though he have made many slips in his life, (else, there were none virtuous, for in many things we offend all [James 3:2]) also a comely man and lovely, though he have some warts upon his hand, yea, not only freckles upon his face, but also scars. No cause therefore why the word translated should be denied to be the word or forbidden to be current, notwithstanding that some imperfections and blemishes may be noted in the setting forth of it.

The KJV translators could calmly consider manuscript evidence because they were not bound by a "one-Bible-only" conviction. For them, the King's speech, regardless of how it appeared in print, was "still the King's speech." Instead of attempting to label one translation good and another bad, they could "make a good one better," and still hear God's word in the good as well as in the better.

#### **b) Manuscripts: Different and Alike, Old and New**

All standard reference works agree that "a large majority of Greek manuscripts"<sup>xx</sup> belong to the text type known as the Textus Receptus or Received Text. In recent years some sophisticated arguments have been published in defense of the "majority text" and have been taken seriously. But simply to argue that the majority are right is to risk the same costly mistake that Ahab made when he summoned 400 prophets to speak good news while shunning Micaiah, the one prophet who might say otherwise (1 Kings 22). Manuscripts, like prophets, are to be weighed, not counted.

Some simple reasons explain the "large majority" of manuscripts in the Koine or Byzantine text type, to use the technical terms for the traditional Received Text.

Scholars use the term Byzantine because this type of manuscript was dominant in the Byzantine empire. Constantine moved his capital to Byzantium in 330, renaming it Constantinople. It was he who declared Christianity legal, and gave great impetus to the Christianizing of the Roman empire. Under his influence, copies of the Bible multiplied, especially in the "Christian" east. A standard biblical text was adopted and in time became the official "Received Text" of the Greek Orthodox church.

The "large majority" of Byzantine-type manuscripts is thus quite understandable. But compared with the other text types, the Byzantine manuscripts are mostly late. Scholars have noted that it is a text suited for church use, often polished and harmonized, generally without remarkable additions or deletions. It is not a dangerous text, but simply is further removed from the originals, both in time and content.

**Text types.** In the nineteenth century the work of classifying manuscripts by "text type" hit its peak. Over against the later Byzantine or Koine type, three pre-Byzantine types have been identified: the Alexandrian type, a text characterized by sober and careful scholarship, was said to have circulated in Egypt; the Caesarean type was centered in Palestine; the Western type, noted for its startling additions and deletions, was known in Rome. But the boundaries and characteristics of the various types are still much debated by scholars <sup>B</sup> and the different types often show up in different areas (especially the Western). A major manuscript can even consist of more than one type. In the fifth century Codex Alexandrinus, for example, the Gospels are classed as Byzantine, the rest of the New Testament as Alexandrian.

Even more debated is the relative value of each text type when it comes to assessing a particular variant. In the nineteenth century, Westcott and Hort, much

maligned by the defenders of the Received Text, led the way in establishing a new "eclectic" Greek text to replace the Received Text. Instead of simply taking the Greek text as it had been "received," they attempted to determine the original reading and constructed a new Greek text accordingly. When Wilkinson exclaims that the Revisers made "nearly 6000" changes in the Greek text (p. 175), he is referring to the work of Westcott and Hort and the new "eclectic" New Testament text which they prepared. Even if changes are relatively minor and affect no Christian doctrine, they will be very unsettling if one believes with Wilkinson that God wrote only "one Bible."

Ironically, Westcott and Hort would undoubtedly agree with Wilkinson's statement that "even the jots and tittles of the Bible are important" (p. 175). They did what they did precisely because they valued the jots and tittles.

Considering Erasmus's own attitude toward "changes" will help to put the matter into proper perspective. But first we will look at how manuscripts are classified as a basis for understanding what happened when Erasmus decided to publish a Greek New Testament.

**Types of Witnesses.** When scholars try to establish the original text of the New Testament, they can consult three types of "witnesses": 1) Greek manuscripts of the NT itself; 2) Ancient translations of the NT into other languages (e.g. Syriac, Latin, Coptic); 3) Early quotations of the NT by Christian writers.

Though the second and third types can prove helpful, the actual NT manuscripts obviously are preferred. They divide naturally into four groups. Statistics given are from 1989:<sup>xxi</sup>

### Types of New Testament Manuscripts

**Papyri.** So named because they are manuscripts and fragments written on papyri rather than parchment. Dates range from the 2nd to the 8th centuries. A total of 96 papyri have been catalogued.

**Uncials.** So named because they are manuscripts and fragments written in all capital letters, i.e. uncials, also called majuscules. Dates range from the 3rd to the 10th centuries. A total of 299 uncials have been catalogued.

**Minuscules.** So named because they are written in a small, flowing script (cursive) and are thus distinguished from the uncials or majuscules. Dates range from the 8th to the 16th centuries. A total of 2812 have been catalogued.

**Lectionaries.** So named because they are collections of Scripture readings for use in worship services. Serious scholarly interest in lectionaries has developed recently, especially for the history of the Byzantine text. Lectionaries are always conservative, even archaic, often preserving text types much older than might be suggested by the manuscript itself. The summary listing in the appendix to Nestle's Greek NT includes five of the more significant lectionaries (a limited sample) ranging in date from the 8th to the 12th centuries. A total of 2281 lectionaries have been catalogued.

While date is significant  $\text{\textcircled{B}}$  thus the general preference for papyri over uncials, and both papyri and uncials over minuscules  $\text{\textcircled{B}}$  later manuscripts can preserve earlier and original readings. Nevertheless, it is understandable that the exciting discovery of ancient uncials in the 19th century played a key part in undermining the authority of the Received Text. Yet scholarly trends change. The introduction to the 26th edition of Nestle's Greek NT says:

The nineteenth century was the age of the uncials; the mid-twentieth century was the age of the papyri. This marked a striking advance over the nineteenth century. But now we are entering the age of the minuscules; their inclusion in textual studies contributes a new insight to the history of the New Testament text, and makes it possible to reach a sounder judgment of its original form.<sup>xxii</sup>

Nestle's introduction may be overstating the case when it exclaims: "The age of Westcott-Hort and of Tischendorf is definitely over!"<sup>xxiii</sup> But even if an exaggeration, the statement still reminds us that scholarly endeavors to recover the biblical text are never static.

Finally, before returning to Erasmus's Greek NT, it would be well to note Metzger's summary statement about the relative rarity of complete Bibles before the invention of printing:

Relatively few [of the some 5000 NT manuscripts] contain the entire New Testament; in fact, codex Sinaiticus is still...the only known complete copy of the Greek New Testament in uncial script. When one learns that only fifty-eight minuscule Greek manuscripts contain the complete New Testament, it suddenly becomes clear that only a very small proportion of Christians could have owned, or even seen, a copy of the complete canon of the New Testament before the invention of printing.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Such a comment puts in perspective the tendency to panic over changes in the jots and tittles of Scripture. Yes, the jots and tittles are important. But it is also well to remember the earthy and practical encouragement expressed by Ellen White, as she

commented on John 3:16: "If one had no other text in the Bible, this alone would be a guide for the soul."<sup>xxv</sup>

### c) The Hasty Greek New Testament

As noted in Bruce Metzger's story of the Textus Receptus,<sup>xxvi</sup> Erasmus's NT was not the first printed Greek NT, but the first one published. And the haste to publish no doubt explains the numerous flaws, some of which Erasmus corrected in later editions.

The first printed Greek NT actually came from the press in 1514 as part of a Polyglot Bible containing the Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin texts of Scripture. Called the Complutensian Polyglot, after Complutum, the Latin name for the Spanish town Alcala where it was printed, the Polyglot was prepared under the direction of the Spanish Catholic Cardinal Ximenes. Apparently lack of papal approval delayed publication. But even after Pope Leo X gave his blessing, dated in the first volume as 22 March 1520, for some reason the Bible was not distributed until 1522.

The well-known Basle publisher, Johann Froben, no doubt had heard about the forthcoming Spanish Polyglot and wanted to be in the marketplace with his own edition before Cardinal Ximenes' work could be finished and authorized for publication. In August 1514 Froben and Erasmus discussed the matter in Basle. But not until April 1515 did the publisher actually convince Erasmus to take on the project. Working through a mutual friend while Erasmus was in England, Froben promised to pay the scholar "as much as anyone else might offer for such a job."

Returning to Basle in July of 1515, Erasmus hoped to find manuscripts good enough to send to the printer along with his own Latin translation which he had been preparing over a period of several years. But the only Greek manuscripts available at the last minute needed some corrections. Nevertheless, printing began

on 2 October 1515 and was completed with remarkable speed by 1 March 1516, a large folio volume of about 1000 pages. Erasmus himself later said that this first edition was "precipitated rather than edited."

Metzger states that "owing to the haste in production, the volume contains hundreds of typographical errors." He even quotes a staunch 19th-century scholarly supporter of the Textus Receptus, F. H. A. Scrivener, as saying: "[It] is in that respect the most faulty book I know."<sup>xxvii</sup> Metzger's evaluation of Erasmus's manuscripts is worth quoting:

Since Erasmus could not find a manuscript which contained the entire Greek Testament, he utilized several for various parts of the New Testament. For most of the text he relied on two rather inferior manuscripts from a monastic library at Basle, one of the Gospels...and one of the Acts and Epistles, both dating from about the twelfth century. Erasmus compared them with two or three others of the same books and entered occasional corrections for the printer in the margins or between the lines of the Greek script. For the Book of Revelation he had but one manuscript, dating from the twelfth century, which he had borrowed from his friend Reuchlin. Unfortunately, this manuscript lacked the final leaf, which had contained the last six verses of the book. For these verses, as well as a few other passages throughout the book where the Greek text of the Apocalypse and the adjoining Greek commentary with which the manuscript was supplied are so mixed up as to be almost indistinguishable, Erasmus depended upon the Latin Vulgate, translating this text into Greek. As would be expected from such a procedure, here and there in Erasmus' self-made Greek text are readings which have never been found in any

known Greek manuscript-- but which are still perpetuated today in printings of the so-called Textus Receptus of the Greek New Testament.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The response to the first edition was mixed. It sold well, but was criticized on numerous counts. One famous incident involves the so-called Johannine Comma [comma in this instance refers simply to a small section of text] in 1 John 5:7-8, a "late" trinity proof text appearing first in a Latin treatise about AD 380 and then in the Latin Vulgate, but unknown in any Greek manuscript before the sixteenth century. Erasmus omitted it because it wasn't in his Greek manuscripts. But when challenged by an editor of the Complutensian Polyglot, Erasmus reputedly promised to restore the missing portion in his next edition if it could be shown to him in even one Greek manuscript. Surprise! One such manuscript was found in Dublin, no less. In spite of his doubts, Erasmus kept his promise and restored the "comma." Because it was in his third edition, the one used by the King James translators, the "comma" remains in the King James Version and New King James Version in spite of the textual evidence that it does not belong.<sup>xxix</sup>

Metzger notes that when Erasmus saw the Complutensian Polyglot, shortly after the appearance of his own third edition, he recognized the superior text, and used it to improve his own. "In the Book of Revelation, for example, he altered his fourth edition in about ninety passages on the basis of the Complutensian text."<sup>xxx</sup> But it was the third edition that became the Received Text and so did not benefit from the corrections.

Erasmus's various editions were reprinted so frequently that the errors had plenty of opportunity to spread. Metzger reports that in addition to Erasmus's five editions, "more than thirty unauthorized reprints are said to have appeared at Venice, Strasbourg, Basle, Paris, and other places."<sup>xxxi</sup> The first edition of the



whole Bible in Greek was published 1518 by the Aldine press in Venice. According to Metzger, "The New Testament, which is dedicated to Erasmus, follows the first edition of Erasmus so closely as to reproduce many typographical errors B even those which Erasmus had corrected in the list of errata!"<sup>xxxii</sup>

In short, Wilkinson is far from the mark when he claims that Erasmus examined hundreds of manuscripts. Indeed, the 1516 edition was rushed to press with only the hastiest of corrections to half a dozen manuscripts, all of which were far from ideal. Erasmus's accompanying Latin translation was carefully and thoughtfully done; his Greek text was not.

Unquestionably the Lord has used the Received Text in mighty ways to bring people to a knowledge of his word. But if Erasmus, on the basis of better manuscripts, was right to "correct" the book of Revelation in some ninety places in his fourth edition, and if it was right for the King James translators, to use the best resources available to them to make a "good" translation "better," shouldn't the same process of improvement continue? If, as Wilkinson himself declared, "even the jots and tittles of the Bible are important" (p. 175), then the work of improvement ought to continue until the Lord returns.

### **3) What Wilkinson Overlooked**

In concluding our analysis of Wilkinson's handling of Erasmus, we note two aspects of Erasmus's experience that Wilkinson distorts or overlooks: the Catholic-Protestant tension, and Erasmus's appreciation for both Jerome and Origen,

#### **a) Catholic, Not Protestant**

The fact that Erasmus remained a Catholic and did not become a Protestant

would not have been a problem for the King James translators or for most modern scholars. But given Wilkinson's own anti-Catholic stance, it is remarkable that he never mentions Erasmus's continuing commitment to Catholicism, and indeed "fled" from Basle when the Reformation arrived there.

In that same connection, it is at least interesting to compare Wilkinson's glowing account of Erasmus with Ellen White's rather cool attitude toward the great humanist. While noting the value of Erasmus's Greek NT and his NT Latin translation, Ellen White does not elaborate further. But when discussing the Reformation in France, she has occasion to cite from Erasmus's correspondence with Berquin. In that setting she refers to Erasmus as "the timid and time-serving Erasmus" then uses the adjectives "politic and self-serving" to describe the contents of his letter.<sup>xxxiii</sup> This is hardly the same Erasmus who "would not compromise his conscience," to use Wilkinson's words (p. 53).

#### b) What Ever Happened to Origen and Jerome?

Perhaps Erasmus was sufficiently critical of Catholic evils to merit Wilkinson's admiration. But was he aware of the fact that Erasmus was also a great admirer of both Jerome and Origen? And that Erasmus published a 9-volume edition of Jerome's works (1516) and a Latin translation of Origen (1536)? From the standpoint of official Catholicism, Origen was a heretic and Jerome a saint. But both of them shared the same conviction that "even the jots and tittles of the Bible are important."

If one is dealing with the true text of the Bible, a sober evaluation of Origen's and Jerome's work would place them among the purifiers not the corrupters. Erasmus knew that. But Wilkinson saw it otherwise. His need to fit the evidence into his either-or, all-or-nothing scheme distorted the picture, not only for Erasmus,

Origen, and Jerome, but also for Wycliffe, a man who typically receives high praise from Protestants, but who received something less than that from Wilkinson.

### C. WYCLIFFE (1330-84)

Because Wycliffe has been so highly regarded as "The morning star of the Reformation," the first to translate the Bible into English, Wilkinson apparently felt obligated at least to mention him. But he damns through faint praise. Though stating that Wycliffe "did what he could and God greatly blessed," Wilkinson goes on to say that Wycliffe's translation "was taken from the Vulgate and like its model, contained many errors. Therefore the Reformation lingered" (p. 49).

By contrast, in her history of the Reformation in The Great Controversy, Ellen White assesses Wycliffe's accomplishments much more positively. When comparing Wycliffe's work with that of Tyndale, the Reformer who produced the first printed English New Testament, she reveals an awareness of the flaws in the Latin Vulgate, noting that the Latin text which Wycliffe translated "contained many errors." She gives Erasmus credit for producing a Greek New Testament in which "many errors of former versions were corrected, and the sense was more clearly rendered." It was this improved Greek text by Erasmus that Tyndale translated into English for the common people. In her words, "Tyndale was to complete the work of Wycliffe in giving the Bible to his countrymen."<sup>xxxiv</sup>

In her view, did the "errors" in the Latin Bible somehow cause the Reformation to linger? Wilkinson states that "the Reformation did not make great progress until after the Received Text had been restored to the world" (p. 50). Ellen White takes quite a different approach, highly commending Wycliffe and his work:

He had placed in the hands of the English people a light which should never be extinguished. In giving the Bible to his countrymen, he had done more to break the fetters of ignorance and vice, more to liberate and elevate his country, than was ever achieved by the most brilliant victories on fields of battle.<sup>xxxv</sup>

A few paragraphs later she again praises his work. It is instructive to listen to her words with the awareness that she is talking about the Vulgate Bible and an English translation based on it:

The great movement that Wycliffe inaugurated, which was to liberate the conscience and the intellect, and set free the nations so long bound to the triumphal car of Rome, had its spring in the Bible. Here was the source of that stream of blessing, which, like the water of life, has flowed down the ages since the fourteenth century. Wycliffe accepted the Holy Scriptures with implicit faith as the inspired revelation of God's will, a sufficient rule of faith and practice. He had been educated to regard the Church of Rome as the divine, infallible authority, and to accept with unquestioning reverence the established teachings and customs of a thousand years; but he turned away from all these to listen to God's holy word. This was the authority which he urged the people to acknowledge. Instead of the church speaking through the pope, he declared the only true authority to be the voice of God speaking through His word. And he taught not only that the Bible is a perfect revelation of God's will, but that the Holy Spirit is its only interpreter, and that every man is, by the study of its teachings, to learn his duty for himself. Thus he turned the minds of men from the

pope and the Church of Rome to the word of God.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

What Bible is Ellen White describing? The Vulgate, the Roman Catholic Bible, and Wycliffe's English translation of it! That was the Bible that sparked the Reformation.

No "lingering" here. She goes on to speak of Wycliffe as "one of the greatest of the Reformers."<sup>xxxvii</sup>

In sum, as with his treatment of the King James translators and Erasmus, Wilkinson again is so driven by his need to defend the Textus Receptus, that he has trouble seeing how God has used any and every translation to further his work, including the Latin Vulgate and Wycliffe's translation of it.

#### D. JEROME (342-420)

Wilkinson's hostility to Jerome and the Vulgate is so self-evident, that it scarcely needs documentation. But what is both intriguing and puzzling is the tell-tale evidence that he knows something of Jerome's positive contributions to the recovery of the true biblical text.

Of particular interest is a paragraph on p. 46 in Our Authorized Bible Vindicated in which Wilkinson quotes H. B. Swete as saying that Jerome was "an admirer of Origen's critical principles." The quotation is from Swete's Introduction to the OT in Greek, and naturally so, since Origen's "critical principles" would be most relevant for Jerome's handling of the Old Testament text. But Wilkinson goes on to say that Jerome studied Origen's manuscripts in the library at Caesarea, and that they influenced him "more in the New Testament than in the Old, since finally he used the Hebrew text in translating the Old Testament."

That is the puzzling comment, for while Jerome was much attracted to Origen

early in life, he later became an outspoken critic of Origenism. All that, however, would have no affect on Origen's "critical principles" which were pertinent to Jerome's work on the Old Testament text.

Early in his book, Wilkinson states that his primary concern was with the New Testament, since the text of the Old Testament was "in a settled condition" by the time of Christ (p. 6). That's an optimistic statement about the Old Testament, to be sure, but he goes on to refer to the very problem which both Origen and Jerome addressed with their considerable energies, namely, the text of the Old Testament: "Whatever perplexing problems there are in connection with the Old Testament, these have largely been produced by translating it into Greek and uniting that translation to the Greek New Testament."

And that is just where Jerome made a great contribution. Becoming ever more perturbed at the numerous old Latin translations of the Old Testament, all from the Greek Septuagint and varying greatly in quality, Jerome vowed to prepare a new Latin translation based on the Hebrew original. For that purpose he spent several years in Palestine learning Hebrew. But because it changed some traditional readings which were based on the Greek, Jerome's new Latin Vulgate stirred up a storm of protest.

His fresh translations of the New Testament also caused considerable furor. He knew it would happen but pushed ahead anyway. When the storm erupted he was ready with sharp words, calling his opponents "two-legged asses" who preferred muddy rivulets instead of the pure fountain of the original Greek. They were so stupid, he said, that they did not realize that he was correcting not the words of the Lord, but the faulty Latin manuscripts. To silence them he would blow a trumpet in their ears, since a lyre would make no impression on asses.<sup>xxxviii</sup> In the preface to Hebrew Questions, a book defending his preference for the Hebrew text, he assailed his detractors as "filthy swine who grunt as they trample on pearls."<sup>xxxix</sup>

If Wilkinson was unhappy because of Jerome's Catholicism, then perhaps he should listen to the glowing "Protestant" tribute to Jerome from the KJV translators in their Preface. The Preface is peppered with good words from Jerome and about him. But the statement about his translation of the Vulgate from the Hebrew is one of the most glowing:

But now the Latin Translations were too many to be all good, for they were infinite, saith S. Augustine. Again they were not out of the Hebrew fountain (we speak of the Latin Translations of the Old Testament) but out of the Greek stream, therefore the Greek being not altogether clear, the Latin derived from it must needs be muddy. This moved S. Jerome a most learned father, and the best linguist without controversy, of his age, or of any that went before him, to undertake the translation of the Old Testament, out of the very fountains themselves; which he performed with that evidence of great learning, judgment, industry and faithfulness, that he hath forever bound the Church unto him, in a debt of special remembrance and thankfulness.

In short, the KJV translators saw Jerome, not as one of the corrupters, but as one of the purifiers. And these were Protestants speaking about the Catholic scholar who gave birth to the Latin Vulgate.

#### E. ORIGEN (185-254)

Because Wilkinson has difficulty separating a scholar's theology from the ability to work carefully with the biblical text, he marks Origen as a corrupter rather

than a purifier of the biblical text. In one sense, as discussed below, Origen's work did end up corrupting the biblical text, but not at all in the way suggested by Wilkinson.

Ira M. Price, in a work known to Wilkinson, The Ancestry of Our English Bible, describes Origen as "the greatest Biblical scholar of the early Christian centuries."<sup>xi</sup> To be sure, Origen spawned ideas that orthodox Christians of every persuasion would certainly reject. But that creatively deviant side of his work should in no way detract from the enormous contribution he made to the study and recovery of the biblical text. Some heretics (Marcion, for example) set out to rewrite the Bible in support of their own theology. Not Origen. Indeed, his work with the Old Testament Hexapla, a six-fold version of the Old Testament, marked a significant turning point in the study of the Old Testament text. The synopsis here draws largely on Price's convenient and readable account.<sup>xii</sup>

Origen's plans for the Hexapla grew out of his frustration over the numerous differences he found between the Hebrew Bible, the Greek Septuagint, and three other Greek translations. His express purpose was to enable Christians to carry on meaningful discussions with Jews without being embarrassed by contradictory Hebrew and Greek texts. Though now lost, probably when the Saracen Turks overran Caesarea in the seventh century, the completed Hexapla would have filled 6000 leaves or 12000 pages. Origen and his helpers spent 28 years working on the project.

The six columns contained the following: 1) Hebrew text, by word or phrase; 2) Hebrew transliteration into Greek (the sounds of the Hebrew reproduced by the Greek alphabet); 3) Aquila, an extremely literal Greek translation; 4) Symmachus's Greek translation; 5) Septuagint, revised by Origen himself; 6) Theodotion's Greek translation.

Aside from the sheer size of the project, the primary significance lay in



Origen's fifth column, for there he introduced critical markings into the text to note additions and omissions. He never deleted anything from the Septuagint column; but when he found an addition in the LXX which was not in the Hebrew, he marked the beginning and the ending with critical signs. Conversely, if the Septuagint lacked what the Hebrew contained, he added a Greek equivalent, generally from one of the other columns, marking the beginning and the ending of the addition. The result was an expanded (conflated) LXX, always longer than the Hebrew, never shorter.

Now as long as the critical markings remained, Origen's goals could have been kept intact. But apparently the Hexapla was so massive that scribes began copying the fifth column only. Without the other columns, however, the critical markings soon became meaningless and fell by the way. Thus the so-called "hexaplaric" editions of the LXX tended to be expansionistic (conflated). Thus, in a sense, Origen's work did "corrupt" the text, but his deviant theology was not involved. And his methods of marking variants set a standard that still lie at the foundation of modern textual criticism.

The KJV Preface refers briefly to Origen's Hexapla, commending his work as being done "worthily and to great purpose." Origen may be justly criticized for deviant theology. But he stands in a place of honor with Jerome, Wycliffe, Erasmus, and the KJV translators as men who believed that "even the jots and tittles of the Bible are important."

We turn now to two final considerations of Wilkinson's work: his treatment of revised passages, and his fear of Modernism.

## 6. REVISED TEXTS?

Wilkinson dedicates three chapters (6, 11, 12) to the examination of KJV passages that have been altered in the Revised Versions. In chapters 11 and 12 he deals largely with simple comparisons between the KJV and the Revised Version or the American Standard Version. In chapter 6, however, he introduces the "Jesuit Bible" (Rheims New Testament, 1582) as the intermediate step between the KJV and the Revised, seeking to show how the Catholic has "led the way" in making changes in the biblical text.

As indicated earlier, the KJV translators did not hesitate to make use of good Catholic scholarship. Indeed, as noted above, there is solid evidence that KJV translators incorporated material from the Rheims NT. But the crucial factor is not whether a change was made by a Catholic, but whether or not it can be justified on textual grounds.

After studying the various "problem" texts cited by Wilkinson, I have concluded that virtually all of them reflect one or more of the following concerns:

- A. Fear of changes that might affect doctrine.
- B. Fear of texts that move toward modernist interpretations, especially anti-supernaturalism.
- C. Discomfort with changes in familiar passages, especially when they involve omissions.

All three concerns are legitimate, though their intensity is much increased if one approaches the Bible with an all-or-nothing attitude and the fear of the "slippery slope."

As for possible changes in doctrine, I decided, as a first step in working through Wilkinson's "problem passages," that I would ask myself if there were any other passages from elsewhere in Scripture which would clearly support the "old" reading now missing from the Revised Version. Following that procedure, I found myself, virtually without exception, penciling into Wilkinson's margin references which

clearly state the "old" doctrine or idea. Thus, unless I were to insist on keeping all the texts that I had ever used to support a particular doctrine or idea, I found no doctrines to be at risk. Still, his concerns deserve attention and come to light when he presents his "problem texts."

#### A. MIRACLES OR SIGNS? JOHN 2:11 (pp. 186-87)

Wilkinson discusses this passage under the heading "A Deadly Blow Against Miracles." Though he objects to the use of the word "signs" in place of "miracles," I did not find him convincing. He notes that the KJV uses the word "miracle" (singular or plural) thirty-two times. In the Revised Version, he says, the word has disappeared entirely in twenty-three of these instances; in the nine other cases, a "weakening substitute" is suggested in the margin. I find this criticism puzzling, for the actual deeds remain untouched: water to wine, walking on water, multiplying loaves, raising the dead. The Revisers will have to be much more brutal with the text if they want to eliminate miracles.

#### B. INSPIRED SCRIPTURE: 2 TIMOTHY 3:16 (pp. 184-85)

Under the heading "Tradition Equals Scripture According to the Revised," Wilkinson claims that the Revised Version has weakened the doctrine of inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16 by reading "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable" instead of "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." He even quotes something like a chortle from the Catholic Dublin Review (July, 1881) which wrote in connection with this verse that Protestantism "has been robbed of its only proof of

Bible inspiration" (pp. 184-85).

But one does not need a revision of 2 Timothy 3:16 in order to take liberties with inspiration. And I find it interesting to note that Ellen White, without apparent qualms and with no explanation, quotes the Revised Version of 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 in the Introduction to The Great Controversy.<sup>xiii</sup> She certainly believed in the inspiration of all Scripture. And when it comes to Bible versions, I am more prepared to be instructed by her example than by strong words from a Catholic newspaper.

### C. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES: JOHN 5:39 (pp. 185-86)

Wilkinson also quotes the Dublin Review in support of his objection to the change in John 5:39. The KJV translates the Greek verb as an imperative: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life." But the verb is actually ambiguous, and the same form can also be translated in the indicative, the choice of the Revised Version: "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them...." The Dublin Review commented: "But perhaps the most surprising change of all is John 5:39. It is no longer 'Search the Scriptures,' but 'Ye search;' and thus Protestantism has lost the very cause of its being." Wilkinson himself comments: "The Revisers destroyed this command. Is not this changing a fundamental doctrine?"

Ellen White's use of the verse is again instructive. In Testimonies for the Church 2:121, for example, she quotes John 5:39 in the imperative. This was in 1868, before the Revised Version appeared in 1881-85. In at least two instances in her later writings, however (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 367 [1890]; Desire of Ages, p. 211 [1898]), she quotes the indicative directly from the Revised Version.

In other cases she simply avoided the problem by quoting only the last half of the verse, "They are they which testify of me" (Steps to Christ, p. 88 [1892]; Christ's Object Lessons, p. 39, 128 [1900]). The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary allows for both the imperative and the indicative in John 5:39 while suggesting that the indicative of the Revised Version best suits the context.<sup>xliii</sup>

In connection with this same passage, it may be noted that the "Scripture Index" in volume 1 of the Ellen G. White Index<sup>xliv</sup> takes special note of Ellen White's usage of the Revised Versions. The first full column on John 1, for example, includes separate entries for John 1:14 RV (Ed 28); 1:14 RV, marg. (DA 23-4); 1:26, 27 RV, marg. (DA 136); 1:29 ARV (MH 157); 1:29-34 RV, marg. (DA 137).

Just from the one column it becomes obvious that Ellen White was not only aware of the Revised Version, the American Standard Version (apparently referred to as ARV in the Index), and their marginal references, but also felt free to use them. It might be a worthwhile project to pursue the question of why Wilkinson was frightened by the Revised Versions, but Ellen White was not.

#### D. LORD'S PRAYER: MATTHEW 6:13; LUKE 11:2-4 (pp. 91-94)

Wilkinson strikes a responsive chord in me when he protests against the "mutilation" of the Lord's Prayer. I, too, resist when revisers tinker with something as precious as the Lord's Prayer.<sup>xlv</sup> In Matthew 6:13, the problem is the omission of the closing doxology: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." In Luke 11:2-4, the Revised Versions omit three phrases that appear in the KJV: "which art in heaven," "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth," "but deliver us from evil."

Here no doctrine is at risk, only our religious "habits." Yet how troublesome (and

how helpful!) our habits can be!

Some pointed questions can help us get to the root of the problem. First, did Jesus pray just one, fixed "Lord's Prayer"? Even in the KJV the setting and the wording of the two versions are not identical. Even if he did speak a "word-for-word" Lord's Prayer, Luke and Matthew obviously did not remember it in exactly the same form, or at least they didn't record it as such.

Wilkinson is unintentionally revealing when he refers to the prayer in Luke as "the secondary account." Why "secondary"? Aha! Our religious habits again. We have all memorized Matthew's version. That is enough to make Luke secondary, even though I cannot imagine Jesus or his apostles calling one version or the other "secondary."

But now let's press the issue further, for it lies right at the heart of the matter in many of Wilkinson's "problem texts." Imagine a scribe sitting at his table copying out the Gospel of Luke. He is a devout man, one who has memorized Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer and now repeats it daily. What happens when he comes to the version in Luke 11? Unless he is very alert, the key phrases from Matthew's version will slip into Luke's version and he won't even notice. Furthermore, when he proofreads his work, the new "expanded" (conflated) version of Luke's prayer will sound quite natural since he has it well memorized and repeats it every day.

Note that all three of the "omissions" from the Revised Version of Luke 11 are present in Matthew's version. Now those who seek to recover and preserve the original text of Scripture believe (with Wilkinson!) that "even the jots and tittles of the Bible are important" (p. 175). The task of the worthy scribe, then, is to record what Luke wrote in Luke, and what Matthew wrote in Matthew. Even if the words have long been hallowed by use, a faithful scribe will preserve the "original" jots and tittles, not the ones that came along later.

And this is where the known characteristics of the Received Text become important. As indicated earlier, the technical name for the Received text type is Byzantine or Koine, indicating that it circulated in the old Byzantine empire. And when the manuscripts of this type are compared with each and with other types, it becomes clear that the Byzantine scribes tended to expand (conflate) and harmonize Scripture. Many of the expansions are like the ones in Luke's edition of the Lord's Prayer, words and phrases that originated in one of the other Gospels. In the vast majority of cases the additions are quite harmless <sup>B</sup> until a thoughtful scribe sets about the work of recovering the original text. Then devout believers like Wilkinson become most upset because they have not realized how the changes happened in the first place. As Jerome put it when criticized for his "corrected" version of the Gospels, "I didn't correct the words of the Lord, only the words of faulty Latin manuscripts!"

Now it is also interesting to note that even Wilkinson did not complain that Matthew's "doxology" is missing from Luke. Why? Because the KJV of Luke never included Matthew's doxology. Thus it was not a problem for Wilkinson. But, with the notable exception of the New King James Version, virtually all modern versions of the Bible now omit the doxology from Matthew. Why? Because the oldest and best texts of Matthew do not include it. The doxology is thoroughly biblical, coming from 1 Chronicles 29:10-11. But it does not belong in Matthew. No doubt Christians will continue to pray the KJV version of the Lord's Prayer. But we will need to learn to read Matthew 6 without it. And in that connection, a good friend of mine who has memorized the Sermon on the Mount, preaching and teaching it frequently, notes in good humor but with emphasis that, in the context of Matthew 6, the Lord's Prayer flows much more smoothly without the doxology.

Finally, let me say again that my heart and my emotions are with Wilkinson on the issue of the "mutilation" of the Lord's Prayer. But I must be realistic and

recognize that my heart and my emotions still have a thing or two to learn.

When we turn to some additional "problem passages," it becomes clear that knowing the relationship between the parallel accounts in Scripture can solve several of Wilkinson's problem passages. In Matthew 5:44 (p. 92), for example, the omission of "bless them that curse you" is linked to the parallel passage in Luke 6:28. And in Luke 4:8 (p. 93), "get thee behind me, Satan" is linked with the parallel passage in Matthew 4:10.

If one is not afraid to see the differences in the Gospel texts, a thoughtful study often reveals that "omissions" or "deletions" are important for understanding an author's special message. A good example of such an "omission" in the writings of Ellen White can be found on page 10 of Steps to Christ. In the chapter entitled "God's Love for Man," she quotes Exodus 34:6 and 7: "The Lord God, merciful and gracious..." concluding with the words, "forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Now the biblical passage at that point shifts to a more somber tone: "but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children...." But that portion of the verse would not have been helpful for the point Ellen White wanted to make at that point. Now she was quite capable of being somber; she knew how to call on the thunders of Sinai. But she didn't want thunder in that first chapter of Steps.

God has preserved four different Gospels for us. But those four were not without challenges in the early Christian centuries. Some, like the heretic Marcion, wanted to dump all the Gospels except one. His preference was Luke. Others, like Tatian, moved in the opposite direction and attempted to blend all four into one in his Diatessaron. Ironically, Wilkinson knew about Tatian, perhaps without realizing that his own attitude to the Revised Version represented a similar impulse to the one driving Tatian:



Tatian wrote a Harmony of the Gospels which was called the Diatessaron, meaning four in one. The Gospels were so notoriously corrupted by his hand that in later years a bishop of Syria, because of the errors, was obliged to throw out of his churches no less than two hundred copies of this Diatessaron, since church members were mistaking it for the true Gospel (p. 16).

Thoughtful translators have been called to unravel the work of men like Tatian. With him the changes were deliberate, even though well-intentioned. But in most cases, the blending of accounts probably happened quite unconsciously. Still, if the Lord has given us four voices: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, surely he intends us to hear each one. The tendency of believers is to homogenize. But the Lord had a purpose in giving us both cream and skim milk. With the help of godly scholars, we should be able to appreciate both.

## 7. THE MODERNIST THREAT

It may very well be that Wilkinson's deepest concern was over the threat that modernism posed to Scripture and the life of the church. As noted earlier, he was writing at a time when Fundamentalism was reacting strongly against the inroads of rationalism. Wilkinson obviously believed that the best way to combat the threat was to defend an unchanging word of God, down to the last jot and tittle.

A glimpse at Wilkinson's opening salvo and his final parting shot illustrate his concerns. After the Foreword, Our Authorized Bible Vindicated opens with a 1924 quotation from The Herald and Presbyter, a Presbyterian journal. The concluding sentence reads:

Those who have really investigated the matter, and are in hearty sympathy with what is evangelical, realize that this Revised Version is a part of the movement to "modernize" Christian thought and faith and do away with the established truth (p. 1).

Following this quotation, Wilkinson refers to a 1928 article entitled, "Who Killed Goliath?" and a 1929 follow-up piece, "The Dispute About Goliath," both published in The Literary Digest. The catalyst for the articles was 2 Samuel 21:19 in the American Revised Version which states that Elhanan killed Goliath. Wilkinson refers to "a special cablegram from 'the most learned and devout scholars' of the Church of England" who reputedly said that the new version was correct, that Elhanan had not David killed Goliath. The same cablegram apparently referred to "many other things in the Bible which were the product of exaggeration, such as the story of Noah and the ark, of Jonah and the whale, of the Garden of Eden, and of the longevity of Methuselah." The claim was made that seminaries were all teaching such "modern" things and that "the young ministers being graduated from them, have rejected the old beliefs about these events whether the public knew it or not" (p. 1).

I would have to say that the description of the seminaries and their graduates was probably close to the truth. Mainstream Protestantism, then as now, tends to be skeptical about God's "miraculous" involvement in the world, whether in Bible times or in our own. Wilkinson, interestingly enough, does not address the larger scene, but focuses on the Goliath question, telling how the publisher was "inundated" with letters asking "whether this Revised Version is correct, or whether, as we have always believed, according to the Authorized Version, David killed Goliath" (p. 2). The implication of Wilkinson's comments which follow is that holding firm to the KJV is the key to faith.

But now let's look more closely at the biblical passages that tell us about Goliath. The familiar story is found only in 1 Samuel 17. There, the manuscripts and translations are quite clear: David killed Goliath.

But in addition to the familiar story, two parallel passages listing the exploits of David and his mighty men also describe Goliath's death: 2 Samuel 21:19 and 1 Chronicles 20:5. In 2 Samuel 21, the Hebrew, Septuagint, and virtually all modern translations read (NKJV is an exception): "Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam" (NRSV). In the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 20, the Hebrew, Septuagint, and all modern translations read: "Elhanan, son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam." In short, 2 Samuel says Elhanan killed Goliath, 1 Chronicles says he killed the brother of Goliath.

The problem probably lies in the tangled Hebrew original. But what are the options? For starters, Scripture is clear that David killed a giant and so did Elhanan. The names easily could have been confused in any of the passages. That happens in Scripture; we could cite other examples if we weren't afraid of them. The KJV solution (which we will examine shortly) is, of course, the easiest: add "brother of" to 2 Samuel 21:19. Problem solved.

But suppose an honest scholar were to conclude on a careful study of the Hebrew parallel passages that Elhanan really did kill Goliath. Would that mean the story in 1 Samuel 17 didn't happen? Not at all. It simply would mean that somewhere along the line someone got the names mixed up. That's all.

Let me suggest that we take a lesson from real life. Have you ever gotten names mixed up when you were writing a test, and I mean even important names?

Even if you are reporting a great disaster or a great celebration, getting a name wrong does not deny the reality of the event. But somehow the all-or-nothing

thinking in connection with the Bible makes us terribly afraid to be that practical. I've even heard preachers talk about Moses leading the animals into the ark. You might not catch that one immediately. It was Noah <sup>B</sup> and he probably didn't lead them in, God did!

Such slips happen. But they don't have to be disastrous. Let's allow the Bible writers the same kind of latitude we grant our very best friends. Then we can sleep nights without the haunting fear that someone is going to shred our Bible.

As for David and Goliath, I will always tell the story as it is in 1 Samuel 17: David killed Goliath. It's so obvious there. Besides, who tells stories from obscure lists? Could it be that the Lord allowed the scribes to tuck those minor contradictions into the Bible so that we could learn not to panic over just such things? Unfortunately, we resist being honest with the jots and tittles in Scripture, a sure way to make the panic worse, at least for some. And I fear Wilkinson has contributed to it.

Now let's look at what the KJV translators did to fix up 2 Samuel 21:19. If they hadn't tinkered with the text (and they did so honestly, I suspect), Wilkinson would have had to find another example to put at the beginning of his book. In brief, the KJV translators added the words "brother of" to 2 Samuel 21:19, thus harmonizing it with 1 Chronicles 20:5. That's the easiest way to fix the problem and may be the right way <sup>B</sup> but our faith in God and in the biblical account doesn't have to depend on that particular solution.

But now look more carefully at just how the KJV translators added the phrase "brother of": they put it in italics! That means they supplied the word without any manuscript evidence. In a sense they were alerting the reader to the tentative and conjectural nature of their "solution." To be sure they had the parallel passage from 1 Chronicles 20:5. But both in the Hebrew and in the Septuagint the manuscripts of 2 Samuel 21:19 consistently read: Elhanan killed Goliath. Now if

the ancients could live with such "apparent contradictions" without losing their faith, why can't we? The trouble is, readers both liberal and conservative often do not take the Bible seriously enough.

To sum up, modern translations have it right when they return to the original manuscripts and read in 2 Samuel 21:19: Elhanan killed Goliath. But such a restoration of the original reading does not require the rejection of the miraculous by the "modernists" or an all-or-nothing defense by the Fundamentalists. Sadly, the two extremes feed each other and anger each other. And Wilkinson was caught in just that kind of tussle.

Wilkinson's perception of the real threat is indicated by the title of his last chapter: "The Rising Tide of Modernism and Modern Bibles." He argues that modern versions contribute to the rise of modernism. I would pose a counter-argument, however, namely, that to defend the Bible with all-or-nothing arguments as Wilkinson has done often drives honest seekers for truth into the arms of the modernists. If we let the history of the Bible speak for itself, God's Word can stand sharp and clear, the two-edged sword he intended it to be.

While I have no question about Wilkinson's commitment to his Lord or his church, I do believe the intensity of his feelings kept him from seeing important evidence. Furthermore, his intensity just added to the problem. The enlightenment rationalism that devastated the Christian world was itself a reaction to an authoritarian medieval church. Enlightenment thinkers were convinced that human reason could solve all problems without the interference of God or the church. The result was a world stripped of the supernatural and a sense of God's presence. Wilkinson was rightly horrified and I share his concern. But I believe the solution must lie elsewhere than in shouting down modern translations. The King's speech can still reach his loyal subjects in many and varied ways and in a variety of translations. And if it falls our lot to translate the King's speech, then we ought to

take the good translations of that speech in hand and see if we can make it better, clearer, and more effective, just as it was when God spoke through the prophets, apostles, and through his Son.

## 8. WILKINSON AGAIN: MODERN BIBLE TRANSLATIONS UNMASKED

The recent of defense the King James Version, or rather the critique of modern translations, by Russell and Colin Standish, is based largely on Wilkinson's work. Since, some issues stand out more clearly in the Standish book, however, a few observations are in order.

### A. ERRORS AND THE GOD OF SCIENCE

The Standish book comes out more forcefully in favor of "inerrancy" than Wilkinson does. Right at the beginning is a reference to "the inerrant Word of God" (p. 2). The Supplement addresses the issue even more bluntly; the implications of the all-or-nothing logic are spelled out with painful clarity on pages 5-7 of the Supplement. There the authors relate the experience of a ministerial student who was told that when the Bible deals with such subjects as "history, chronology, astronomy, or biology, it is not accurate and has plenty of mistakes." As they tell the story, and there is no reason to doubt it, for it happens with some frequency, "this ministerial student came to the logical conclusion that if the Bible is not reliable in these things on which it can be tested, neither can it be trusted on other themes" (S p. 5).

On the next page the authors pose several questions: "If there are scientific

errors in the Bible, why should there not be errors of theology and of salvation as well?" And again: "If one part is erroneous, can any of it be trusted?" (S p. 6).

But perhaps most revealing is the comment on p. 7 of the Supplement where the authors comment on an Ellen White statement: "The Bible is not to be tested by men's ideas of science, but science is to be brought to the test of this unerring standard."<sup>xlvi</sup> The reason this statement is significant, they say, is that "science has become the god of millions. Too often some who claim to be members of God's remnant church pay this false god far too much secret worship" (S p. 7).

There is a truth, there. But is it also possible that our insistence on finding precise science in the Bible may actually be another way of paying this "false god far too much secret worship"? Science, you see, is very much a modern phenomenon. No believer in biblical times would ever have insisted on finding pure "science" in the Bible. That is a recent idea. To be sure, in the heady days of the enlightenment, reason and science were used to attack the Bible. And the Bible is still attacked in the name of reason and science. In fact, this "false god" B the Standish term is a good one -- has so bewitched the world that even Christians have begun to worship at its feet, albeit quite unintentionally. That's why Christians will attack the scientists one moment, but rejoice the next when "science" proves some aspect of Bible truth.

Alva J. McClain, for example, in his little book, Daniel's Prophecy of the 70 Weeks, declares that he has found a way of interpreting the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 so that it pinpoints "the very day" on which the Messiah would ride into Jerusalem. "In this remarkable fulfillment," he declares, "we have an unanswerable argument for the divine inspiration of the Bible. It is, in fact, nothing less than a mathematical demonstration."<sup>xlvii</sup> Adventists would note that his "mathematical demonstration" is based on quite a different set of dates, all in the interests of dispensational theology and a secret rapture. Such "proof" is much too vulnerable to be enduring.

A similar awe in the presence of mathematics and science is reflected in Peter Stoner's argument based on messianic prophets. Taking eight Old Testament prophecies, he computes the probability of a single person's fulfilling them as being 1 in 10 to the 17th power. That's 1 with seventeen zeroes after it. The odds would be the same if one were to cover the entire state of Texas two feet deep with silver dollars and then look for a single marked dollar. "Coincidence is ruled out by the science of probability," says the author quoting Stoner in Signs of the Times.<sup>xlviii</sup>

All that sounds impressive. But it isn't at all "biblical." In the New Testament, Jesus is said to have "fulfilled" prophecy. But it wasn't the kind of fulfillment one could prove in a laboratory. It was more like the "fulfilling" of the law in Matthew 5, filling old truths with new and deeper meaning. The people listened to Jesus, not because he "proved" the truth, but because he lived it with such power and because he practiced what he preached. That's why they believed.

Today, no book is outdated more quickly than a science textbook. And Christians cannot afford to wait until science gets it right. God calls us to live for him today! Now! And the Bible is the source of our vision, courage, and power.

Now I would like to suggest what we might call "practical reliability" from Scripture rather than "scientific reliability." It was the kind of thing the King James translators were talking about when they said the apostles used a Septuagint translation which "needed in many places correction." "Yet," said the translators, "it seemed good to the holy Ghost and to them, to take that which they found," namely, a translation that was "for the greatest part true and sufficient." Not absolute perfection, but sufficient. If we would trust the Bible in the same way we do our good friends, we could allow minor glitches while still trusting the witnesses to be true and sufficient. That's practical reliability, just what we need for dealing with human beings. Scientific reliability works well with laboratory instruments. It's less helpful when applied to people.



In this same connection, especially in view of the Standish brothers' use of the term "false god" to refer to science, I find it interesting to note that science itself shows signs of becoming more humble. Bart Kosko, a man trained in the sciences, for example, has written Fuzzy Thinking: The New Science of Fuzzy Logic, to show how the traditional binary, either-or model often simply does not work in real life. His opening sentence is striking: "One day I learned that science was not true. I do not recall the day but I recall the moment. The God of the twentieth century was no longer God."<sup>xlix</sup> As for facts, Kosko says: "There are just too many molecules involved in a >fact= for a declarative sentence to cover them all. When you speak, you simplify. And when you simplify, you lie."<sup>i</sup>

I think the Standish brothers are right when they declare that we have been too much in awe of science. Another Kosko quote suggests the same and is particularly interesting in view of the mathematical "proof" cited above: "The more math an author throws at a problem, the less her audience understands her and the more they respect her."<sup>ii</sup>

So let's quit worshiping science and find a model that is more in keeping with our daily needs. Let's return to Scripture and expect "practical reliability" rather than "scientific reliability." After all, as Ellen White herself said, "God and heaven alone are infallible."<sup>iii</sup> God's word is reliable. But our own fallible nature should suggest caution when we use the term infallible with reference to our interpretations of Scripture or science.

## B. CARELESS SCHOLARSHIP

Even when writing in our own fields of expertise we are more prone to mistakes that we like to admit. Anyone who has attempted to proofread an article

or book knows about that. Since the Standish brothers are not writing in their areas of expertise, I would not expect them to produce fully polished and supported arguments. But even given their lay perspective on the history of the Bible, the number of glaring errors in their book is remarkable.

Wilkinson had his slips, too B dating the Council of Trent to 1645 instead of 1545 (p. 15), placing Wycliffe's translation two hundred instead of one hundred years before the birth of Luther (p. 49). But even the great Erasmus had many such flaws in the first edition of his Greek NT.

Beyond minor slips, however, Wilkinson's handling of his sources prepared the way for some of the more striking errors in the Standish book. In attempting to draw clear lines between the purists and the corrupters, Wilkinson leaves the distinct impression that each corrupter taught the next one in line: Justin Martyr had a "pupil" named Tatian; Tatian had a "pupil" named Clement of Alexandria; and Clement had a "pupil" named Origen. Then Origen was the one "who mightily influenced Jerome" (pp. 16-17).

All that is quite misleading. The short note on "Tatian" in The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, for example, says that "Tatian was a pupil of St. Justin Martyr, but soon showed leanings to independent opinions." And "his literary opponents" included Clement of Alexandria and Origen.<sup>liii</sup> The ODDC article on Clement mentions no links between Clement and either Tatian or Origen.<sup>liv</sup> Under "Origen," ODDC says that Clement fled Alexandria in the persecution of 202 and that Origen was appointed in his place as head of the Catechetical School there. ODDC mentions no other tie between them.<sup>lv</sup>

It's possible, of course, that subtle ties existed between these men which simply are not mentioned in ODDC. But Wilkinson's genealogy is much too tidy, and his careless language no doubt accounts for the reference in the Standish book to "Origen and his follower, Jerome" (p. 9), and even more blatantly: "It was

Origen who taught Jerome" (p. 17). That would be difficult B Origen died in 254; Jerome was born in 342.

A similar misreading of the history of the Bible appears when the Standish brothers describe the origin of the Vulgate. Simplifying the classification of manuscripts, they speak of the Eastern text and the Western. Their "Eastern" is the Received Text, while Rome and Alexandria are in "Western" territory. They classify the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus as belonging to the "Western" text. They then say that the Latin Vulgate and the Douay [sic] Version were translated from these "Western" texts. The resulting picture is tidy, with the corrupters in the West and the purists in the East. But the real picture is much more complex and their use of technical terms for their own purposes is not at all helpful.

Finally, the hint of "sinister" motives relative to the Vaticanus manuscript is not credible when the facts are known. On pp. 58-60, the Standish book discusses the relationship between the church historian Eusebius (d. 340) and the two Codices, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, accepting the view held by some authorities, that Eusebius was the "source" of both (p. 58). Given that perspective, the following quote is of interest:

Since the Codex Vaticanus does not include the book of Revelation one might question if it is just due to a failure to complete the manuscript, or due to later loss, or whether a more sinister matter B that Eusebius himself accepted that it was spurious and thus saw no need to include it (p. 60).

The Nestle Greek NT indicates that Vaticanus is missing the last part of the New Testament, everything from Hebrews 9:14 to the end (including 1 Timothy to Philemon). Metzger indicates that the Vaticanus is also missing almost forty-six

chapters of Genesis and some thirty psalms.<sup>lv</sup> Given those circumstances, the possibility that Revelation was deliberately omitted from the Vaticanus seems remote. Furthermore, if Eusebius were to be that sinister with the Vaticanus, why would he allow its companion manuscript, Codex Sinaiticus, equally maligned by the defenders of the Received Text, to include Revelation? Codex Sinaiticus is still the only uncial manuscript to contain the entire New Testament. It would appear that the Standish brothers, like Wilkinson, simply have a hard time accepting honest motives when dealing with the Catholic tradition.

### **C. A PRACTICAL CONCERN: THE BIBLE TO ALL THE WORLD**

Finally, perhaps the most disturbing implication of the Standish book is what it means for Gospel work and the distribution of Scripture. With the exception of the small Trinitarian Bible Society which still supports the Received Text, all the Bible Societies, including the American Bible Society and the United Bible Societies, continue to pursue the two great objectives that were dear to the hearts of the Reformers and followed by translators of the King James Version:

1) **Back to the Source: Finding the Ancient and the Original.** The Bible Societies base their work on the best possible manuscripts, seeking to get as close as possible to the very words written by the prophets and apostles. Often the Received Text is correct; but often it needs correction, and the history of the Received Text explains why. Thus all the major texts and translations prepared by the Bible Societies are "eclectic." That will continue to be the case as long as the Bible Societies follow the same principles which guided the Reformers and the translators of the King James Version.

2) **Forward to the People: Putting Translations into Every Human Hand and Tongue.** Until all people everywhere can hear and read God's Word in their

own mother tongue, the work of the Gospel is not complete. The Bible Societies are committed to that goal. In some cases, it means translating the Bible into a language for the very first time. But in many cases it means staying abreast of a changing world, revising and updating older translations into the language of today. That will continue to be the case as long as the Bible Societies follow the same principles which guided the Reformers and the translators of the King James Version.

But for reasons which I only partially understand, some are much more cautious about sharing God's Word. In the case of Russell and Colin Standish, their feelings about the Received Text are so strong, they almost seem to prefer no Bible at all rather than risk one they consider corrupt. The tragedy of that view comes clear from these two paragraphs:

In 1990 Colin was preaching at a Korean campmeeting in Georgia. He mentioned the widespread use of Bibles in many languages translated from the corrupted Greek manuscripts. After the service a number of Korean pastors wanted to know if their Bible was translated from corrupted manuscripts. It took little time to confirm the worst fears of the pastors. They explained that only one translation is now available in Korean -- and this translation is from corrupted manuscripts.

Even in the minuscule Pacific Island nation of Kiribati (formerly the Gilbert Islands), the present translation is based upon the corrupted Western manuscripts (p. 61).

I find the Korean scene especially poignant. Think of it B more than

100,000 Adventists in Korea, plus myriads of other Christians, all won and nurtured by a "corrupted" Bible? Please no! No doubt the Korean Bible could be improved just as Tyndale and Erasmus improved on Wycliffe. But let's not dismiss it as "corrupted."

If only we could hear and believe the godly good sense of the King James translators: "We affirm and avow, that the very meanest translation of the Bible containeth the word of God, nay is the word of God."

## ENDNOTES

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i. Benjamin G. Wilkinson, Our Authorized Bible Vindicated (Washington D.C.: 1930; reprint edition, Leaves-of-Autumn Books, Inc., PO Box 440, Payson, Arizona 85541).

ii. H. H. Meyers, Battle of the Bibles (New Millennium Publications, Post Box 290, Morisset NSW 2264, Australia, 1993).

iii. Russell R. and Colin D. Standish, Modern Bible Translations Unmasked (Rapidan, Virginia: Hartland Publications, 1993).

iv. David Otis Fuller, Which Bible? (Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 2233 Michigan N. E., Grand Rapids, MI 49503, 1990 [first published, 1970]). Without indicating that he is modifying Wilkinson's text, Fuller enhances and revises the footnotes, omits chapters and paragraphs, italicizes the text otherwise than in Wilkinson's original, and occasionally revises the main text. While referring to Wilkinson as "a scholar of the first rank," Fuller otherwise identifies him only as someone who "taught for many years at a small and obscure Eastern College."

Both the original and the reprint editions of Our Authorized Bible Vindicated identify Wilkinson as Dean of Theology, Washington Missionary College. He obviously wrote for the wider Protestant Fundamentalist audience, however, for in the body of his book he avoids any direct reference to his affiliation with Seventh-day Adventists. He comes closest to revealing his Adventist identity when dealing with problem texts: a sabbath text in Acts 13:42 (p. 94) and two comments on that well-known "Adventist" variant in

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Revelation 22:14: "keep the commandments" vs. "wash their robes" (pp. 98, 198). Most likely, Wilkinson's book has been the key influence in familiarizing Adventists with that particular variant.

v. "Wilkinson, Benjamin George," in Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, revised ed., Don Neufeld, ed. (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), p. 1609.

vi. B. G. Wilkinson, Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1944).

vii. See Dennis Pettibone, "The Sunday Law Movement," in The World of Ellen G. White, Gary Land, ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1987), pp. 113-28.

viii. Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1888, 1907, 1911), p. 564.

ix. Meyers, pp. 126-131.

x. W. C. White to L. E. Froom, letter dated January 8, 1928, cited in Appendix C of Selected Messages From the Writings of Ellen G. White, Book 3 (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), p. 454.

xi. Molleurus Couperus, ed., "The Bible Conference of 1919," Spectrum 10:1 (May, 1979), pp. 54-55.

xii. For the story of Prescott's struggles and the possible influence of Gaussen and his book, Theopneustia, see Alden Thompson, "Questions and perplexities without end," in Adventist Review, September 19, 1985 (Part three of four-part series, "Adventists and Inspiration"), pp. 7-9.

xiii. Wilkinson, Our Authorized Bible Vindicated, p. 73, citing A. T. Robertson, An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament [1925, 1928], p. 21.

xiv. Letter of Aristeas, lines 310-311, trans. by R. J. H. Shutt, in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 2, James. H. Charlesworth, ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), p. 33.

xv. Reprinted with commentary by Edgar J. Goodspeed, ed., The Translators to the Reader: Preface to the King James Version 1611 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935).

xvi. David Ewert, A General Introduction to the Bible (Grand

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Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 198.

xvii. J. Isaacs, "The Sixteenth-Century English Versions," in The Bible in its Ancient and English Versions, H. Wheeler Robinson, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 193-94.

xviii. An even more vivid example of how a conspiratorial stance can distort the history of the Bible is found in G. A. Riplinger's flamboyant New Age Bible Versions (Munroe Falls, Ohio: AV Publications, 1993 [Box 388, Munroe Falls, Ohio 44262]).

Disregarding the commonly held view that the Greek Septuagint was the Bible of the Apostles and the New Testament era, Riplinger declares in a footnote [#87, to Chapter 38, p. 685] that "The Septuagint [LXX] cannot be the word of God." Her reasons are worth noting.

Her first point is that "it contains the Apocrypha." True. But so does the King James Version which she is defending, though the KJV admittedly followed Luther's example and moved the apocryphal books to a separate section between the Old and New Testaments. Ironically, when Protestants began to argue against the canonical status of the Apocrypha, they quoted the Catholic scholars, Origen (d. 254), Jerome (d. 420), and Augustine (d. 430) to show that the Apocrypha did not belong in the Old Testament. See article, "Apocrypha," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, G. A. Buttrick, ed. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) 1:164.

Riplinger's second point is not entirely clear, for she first uses the word "fable" to describe the story of the Septuagint's origin [Letter of Aristeas], and goes on to note that this "fable" says the Septuagint was written by 72 Jews, six from each of the twelve tribes. Correctly noting that the word Septuagint means 70, not 72 (her basis for rejecting the story?), she then seems to assume the truth of the "fable" after all, for it provides her second reason for rejecting the Septuagint, namely, that "only the tribe of Levi were permitted by God to write the scriptures (1 Chronicles 16:4)." Her sweeping application of the passage in Chronicles moves far beyond what the passage actually says.

Her third point also seems to accept the truth of the "fable," for it assumes that the Septuagint originated in Egypt as per the Letter of Aristeas. Her third reason, then, for not accepting the Septuagint: "Any Jew living in or returning to Egypt was in direct disobedience to God's command in Deuteronomy 17:16."

Fourth, and finally, now assuming (wrongly) that Origen wrote the Septuagint, she argues for its rejection because "Origen's six column [sic] Old testament, the Hexapla, parallels O.T. versions by Theodotian [sic], Symmachus, and Aquilla [sic], all three Gnostic occultists." Again, the conspiratorial approach assumes guilt by association.



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As noted above, the King James translators were much more charitable in their treatment of the Septuagint. While recognizing its shortcomings ("that Translation was not so sound and so perfect, but that it needed in many places correction...") and the sins of its translators ("as men they stumbled and fell, one while through oversight, another while through ignorance, yea, sometimes they may be noted to add to the Original, and sometimes to take away from it..."), the KJV translators affirmed that this was the Bible used by the Apostles: "It seemed good to the holy Ghost and to them, to take that which they found, (the same being for the greatest part true and sufficient) rather than by making a new, in that new world and green age of the Church, to expose themselves to many exceptions and cavillations, as though they made a Translation to serve their own turn, and therefore bearing witness to themselves, their witness not to be regarded."

xix. "Erasmus," in The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2nd edition, F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 466-67.

xx. The phrase is quoted from a standard work on New Testament text criticism: Bruce M. Metzger, The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration, 3rd, enlarged edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 212.

xxi. Cited here from Metzger, p. 262. The range of dates are taken from one of the standard Greek texts published and distributed by the Bible Societies, the 26th edition of the Nestle-Aland NT text, Novum Testamentum Graece (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979), pp. 684-710.

xxii. Nestle, p. 47.

xxiii. Nestle, p. 43.

xxiv. Metzger, p. 263

xxv. Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1923, 1944), p. 370.

xxvi. Metzger, "The Pre-critical Period: The Origin and Dominance of the Textus Receptus," pp. 95-118. The synopsis in the text is drawn largely from Metzger, augmented by the concise articles on Erasmus in The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, pp. 466-67, and in The Columbia Encyclopedia, 5th ed., Barbara A. Chernow and George A. Vallasi, eds. ([New York:] Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 886.

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- xxvii. Metzger, p. 99, citing F. H. A. Scrivener, A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament, 4th ed., ii (London, 1894), p. 185.
- xxviii. Metzger, pp. 99-100.
- xxix. For further discussion and illustrations involving the Received Text, see Alden Thompson, Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1991): chapter 4 on "Manuscripts" (pp. 69-75), and chapter 5 on "Translations" (pp. 76-86).
- xxx. Metzger, p. 102.
- xxxi. Metzger, p. 103.
- xxxii. Metzger, p. 103.
- xxxiii. White, GC, p. 216.
- xxxiv. White, GC, p. 245.
- xxxv. White, GC, p. 88.
- xxxvi. White, GC, p. 93.
- xxxvii. White, GC, p. 94.
- xxxviii. J. N. D. Kelly, Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1975), p. 89.
- xxxix. Kelly, p. 157.
- xl. Ira M. Price, The Ancestry of Our English Bible, 3rd revised edition, by William A. Irwin and Allen P. Wikgren (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), p. 74.
- xli. Price, pp. 74-78. A briefer and more recent account is found in Ewert, pp. 108-109.
- xlii. White, GC (1911), p. vii.
- xliii. Francis D. Nichol, ed., Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1956) 5:955.
- xliv. Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White, 3

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- vols. (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1962) 1:19-176.
- xliv. See discussion in Thompson, pp. 68-75.
- xlvi. E. G. White, Signs of the Times, March 13, 1885, p. 161.
- xlvii. Alva J. McClain, Daniel's Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1940, 1969), p. 9.
- xlviii. Marjorie Lewis Lloyd, "That Different Book," Signs of the Times, August 1976, pp. 16, citing Peter Stoner, Science Speaks (Moody Press, 1963).
- xlix. Bart Kosko, Fuzzy Thinking: The New Science of Fuzzy Logic (New York: Hyperion, 1993), p. xv.
- l. Kosko, p. 86.
- li. Kosko, p. 9.
- lii. Ellen White, Selected Messages, Book 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 37 [The Review and Herald, July 26, 1892].
- liii. "Tatian," ODCC, p. 1341.
- liv. "Clement of Alexandria, St.," ODCC, p. 303.
- lv. "Origen," ODCC, pp. 1008-1009.
- lvi. Metzger, p. 47.