

From Uncertainty to Certainty: Epistemology in Text Criticism

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Greg Bahnsen declares, “A truly Christian defense of the faith must never fail to exalt Christ as Lord over all, including argumentation and reasoning. An apologetic that builds on any other rock than Christ does not honor the greatness of divine wisdom; it is foolishly and audaciously erected on the ruinous sands of human authority.”¹ He proceeds to explain that in apologetics, Christians should not first follow human philosophy and then try to honor God with authority.² Bahnsen’s exhortation is desperately needed in contemporary textual criticism.

Christians studying in various fields often ignore the need for a distinctly Christian epistemology. While this has certainly been the case in scientific studies, it is also often true in text criticism. Text critics largely took modernist and empiricist approaches for the last two hundred years. However, in our contemporary age, we are seeing a decided move to postmodern philosophy.

This paper will briefly present and critique empiricist and postmodern philosophies and will then analyze and critique their usage in textual criticism. Christians must be aware of the philosophies, with their corresponding epistemologies, behind their text of Scripture. If Scripture is the foundation of all Christian belief, ought we have un-Christian and failed philosophies at the root of the production of the scriptural text? If we abandon Biblical authority in the production of the text of Scripture, will the result be a rock that cannot be broken (Jn. 10:35)? After proper Christian epistemology is presented and Scripture’s references to itself are discussed, the various approaches will be compared. We will find that one approach to the text of Scripture stands out as being more consistent with the way Scripture speaks of itself and with a philosophical approach that stands on the Word of God itself.

The Problems with Modernist/Empiricist Epistemology

Empiricism is the belief that all truth claims must be verified by sense experience or observation. This is distinctly the epistemology of modernism. Theological presuppositions were supposedly discounted, and the belief was that neutral observation and inductive science could produce cold, hard facts. There are three major problems with empiricism that reveal it to be a failed philosophy. The reader should note easily the unbiblical nature of the belief. God is not verifiable by the senses, yet Christians most certainly believe he exists and is true.

The first problem with empiricist epistemology is that it is self-defeating. The belief that all truth claims must be verified by the senses is not a truth claim that can be verified by the senses. As

¹ Greg Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics*, (Nacogdoches, TX: American Vision Press, 2011), 4.

² *Ibid.*

multiple apologists have pointed out there are no experiments in a lab or observations done in fieldwork that will prove that all truth claims must be verified by the senses.³ In other words, this is a non-empirical truth claim. Empiricism is non-empirical. Based on its own definition, since it is not verifiable with observation, it cannot be true.

A second problem with empiricist philosophy and epistemology is that it has to rely on the belief that the human senses and the human mind are reliable. Can this be proven based on observation alone? Would not the person trying to prove it have to simply *assume* the reliability of their senses and their mind? This problem has been devastatingly pointed out in Alvin Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism. If human sense organs and the mind are slowly changing over time, how can their reliability be proven? What if they are only half-evolved? They would be misrepresenting reality. Can this be a solid foundation for truth and knowledge? We must note that survivability does not require accuracy. If the senses and the mind cannot be shown to be reliable, then no belief, including empiricism, can be known to be true.

The last fatal problem for empiricism is that there is no way to solve the induction problem. Induction is the process of creating a universal truth from limited data. The problem, as has been pointed out by empiricists, is that we do not know what we do not know. The next discovery could overthrow everything that we think we know.

A common illustration of the induction problem is this: Are all crows black? Say 100 black crows land on your desk and then fly away. Can you induce the conclusion that all crows are black? No, you cannot. The next crow may be an albino and will destroy your conclusion. This is why scientific revolutions have happened and will continue to happen. Everyone thought Newton's physics was perfect until Einstein. People believed in geocentrism until Galileo and Copernicus.

If empiricism is a self-defeating philosophy that cannot establish the reliability of the senses and the mind and cannot solve the induction problem, why should Christians use it as their philosophy for text criticism and establishing the text of their Bibles?

The Problem with Postmodern Philosophy and Epistemology

Postmodernism exists due to the failures of rationalist and empiricist philosophies in history. Once Kant's epistemology of the mind was seen to fail, and Nietzsche's nihilism arose, a transition occurred towards irrationalism and skepticism. Postmodernism and the rejection of

³ See for example Jason Lisle's work *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*, or John Frame's discussion in *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*.

universal truth and universal paradigms, or at least any access to them, have arisen from this philosophical ethos.

Postmodernism is a relativist philosophy. Douglas Groothius examines this fact in his monograph *Truth Decay*. He states, “Postmodernists, such as Richard Rorty, reject the modernist view of universal human reason and objective truth.”⁴ Walter Truett Anderson’s constructivist relativism is important to consider:

The constructivists - whose thinking runs close to my own... - say that we do not have a “God’s eye” view of nonhuman reality, never had, never will have. They say we live in a symbolic world, a social reality that many people construct together and yet experience as the objective “real world.” And they also tell us the earth is not a *single* symbolic world, but rather a vast universe of “multiple realities,” because different groups of people construct different stories, and because different languages embody different ways of experiencing life.”⁵

R.C. Sproul presents well the contemporary relativist ethos of philosophy in *Making a Difference*:

We are cut off and isolated from any contact with the eternal world. The transcendent realm is where we find unity. The world in which we live is the world of diversity. Universals are beyond the wall; the particulars of our experience are here and now. The transcendent realm is also the realm of the absolute. This side of the wall is the place of the relative....

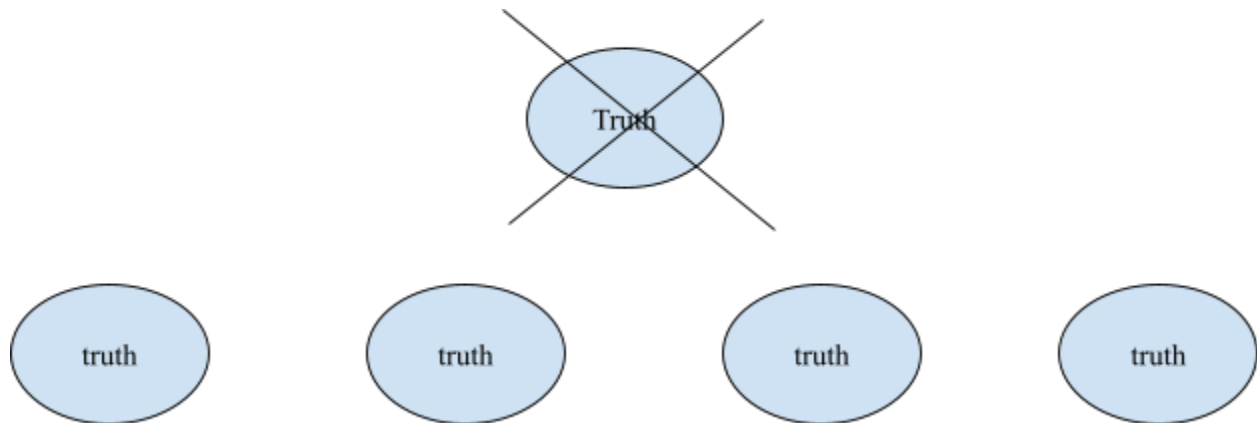
The basic idea of pluralism is this: We have diversity here in this world. We have no access to ultimate unity, no way to bring the diverse things of our experience into a coherent whole. We have particulars but no universals; relatives but no absolutes.⁶

The idea can be illustrated by the following picture, where “Truth” is universal truth, and “truth” is particular truth:

⁴ Douglas Groothius, *Truth Decay*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 38.

⁵ As found in Gene Edward Veith’s *Postmodern Times*, (Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books, 1994), 47-48.

⁶ R.C. Sproul, *Making a Difference*, (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 1986), 117-118.



The problem with postmodern philosophy should be clear. If there is no truth, then postmodernism is not true. Postmodernism may be an idea that some people hold, but it cannot be actually true. If there are no universals, then postmodernism cannot be a philosophy that actually explains the nature of truth and reality.

Another way to see the problem is that postmodernists assert relativism as if it is the truth about truth and reality. They are not assuming they do not understand the true nature of reality and truth but believe postmodernism *is* the nature of truth and reality. They are, therefore, *not* affirming relativism but absolutism. They absolutely reject absolutism and objective truth, meaning they actually affirm the opposite of what their philosophy allows. The host of other philosophical problems with postmodernism cannot be addressed in this paper, but Veith's and Groothuis' works in the bibliography can be accessed for more in-depth analysis.

Outside of the philosophical failure of postmodernism, the Christian should again note that it is anti-biblical. Truth is not a construction of people but exists eternally in the mind of God (Jn. 1:14, 17:17, and Ep. 1:4). Truth is universal and eternal and is real and binding for all people everywhere.⁷ Again it must be asked, should Christians assume a self-defeating and unbiblical philosophy as their approach to text criticism?

The Presence of Postmodernism in Contemporary Text Criticism

The move to a postmodern approach in text criticism is widely acknowledged. Three papers will be presented in order to justify this claim.

⁷ See Matthew 28:19 where the Gospel is seen to be the truth to which all nations must submit. See also the book of Amos where the Law of God is the universal standard by which all nations are judged.

The first article is Jennifer Knust's *In Pursuit of a Singular Text: New Testament Text Criticism and the Desire for the True Original*.⁸ She begins by paraphrasing J.A. Dane: "Interpretation, especially interpretation of sacred texts, is often rooted in the fantasy that there is a transcendent text, which stands apart from any particular physical manifestation of that text."⁹ Immediately we are struck with the postmodern rejection of a transcendent true text behind the particulars. She turns to Eldon Epps' famous recapitulation of the goals of text criticism. "According to Epp, a shift in the direction of the field can be traced to textual work that abandons the search for the original in favor of an analysis of the development of particular texts."¹⁰ Knust then moves on to present D.C. Parker's view:

Parker offered the following provocative observation: denying the notion that there is a true or transcendent text that stands apart from particular texts, he argues that Gospel texts do not exist apart from the manuscripts that preserve them... In Parker's view, there simply is no single original to be found; since manuscripts 'are the tradition,' there is no 'greater reality behind what we have' and, therefore, 'there is no authoritative text beyond the manuscripts which we may follow without further thought'¹¹

The postmodernism of these text critics ought to be apparent. We have texts but no Text. There is no transcendent Text, or Truth, behind the texts. We have particulars but no universal, or at least no access to it.

Knust offers the reason for this movement, "Nevertheless, disillusionment with the pursuit of a singular original text should be understood not as a return to an ancient point of view, but as a recognition of the inadequacy of nineteenth-century explanations and methods." The failure of modernist, or empiricist, text criticism has caused scholars to take this new approach. We ought to agree that the modernist approach fails, but does that mean we should adopt the postmodern approach with its failed epistemology?

The second paper that will be analyzed is Michael Holmes' *From 'Original Text' to 'Initial Text': The Traditional Goal of New Testament Textual Criticism in Contemporary Discussion*.¹² While Holmes seems to favor the traditional goal of text criticism, although recapitulated, he offers various new paradigms that exist in the field. He quotes Francis Watson as referring to the "irreducibly plural forms of canonical scripture that are actually operative within communities of

⁸ Jennifer Knust, "In Pursuit of a Singular Text: New Testament Text Criticism and the Desire for the True Original," *Religion Compass* 2/2 (2008): 180-194. . Accessed from academia.edu on Nov. 25, 2023.

https://www.academia.edu/32384329/In_Pursuit_of_a_Singular_Text_New_Testament_Textual_Criticism_and_the_Desire_for_the_True_Original?email_work_card=reading-history

⁹ *Ibid*, 180.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 185.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 186.

¹² Michael Holmes, "From 'Original Text' to 'Initial Text': The Traditional Goal of New Testament Textual Criticism," *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, 2nd ed. (ed. by Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes; NTTSD, 46; Brill, 2013 [November 2012] 637-688. Accessed on academia.edu on Nov. 25, 2023.

https://www.academia.edu/12533585/From_Original_Text_to_Initial_Text_The_Traditional_Goal_of_New_Testament_Textual_Criticism_in_Contemporary_Discussion_email_work_card=reading-history

faith.”¹³ Here is the postmodern pluralism clearly conveyed. Holmes refers to Epp as saying, “Over several generations, New Testament textual critics have been socialized into thinking of a single original text” as the obvious goal of the discipline.¹⁴ He then references Lee Patterson, who affirms that the modernist goal was based on “an idealist belief that even amid the welter of fragmentary details history has left us, there abides a gleam of light that beams across the ages, an atemporality that resists being historicized, a value that transcends any specific historical moment.”

A few things must be recognized at this time. We see the emphasis once again on pluralism over universalism and objectivism. The social conditioning aspect of postmodernism, seen in Anderson’s quote above, is clearly reflected in Epp’s assertion. And lastly, we must notice the postmodern rejection of any sort of transcendent truth beyond the “wall” that exists behind particular manuscripts.

It also must be noted that with this move to pluralism and the rejection of the search for the original, all certainty regarding the biblical text is abandoned. Scholars admit there is a gap between what they are producing and the original text. This should come as no surprise. Postmodernism is not a philosophy of certainty. It is an ideology of uncertainty and skepticism (save its own self-defeating assertion of certainty regarding truth being postmodern).

The last article examining the presence of postmodernism in text criticism is Nathan C. Johnson’s *Living, Active, Elusive: Toward a Theology of Textual Criticism*.¹⁵ Johnson begins by discussing the move from obtaining the original wording towards the elusive initial text (which may or may not represent the original). He states, “Many contemporary textual critics no longer hold out hope of assuredly attaining the original text, whether through discovering the autographs (the original manuscripts of each book) or with the methods currently used.”¹⁶ He proceeds, “The original or earliest text of the New Testament, to one degree or another, continues to and will always elude us. No one will ever hold the Greek New Testament in their hands because the church, in its history, has never had the one Greek New Testament.”

Again we hear the postmodern rejection of the universal, the archetype. It is inaccessible. We should also pay attention to the self-contradictory nature of particular assertions that are made in this postmodern approach. After arguing that the original text is elusive, Johnson notes that we can trust that God communicates with us through uncertain copies. He states, “We can trust God to communicate because ‘He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?’ (Rom. 8:32).”¹⁷ How does he know this is a true text of Scripture? If the original is elusive, this text of Romans may be a corruption that occurred somewhere between the stage of original composition and the “earliest attainable text” that we can determine with our text-critical methods. If no one has ever held the New Testament,

¹³ *Ibid*, 637.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 645.

¹⁵ Nathan C. Johnson, “Living, Active, Elusive: Toward a Theology of Text Criticism” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 12 (2018), 83-102. Accessed on academia.edu on Nov. 25, 2023.

https://www.academia.edu/37169527/Living_Active_Elusive_Toward_a_Theology_of_Textual_Criticism_JRT_12_2018_83_102?email_work_card=title

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 84-85.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 102.

why does he treat Romans 8:32 as a certain part of the original New Testament? Uncertainty has been presupposed, so all that can remain is uncertainty.

Dan Wallace's Attempt to Rescue Text Criticism from Postmodernism

Dan Wallace has written an article decrying the postmodern influence in text-critical studies.¹⁸ The affirmation of this philosophy in the field does not need to be rehashed. Wallace rightly presents and critiques this approach. The problem is that his approach fails as well, for the same reasons empiricism fails epistemologically. While Wallace laments the epistemological uncertainty of postmodernism, he affirms that some truths may be more “probable” than others.¹⁹ He then states, “Can we know with absolute certainty that what we have in our hands today exactly replicates the original text? Of course not. We can never have absolute certainty about any historical documents whose originals have vanished. And postmodernism is a corrective to the naïve epistemological triumphalism of the modernism that has infected so much of the evangelical community.” Here we see the blatant rejection of certainty regarding the biblical text. We oddly find that his solution to the uncertainty in postmodernist text criticism is having a little less uncertainty.

The reason Wallace's approach fails, and he *has* to admit uncertainty, is due to the induction problem of empiricism. Text critics do not have all the data, and they know it. They do not have the original manuscripts, nor all of the manuscripts that have existed in history. New manuscripts and discoveries change the text. Just as universal conclusions cannot be induced from limited data, a stable original text cannot be empirically induced from limited manuscripts.

It is not only new information that changes their conclusion (the text they produce), but new methods of collating the current manuscripts do so as well. The Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM) has significantly changed their text.²⁰ Gurry and Wasserman note that this method has brought a, “Renewed appreciation for the Byzantine Text.”²¹ Significantly, contemporary text criticism has been based on the idea of manuscript families (Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine). Recent data from the CBGM has undermined this theory.²² Nevertheless, many scholars continue to refer to these families as if the theory was not undermined by the recent data.²³ What we are seeing is a constant change in their conclusions precisely because they cannot induce universals out of a finite amount of empirical data while developing new methods of interpreting that data.

¹⁸ Daniel B. Wallace, “Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism for the Twenty-first Century,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52/1 (March 2009), 79-100. Accessed online Nov. 25, 2023.

<https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/52/52-1/JETS%2052-1%2079-100%20Wallace.pdf>

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 85.

²⁰ Tommy Wasserman and Peter Gurry, *A New Approach to Textual Criticism: An Introduction to the Coherence Based Genealogical Method*, (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), 6.

²¹ *Ibid*, 10.

²² *Ibid*, 7-10.

²³ Also, read Taylor DeSoto's article at the Young, Textless, and Reformed website entitled “There is No ‘Alexandrian Text Family.’” Accessed online Nov. 27, 2023.

<https://youngtextlessreformed.com/2021/03/19/there-is-no-alexandrian-text-family/>

In addition to these issues, we must recognize the inherent problem with empirical claims to the probability of truth. Wallace claims that some truths are more probable than others. If we do not know the universal truth, or in this case, the original text, then we can never speak of probability. If we have observation A, and a hypothetical original B, we can only know the extent to which A represents B if we already know what B is. That is precisely what Wallace is denying. If we do not know the original, there can be no talk of how much our reconstructions may represent it. This is the precise failure of the modernist approach that has caused the shift to postmodernism in text criticism.

Scripture's View of Itself

In all of this, we must compare Scripture's view of itself with these text-critical claims. It should be apparent that if someone believes X, and Scripture teaches Y, that belief X must be unbiblical. This is the case with both modernist and postmodernist uncertainty regarding the biblical text.

Compare the claims of both Wallace and the other scholars above with how Scripture quotes Scripture. In the first chapter of the New Testament, Matthew refers to what the prophet Isaiah *spoke* and therefore wrote in Isaiah 7 regarding the virgin birth. There appears to be no uncertainty regarding the original text. When Jesus quotes Deuteronomy, he uses the phrase, "It is written," (Mat. 4:4, 7, 10). This is an authoritative phrase that looks back on Scripture as an authoritative text. Jesus offers no uncertainty regarding what was originally written in Deuteronomy. Nor is Jesus uncertain about what Moses wrote regarding circumcision in Genesis 17 (Jn 7:22). Mark knows what the prophets said about the coming messenger in Malachi 3 and Isaiah 40. Paul knows exactly what the scriptures said regarding muzzling an ox in Deuteronomy 25 and what Luke originally wrote in Luke 10 about laborers being worthy of their hire (1Ti. 5:18). Paul also knows that Christ was the ultimate reference of the promise of a coming seed due to the fact that the text about the promise refers to a singular seed and not plural seeds (Ga. 3:16, Ro. 9:17). In fact, Paul is so certain regarding his text of Scripture that he can refer to Scripture as "preaching" the very things that God spoke (Ga. 3:8). We can also see the way New Testament authors refer to things found in the Old Testament Scriptures as the things God speaks (Mat. 19:4-5, Ac. 4:24-25). Note in Acts 4, the disciples of the New Testament have no doubt regarding what David originally said and wrote.

The reason Scripture refers so certainly to itself is because Christianity is not a worldview of uncertainty. According to Scripture, we *can* be certain regarding truth. In fact, Luke tells us what he wrote his Gospel:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, *That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.* (Lu. 1:1-4, *emphasis mine*)

Luke wrote Scripture so we could have certainty regarding the truth. Certainty is attainable and the goal of revelation according to Scripture. Paul refers to Abraham's certainty regarding the promises of God as the goal of all faith: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform," (Ro. 4:20-21). Paul was fully persuaded. There was no doubt. There was no uncertainty about God's promise.

We again witness no uncertainty regarding Scripture as we read Jesus reference it to the Pharisees: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me," (Jn. 5:39). Nor is their doubt about the totality of the text of the Old Testament pointing Jesus' person and work:

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: (Lu. 24:44-46)

In each case, the consistent testimony of Scripture is a knowledge of what the original authors said and wrote, including an understanding of what they meant to say.

Let us call the biblical theology of the text seen above "A." Let "B" be the various philosophies of the text seen in the quotes of the scholars above. Substitute any of the quotes for B. Does A = B? It does not. The question is, then, do we do away with A and adopt B, or do we reject B as being what it is: human philosophy that is a rejection of scriptural authority and theology? Are we not back in the position where we started? As Bahnsen exhorted us, are we placing human philosophy at the base of Christianity? By adopting the postmodern and empirical methods as our philosophies of text criticism, are we not building our Bibles on the "ruinous sands of human authority,"²⁴

Before we examine an alternative, let's make sure to notice that presupposing the authority of Scripture answers the problems that are seen in humanistic philosophy. Scripture is not self-defeating. Saying, "The Bible is the Word of God," and using that as the basic philosophical commitment for Christianity is being internally consistent.²⁵

Second, the reliability of human senses and the mind are established by a scripturalistic epistemology. God, who does not lie and is not a God of deception (Nu. 23:19, 1Sa. 15:29, Tit. 1:2), made our senses (Pr. 20:12, Ps. 94:9). He made us in His image, which is rational and logic affirming (2Ti. 2:13, Is. 1:18). We are not left with empiricist uncertainty regarding these things when we begin with Scripture.

Third, Christianity avoids the induction problem. Although people, without God, cannot know what they don't know, God knows everything. He cannot learn a new fact (Ps. 147:5, 1Jn. 3:20, Is. 46:9-10). Omniscience is the solution to induction. Christianity is a worldview that contains

²⁴ Bahnsen, *Ibid*, 4.

²⁵ See Gordon H Clark's vast array of works on scripturalistic philosophy, or Bahnsen's on presuppositional apologetics.

within it this concept. Now, all those things revealed by this omniscient God, including if we can be certain in general or regarding the text of Scripture, can be *known* by human beings.

What we observe is a stark contrast in ideology between the one built upon Scripture and those built upon finite human reason. Those built on human reason are ruinous sands indeed. Praise God, we can build our philosophy on the solid rock of his Word.

Confessional Bibliology as a Scriptural Alternative

Thankfully for the Christian, there is an approach to identifying the authentic text of Scripture that is more consistent with Scripture's claims concerning its own self-attesting authority. Those who hold the view known as confessional bibliology maintain that the Hebrew and Greek texts that were received and used by the church during the Protestant Reformation, and therefore referenced in the various Reformed confessions, are the providentially preserved Word of God. This epistemology is scriptural, and the view is more consistent with the certainty that Scripture affords to itself. For example, the 1689 London Baptist Confession affirms:

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal to them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have a right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded in the fear of God to read, and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope. Chapter 1, paragraph 8.²⁶

Here we have the affirmation that God's Word has been "kept pure in all ages," and is, therefore, "authentic."²⁷ Various theologians of the Reformation confirmed this belief in the Scriptures. Thomas Watson stated, "We may know the scripture to be the word of God, by the miraculous preservation of it in all ages..."²⁸ In his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Francis Turretin wrote, "By the original texts, we do not mean the autographs written by the hand of Moses, of the prophets and of the apostles, which certainly do not now exist. We mean their apographs which are so called because they set forth to us the word of God in the very words of those who wrote under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit."²⁹

²⁶ It should be noted that this is identical to the affirmation in the Westminster Confession.

²⁷ Mt. 5:18 is used as the proof text: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

²⁸ This and other quotes of the Reformation, as well as various articles on confessional bibliology can be found at the Text and Translation website. <https://www.textandtranslation.org/thomas-watson-on-miraculous-preservation/>

²⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992, 1:106, and <https://www.textandtranslation.org/turretin-on-the-authenticity-of-the-copies/>.

The proponents of this view believe that God has preserved the original scriptures so that we continue to have access to them today. We *can know* what the original authors said. We are not left in uncertainty because we are not basing our text on the uncertainty of empiricist philosophy or postmodern skepticism. Instead, we are basing it on the fact that the omniscient and omnipotent God preserved his Word for us (Ps. 119:152, 160, Is. 40:8, Mat. 5:17-18, Jn. 10:35, Mt. 24:35, 1Pe. 1:23-25). The inspired text of Scripture has been maintained by God throughout history. We *do* have access to the archetype, and we *can* know the transcendent text penned in time by the prophets and apostles.

It is important to note that the text basis for this view is not the same as the contemporary modernist and postmodernist approaches to text criticism. The Old Testament text affirmed as the preserved Word of God by the Reformation theologians is the Hebrew Masoretic Text. The New Testament text being affirmed is the Greek Textus Receptus. The contemporary methods do not have the epistemological foundations to present a text as a valid replacement for the Reformation texts because there is no final product to offer. What they have is uncertainty based on postmodernist assumptions and empiricist induction. Texts produced by philosophically failed epistemologies cannot be used to undermine competing views that are established on philosophies founded in the certain Word of God.

Conclusion

When we analyze confessional bibliology, we see that the claims match the theology of Scripture. This view does not abandon biblical authority in order to establish its text of Scripture and then look to its reconstructed text, based on unbiblical philosophies, as authoritative. The proponents of this view seek to build a thoroughly consistent philosophy through and through.

We must seek to apply the commandments and truths of Scripture in all fields of thought, including textual criticism. Paul tells us, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;” (2Co. 10:5). If every thought must be taken captive under obedience to Christ, then so should our philosophy of establishing the text of Scripture. God tells us in Proverbs, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Pr. 1:7). In the Psalms, we read, “For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light,” (Ps. 36:9). If these things are so, we should begin with Christian philosophy when we approach our Bibles and its text. Paul tells us once again, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness,” (1Co. 3:19). In light of these things, we should not be surprised that abandoning the fear of the LORD in text criticism will not result in knowledge, but uncertainty. We should not find it odd that without biblical presuppositions in the field, the result is darkness and not light. But what we must do is recognize that if we apply the wisdom of this world to text criticism, the result will be foolish in the eyes of God. There is another way. God has not left us in the darkness of uncertainty but has left us his light in biblical revelation. We can know, and we can have certainty because our omniscient God has preserved for us the Scriptures by his glorious power and grace.

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