

HUMANITAS

THE INSTITUTE FOR RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION BIBLICAL STUDIES

P.O. BOX 870525, Stone Mountain, Georgia 30087, Letist@aol.com

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While still a Ph.D. student at the University of Edinburgh, I was asked by Stephen Perks, editor of a then rather recent British periodical titled: *Calvinism Today* (today it has changed its name to *Christianity and Society*), to write a review of Gordon Clark's foray into the very complex world of N.T. text criticism in a small booklet he unwisely wrote titled: *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism*. This act on his part was not only unprofessional, since he knew nothing of the discipline, it was actually perfectly reckless and rather surprisingly thoughtless. Sometimes at the end of a long tumultuous career, full of confrontation and polemic, it is possible for an academic to lose touch with either the intellectual currents of the day, or else a right sense of their own abilities or standing. Such was the case with Clark and his little booklet. I took up Stephen's challenge and pointed out just where Clark had misstepped. Furthermore, I pointed out how out-dated was his approach to epistemology. His student, John Robbins was not happy with either of these major points I had made and so wrote a very combative letter to the editor, to which I replied and both appeared in a further number of the journal. Robbin's accepted none of my criticisms—even though they were offered from one who was at the very moment writing a major history of N.T. text criticism from Erasmus to the Victorian era. Instead, Robbin's just dug himself into a hole that sank deeper each time he offered a remark in reply to my review.

Robbin's has recently attempted, in one of his Trinity Foundation newsletters, to revive his mentor's textual arguments—which, interestingly enough, makes no attempt to address the Westminster Confession of Faith's *theological* tenet of "Providential Preservation" (such as my mentor, Edward F. Hills had accomplished, an actual credentialed and published N.T. text critic, whose work I have been busy these many years attempting to perpetuate); but rather, Clark rallied around the "statistical probability," pseudo-scientific approach of the Baptist Dispensational Fundamentalists out of Dallas Seminary (Zane Hodge, Wilbur Pickering, Alfred Martin, *et al.*). Hence, I thought that for the record folks ought to be aware of these original documents from the early nineties so that they can put this recent rather dilettantish attempt on the part of Robbins, and his untrained associate, into a wider context. Also, since in this same newsletter theirs is an appeal to the work of Harry Sturz, I have also supplied my review of Sturz's work as well, in order to alert folks to the fact that his work was neither original, nor of much lasting value on its own.

[All the comments that follow, even the editorial remarks by Stephen Perks, have been reproduced].

Theodore P. Letis

A Review of *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism* By Gordon H. Clark
Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1986
Paperback, 54 pages, \$2.96

Gordon Clark is well known as one of the last to advocate in the late twentieth century the

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old Scottish Common-Sense approach to epistemology as practiced at Princeton Seminary in the nineteenth century against post-Enlightenment skepticism. As such, Clark influenced many American fundamentalists, such as Carl F. H. Henry, and others, who were keen to project the idea that "reason" and "logic" were on the side of Christianity. With the advances made in epistemological development, however, as early as the career of Cornelius Van Til within Princeton circles, Clark's career has come to be viewed as a fossilised remain from an earlier era. As Colin Brown so winsomely put it, "To repeat without modification the arguments of Archdeacon Paley, or even of B. B. Warfield, would be like going out to battle wearing Saul's armor" (*Miracles and the Modern Mind*). Still, there is a vast array of American fundamentalists who make their living parading the truth claims of Christianity--mostly before other pseudo-intellectual *Christians* since no one else is really listening--as the intellectually *superior* system, by an appeal to the shell game of Aristotelian logic.

In this present work, Clark was convinced he could dazzle his readers once again by an appeal to logic, though he had absolutely no training in the discipline he was addressing.

This means that in this field he could not possibly know what was a valid *premise* and what was not. All of this seems to be compensated for, however, by polemic and rhetoric, the tone of which is set by an arrogant and acerbic display by the author of the preface.

Contrary to the title, the first section deals not with text critical matters but with translation problems. The second section,

however, is where Clark unsheathes his logical *Excalibur*. Interestingly enough, though, he begins by admitting that text criticism is "a mass of complications, requiring knowledge of a half dozen or more languages, [and] is no playground for the ordinary church member. Nor for pastors, who are supposed to know both Greek and Hebrew." But where angels fear to tread, Clark, no more qualified than those he has excluded, knows how to run a syllogism and so plunges ahead in a 54 page booklet, making pronouncements to the rest of the Christian world on the subject, based on his fifty years of teaching "logic"(?!)(**argumentum ad verecundiam*, Professor?).

One of the most painfully obvious defects in Clark's judgment is his dismissal of the only real Reformed technician from *within* the discipline who offers the kind of critique Clark was fumbling for, back in 1956--Edward F. Hills, who had a doctorate in N.T. text criticism from Harvard. One heard not a peep from Clark on this subject in those days and it seems to have taken an amateurish approach, advocated by the Dallas Seminary Fundamentalist Dispensationalists, e.g., Wilbur Pickering, Zane Hodges, Harry Sturz (none of whom ever took the effort to become practitioners of the discipline and whose influence as a result has been nil), to win him over so late in his career.

Clark employs a very informal style throughout, even alluding to sensationalized personal anecdotes. Faulty judgments and erroneous statements are found here, as one might expect (Burgon a "bishop!"). There is simply no evidence that "the obliging papacy quickly got an Irish priest to make a manuscript and Erasmus inserted the verses" (for clarification on this oft repeated error

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found also here in Clark's work, consult, H.J. deJong, "Erasmus and the *comma Johanneum*," in *Ephemerides Theologicae Louanienses* Ivi [1980]: 381-9).

This book is an embarrassment. The author having admitted, "the present writer is not a text critic," and having correctly anticipated that "professional textual critics will expect too much and make a negative judgment," he should have refrained from producing this booklet. Metzger rightly dismissed this work in a footnote, referring only to "the truculent comments of Cordon H. Clark" (Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 3rd ed., p. 291, n. 1).

Sile et philosophus esto

("hold your tongue and you will pass for a philosopher").

Theodore P. Letis,
Ph.D. candidate
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John Robbins replies to this review in the following letter to the editor:

Editor,

I was angered by your magazine's irresponsible review of Gordon Clark's *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism*. It is one function of an editor to keep a writer from displaying his ignorance in public, but in this case the editor failed.

Mr. Letis writes that "Gordon Clark is well known as one of the last to advocate in the late twentieth century the old Scottish Common-Sense approach to epistemology. . ." Letis cites no evidence for this ludicrous statement, because there is none. Gordon Clark is, of course, well known as an opponent of all forms of empiricism, includ-

ing appeals to common sense, but Mr. Letis either has not read, or if he has read, has failed to understand Dr Clark's books.

Mr. Letis writes, "Clark's career has come to be viewed [by whom?] as a fossilised remain from an earlier era." Letis then suggests that Clark repeated "without modification the arguments of Archdeacon Paley [and] B. B. Warfield." At this point Letis' misrepresentation of Clark is so blatantly false that it is beginning to appear malicious. To characterize the career of one of the greatest American Christian philosophers as a "fossilised remain" in which Clark repeated Paley--a theologian whose arguments Clark refutes--and Warfield is not only false, it is maliciously so. Mistakes of this size are not made innocently. I do not know why Letis hates Clark so, but his animus has driven him to make false and demeaning statements about Clark.

In the next few sentences--actually the first one-third of the review has nothing to do with the book--Letis vents his contempt for "fundamentalists," for Clark, and for "Aristotelian logic." He refers to an "arrogant and acerbic" Preface to Clark's book, but the book has no Preface, and one must wonder what Letis is reading. As for training in languages, I am sure Dr Clark could have translated circles around Letis or the liberal textual critic Bruce Metzger, whom Letis quotes with approval.

After one has gotten through Letis' opening attack on Clark and actually into the review, he finds that Letis cites only two errors, which are apparently of sufficient importance that Clark "should have refrained from producing this booklet." What are these serious errors? The first is this: Clark refers

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once to "Bishop" Burgon rather than "Dean" Burgon, perhaps because he was thinking of Bishop Burgess, who did hold opinions similar to Burgon's. The second "error" Clark makes, according to Letis, is reporting that the Roman Catholic Church had a hand in manufacturing a Greek manuscript containing 1 John 5:7b-8a. That the verses are spurious, Letis does not dispute. Let the reader investigate the matter for himself and decide who manufactured the verses.

Letis simply does not understand this book any better than he understands Clark's other books. Clark himself pointed out that he was not a textual critic, but he was a theologian. As such, he demonstrated the logical inconsistency of the textual critics with their own criteria of evaluation, the logical inconsistency of their results, and their logical inconsistency with the manuscript evidence they cite. That is why Clark titled his book, *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism*. Clark was concerned merely to point out the irrational ways in which the textual critics have rated variant manuscript readings and both omitted from and inserted into the New Testament certain words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Letis, because of his contempt for logic and for Clark, does not seem to be able to grasp how Clark is using logic to undermine textual criticism.

I hope you will (1) publish this letter, (2) publish an apology from Letis, and (3) in the future find competent reviewers. The Trinity Foundation has produced 40 books, and you have yet to review one competently.

Sincerely, John W. Robbins

[Editor's comment: We believe that it is only fair that authors and publishers should have the opportunity to respond to criticism and therefore although we do not approve of the tone of the above letter we have, nonetheless, in the interests of fairness published it. However, for the same reasons we think it only right that Mr. Letis should also have an opportunity to respond and therefore Dr Robbins' letter was sent to Mr. Letis for his comments, which we here reproduce]:

Dear Stephen,

I had only one serious point to make in my review of Clark's book: he had no training as a text critic and therefore he commits a fundamental fallacy of logic, namely, *argumentum ad verecundiam*.^{*} The irony of this can hardly be missed by friends and foes alike. That errors of fact as well as judgment appear is hardly surprising.

Secondarily I put his thought in its historical context so that it might help explain how he could be so arrogant as to make pronouncements on a subject beyond his abilities, namely, the influence of the old Princeton, common-sense approach to epistemology. A key component of this system, (what Thomas Reid called in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, "first principles," "principles of common sense," "common notions," "self-evident truth") is-- "logic!" (pp. 413-452).

Even Reid would have been scandalized, however, at Clark's idolatry, referring to the second person of the Trinity as "Logic" (e.g. Clark's rendering of John 1:1). Note with whom Clark stands on a common stage:

It is with great violence to the Text, and to the whole scope of the Gospel, that the Sabellian and some Socinian writers expound this passage, of [o` lo,goj] the internal

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Reason or Wisdom of God: In the beginning was

REASON, and REASON was with God, &c. As if the person who came to be incarnate for us, and to die for our sins; was nothing but an attribute of the Father, without any real proper being" (Samuel Clark, The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity, London, 1712, p, 85).

Moreover, the German pantheist at the end of that same century, G. W. F. Hegel, was in complete agreement with Clark's translation, stating such in his *The Life of Jesus* (1795):

"Pure reason, transcending all limits, is divinity itself--whereby and in accordance with which the very plan of the world is ordered (John 1)."

Finally, is Robbins really offended that I quoted Metzger, a genuine expert in the field, just because he rightly dismissed Clark as a blustering dilettante? Far from Clark's "logic undermining textual criticism," his self-indulgent escapade into print on this subject further reinforces the perception that only ill-informed, non-technicians challenge the established practice of text criticism. In the end this leaves the *status quo* all the more convinced that only their fellow experts should be listened to in matters of criticism. At the end of the day Clark has seriously damaged whatever cause he thought he was helping and with his silly antiquated epistemology as his only defense, he looks like the sad clown standing in the spotlight after everyone else has gone home.

Sincerely, Theodore P. Letis

[**Argumentum ad verecundiam*: "A reliance on the prestige of some great name rather than the independent consideration of the question at

issue,"--in this case Clark's own reputation as a philosopher, rather than as a text critic---SCP, editor].

Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984, 305 pp., hardback, \$18.95.

Sturz's study is one of a considerable stream of recent works (that began as a trickle in 1956 with the publishing of E.F. Hills's *The King James Version Defended: A Christian View of the New Testament Manuscripts*), calling for either a favorable re-evaluation of the Byzantine text; or else a full-scale return to it as the "proper" textual base for the N.T.

Sturz, the late professor emeritus and former Chairman of the Greek Department (contra the dust jacket of his book), at Biola University, wrote this originally as his doctoral dissertation at Grace Theological Seminary, 1967. While it has been slightly revised, it is essentially this MS, that was circulated for many years by Biola as a syllabus, that was then picked up by Thomas Nelson in 1984.

Within the discipline of N.T. text criticism Sturz's proposal is a modest one. In fact, it practically echoes the position of Herman von Soden (1852-1913). Although, in an earlier review of Sturz, Professor M. Silva expressed an opinion that Sturz's position was that of F.H.A. Scrivener (1813-1891), the coadjutor of Burgon, Scrivener's own assessment, however, was that "I stand midway between the two schools, *inclining much more to Burgon than Hort*" [emphasis

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mine] (*Life of Burgon* vol. 1, p.229). This is not the position of Sturz in this book!

Furthermore, a glimpse at Scrivener's *Introduction* (2 vols., 4th ed.), reveals that he nearly always defended as authentic the Byzantine reading, thus giving priority to this text-type. Sturz is, however, virtually restating von Soden's position.

Regarding von Soden, Metzger notes,

Von Soden tends to give preference to readings supported by two of the three main texts, by this procedure the Koine type [Byzantine] of text is elevated to a rank co-ordinate in importance with the other two texts. (The Text of the New Testament, p.142.)

The unique contribution that Sturz brings to von Soden's approach is his detailed presentation of the data now provided by early papyri, which did not exist in von Soden's day. In so doing, Sturz destroyed forever Hort's theory that the Byzantine text was constructed in the fourth century by combining earlier text-types. Hort believed "distinctively" Byzantine readings could not be found before the recension that produced the Byzantine text in the fourth century. Since Sturz has provided an array of papyri readings from the third and fourth centuries, containing *distinctively* Byzantine readings (readings not shared by other text-types), he insists the Byzantine text, as von Soden argued, should be given equal authority with the other text-types when making a textual judgment.

But even here Sturz is not saying anything new. In 1940, C.C. Tarelli, investigated the papyri and revealed the Byzantine text merited greater consideration:

The readings of the Byzantine text which the papyrus [p.45] supports, moreover, include at least as many with a pure "Syrian" attestation as those which it opposes, which cannot but weaken the presumption against readings so attested.... the occurrence of such readings...in this early manuscript suggests that it is at least unsafe to assume a late date for a reading which might be explained as an "improvement". (The Journal of Theological Studies vol. xli. p 258.)

However, while nearly everyone now admits that on the basis of external evidence, the Byzantine text cannot merely be dismissed when determining a reading, few accept the proposal that because some Byzantine readings are found in the papyri we can now assume that the Byzantine text is as old as the Egyptian or Western texts--old "readings" do not an old "text" make. Hence, when Zuntz made his confession that the Byzantine text must now be given greater respect because of the evidence from the papyri, he noted that "A number of Byzantine readings, most of them genuine, which previously were discarded as 'late,' are anticipated by P46," for him this did not mean we were "to resume the hopeless fight of Dean Burgon" (*The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition Upon the Corpus Paulinum*, 1953, P. 55.).

The invoking of Burgon's name has great significance: the papyri *do* lend support to Burgon's thesis that the Byzantine text can be demonstrated not just to be equal in significance to the other text types, but rather the trunk from which the others diverged in a secondary fashion. This, as anyone who has studied the history of the discipline knows, is the decisive debate. Sturz's modest proposal has not been accepted just because it tends in the direction of Burgon. Hence, as modest as it may be, Sturz's position has not found

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acceptance among American N.T. text critics, because as Metzger says, "so far from

regarding the Koine [Byzantine] as an independent entity...most scholars today follow the view of Griesbach, Hort, and others, that this text is largely secondary and derivative from the others" (Ibid.).

Furthermore, Sturz makes it clear that he, too, has no intention of "resuming the hopeless fight of Dean Burgon." He spends all of chapter four debunking Burgon and Hills for using a *theological* framework for interpreting the data of N.T. text criticism.

For the record, let it be known that Hills was the first text critic to make use of the papyri to vindicate Burgon's argument that the Byzantine text reaches back well before the fourth century. In fact, in 1942, while a doctoral student under E.C. Cowell, Hills proposed a dissertation topic that would prove "the K MSS [Byzantine] that had attestation among the oldest witnesses [papyri] would be older than those that had many variants without such attestation." (Theodore P. Letis, "Edward Freer Hills's Contribution to the Revival of the Ecclesiastical Text," Unpublished M.T.S. Thesis, Emory University, 1987. p. 141.) If his proposal had been accepted he would have accomplished what Sturz set out to do, and more, twenty-five years in advance of Sturz. The proposal was refused, however. So Hills wrote his dissertation on another topic, (the so-called "Caesarean" text), under a different director (H. Cadbury), at a different institution (Harvard).

However, in 1956, still eleven years in advance of Sturz, Hills argued,

When the Chester Beatty Papyri were discovered, still other Byzantine readings which previously had been regarded as late were found to be early... [this] has given material aid to the cause for which

Burgon stood. (The King James Version Defended p. 74.) Furthermore, in his Introduction (1959) to the reprint of Burgon's monograph defending the last verses of Mark's Gospel, Hills listed a table of seventeen distinctively Byzantine readings discovered by him in P66, the famous Papyrus Bodmer II, published just two years earlier. Sturz is silent about all of this—to his shame—focusing rather on Hills's theology of the text, something of which as a Baptist Fundamentalist Dispensationalist with no connections with the *Westminster*, nor the *London Confessions*, Sturz had no firm grasp whatsoever (on this, see my contributions to *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate*, The Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987).

Sturz did, nevertheless, provide an important contribution in continuing to keep the data before those who want to dismiss the Ecclesiastical Text as though it was without substance or support in the early Church.

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