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BIBLICAL STUDIES

The Old Orthodoxy Versus the New  
17 June 2002

In a message dated 4/7/02 9:46:11 PM Eastern Daylight Time, a correspondent writes:

"Could you not show people that the issue for you is not opposing the concept of inerrant autographs, but rather, opposing any idea that removes authority from the manuscripts that have been available for hundreds of years. In other words, 'What good are inerrant autographs...'"

Yes, good point. You make me realize that I have failed as a teacher to make clear what is at stake with this language and these two mutually exclusive paradigms. Let me put to you an analogy from history that might help to explain. One cannot hold to a manufactured paradigm that came out of the 19th century, or even the *language* of that paradigm--the purpose of which, was to "substitute" for an *earlier* paradigm--*and* hold to that earlier paradigm at the same time (see the chart at the end of my chapter "The Protestant Dogmatists..." in my *Ecclesiastical Text*). Not only was this 19th century Warfieldian paradigm meant to substitute for an earlier paradigm, it is impossible to be held in conjunction with the earlier paradigm, but, rather, it must be deliberately opposed, in order for the earlier paradigm to become apparent. This is because the two paradigms, *and their language* and corresponding *referents*, are mutually exclusive of one another. Here is an analogy from history:

In Martin Luther's day, orthodoxy as defined by the Roman Catholic Church (universally believed at the time in Western Europe to be the one, true, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of the Nicene Creed), was that both Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church (papal decretals, decrees of councils, etc.) were coequal with the teaching of Scripture. That is, Scripture and Tradition were coequal in authority. The Second Vatican Council also reaffirms this in very explicit terms. That was the orthodoxy of the day in the sixteenth century. This was the language of orthodoxy: Church and Tradition, equal, authoritative, final = orthodoxy. You and I today will say that it was not orthodoxy; rather, it was heresy to make church Tradition coequal with Scripture. But in the 16th century every theologian within the Western church would have told you that Scripture

and Tradition together are equally authoritative and the only orthodoxy. Luther came along and said, no, in the early church *only* Scripture was deemed Revelation, inspired, and authoritative, *not* tradition (though tradition was important to the extent it agreed with Scripture). Luther was deemed a heretic because of this by most of the Church (except for humanists like Erasmus who was very liberal, indeed, and did not think Scripture final in the way that Luther did, but he was opposed to the strictures and intolerance of the Church and so in some ways he agreed with Luther but for different reasons). The point is, Luther was going up against the "orthodoxy" and the "language of orthodoxy" of his day, which we today would agree with him in saying was actually heresy! But all his life long most Christians in the West thought him a heretic for going against the orthodoxy of the day. Now we see he was right and that the comprehensive standard of orthodoxy as taught in the universities all over Europe was not just wrong, but heresy. Suppose Luther had said, in some cases Scripture and Tradition can still be viewed as coequal and so be viewed as orthodoxy; but he personally preferred to use only Scripture, even if no one else agreed with him. That would have been the position of either a mad man or a fool. Logically, it is either Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) or Scripture and Tradition. It cannot be both because the two paradigms are mutually exclusive.

So it is with me today. The accepted language and paradigm that is considered orthodoxy by the majority of conservative Protestants (sorry, I include Baptists here) is "inerrant autographs only." I have demonstrated in great detail and with much repetition, that both 1) the language, as well as 2) the paradigm that the language expresses, are neither historic orthodoxy, nor of a long standing. That is, I have proven (this is not in dispute), that the word "inerrancy" came into use in theological ranks no earlier than the late 19th century. This is an established fact, not an opinionated slant of the evidence. Moreover, I have demonstrated that appeal to the autographic form of the text as alone final and authoritative, is recent and the direct result of the crisis caused to the doctrine of verbal inspiration by massive textual variation found in the existing manuscripts by the end of the 19th century. Hence, it is a new and adjusted "orthodoxy," just as late medieval Roman Catholic "orthodoxy" was a late and adjusted orthodoxy as compared to the early Church. Also, on the other hand, I have demonstrated that the classic vocabulary and paradigm for Protestant orthodoxy from the 16th century until the 19th century was dramatically different, both in *language* and *substance*, from the current "orthodoxy." I advocate a different, earlier, and lost orthodoxy, just as Luther's discovery of the earlier understanding of Scripture alone was an earlier and lost orthodoxy, which today we can hardly believe was ever in question at any point in history. Recall, however, that it took several hundred years and many wars before Protestant orthodoxy became the standard all across Europe. I am where Luther was when he posted his 95 theses. The false language and paradigm are in place still, but I have provided the opportunity for those who will to, to find the truth. Why have so few stopped saying that Scripture and Tradition are coequal (that is, following my analogy, why do so many still say that it is *only* the original autographic form of the text

that is inspired, authoritative, "inerrant" and final) even after it has been established that this *is not orthodoxy, but heresy?* Because they do not want to be burnt at the stake for holding to the truth (that is, they do not want to lose their teaching posts, pastorates, or missionary callings). The code language of the "modern" orthodoxy (read=heresy) remains in place. The parallel is exact. Finally, logically, it is impossible to maintain both the language and paradigm of "inerrant autographs only" along with "infallible apographs only" because they are mutually exclusive, i.e., it can only be one or the other. One cannot say that, "I believe that only the autographs were inerrant, but I also believe the apographs (copies) are infallible." This is because one standard of authority is ultimate and the other relative and they are forever pitted against one another. This means that logically, you still do not have a final authority because the autographic form of the text remains unidentified. So you have a relative stopgap authority that demands that you go on a quest for the only final form of the text, the autographic form. This in turn, then, entails accepting the canons of text criticism. Text criticism presupposes that the extant text is corrupt and has been corrupted by the orthodox church, which involves denying the classic Protestant orthodox doctrine of Providential Preservation. This, then, firmly places you within the ranks of heretics (Jesus Seminar, etc.,) who butcher the Church of God to make a name for themselves; or who profit from sitting on revision committees producing modern language Bibles that promise to take us closer and closer to the autographic form of the Bible (the only form that is ultimate, inspired, authoritative and inerrant). In the process they throw out massive portions of Scripture that were once regarded as canonical by the early church and the Reformation church, in the ironic goal of seeking "inerrancy!" However, any one who does continue to use such code language and such a defective paradigm, in order to retain their teaching post, ministerial position, or missionary calling, in my estimation, is a heretic and an enemy of truth. How could I join those ranks? I would be either a mad man, or a fool.

Theodore P. Letis  
11 May 2002

P.S. Please do keep in mind my trip to Berlin next month. While some of the funding has come in, this is peak traveling time and I have to spend time in London (to discuss documentary with a producer) and tend to my books in Edinburgh. Also, do direct folks to the sites below, particularly to the holywordcafe, which is gathering momentum by the day with new materials...

[www.kuyper.org/thetext](http://www.kuyper.org/thetext)

[www.holywordcafe.com/bible/Letis.html](http://www.holywordcafe.com/bible/Letis.html)

[www.bible-researcher.com/letis1.html](http://www.bible-researcher.com/letis1.html)

[www.bts.edu/trobisch/Temp/SBL\\_Berlin\\_2002.htm](http://www.bts.edu/trobisch/Temp/SBL_Berlin_2002.htm)

In a message dated 6/18/2002 6:43:24 AM Eastern Daylight Time, Olivianus writes:

<< So, IF the textual critical methodology of the nineteenth century views of the 1881 texts of Warfield, Brooke Westcott and Fenton Anthony Hort, UBS-Kurt Aland "The Text of the New Testament" etc are to be embraced in favor and against those of Turretin, Burgon, Hills etc, what does this embracement say regarding the preservation of God's word in Isaiah 59:21? What NECESSARY consequences does this view imply as to the quality of the copies of the word of God which were transcribed and possessed by Christ's church from the first century to 1881? Are we saying that Christ's church was only in possession of a poor and corrupt body of manuscripts for 1800 years? That the best and most faithful copies were simply hidden away for all this time? >>

Christopher, please do pass this on to the group [Warfield list]. Yours was the most wonderfully measured and informed statement of the facts, as well as of the problem, as I have read in many a day. I want to start with just a brief explication for why your use of "inerrant" would be jarring to Turretin and all the 17th century dogmatists, both Lutheran and Reformed. "Inerrancy" as used by Warfield and after some arm twisting as eventually also used by A.A. Hodge, was always qualified, and is to this day, to have as its proper referent the ipsissima verba of the autographa. Hence, one can never indiscriminately call the apographa (copies), inerrant. They are only so once science has clearly given each portion/verse/word, empirical-like verification in light of the current state of the discipline. This perfectly reflects the very naive stance that Princeton and other Victorian believers had towards a nearly unbounded confidence in science to always affirm the faith (see Theodore Bozeman's excellent study of this, *Protestants in an Age of Science*). This is very different from the pre-scientific Westminster Divines who comprehensively stated that the Providentially Preserved text in the use of the church was, indeed "infallible" in ALL that it taught, without ANY qualification. Do you not see how the two words represent two different paradigms?

To get to your point, however, Warfield came to exactly the conclusions that you suggest. He declared openly and in explicit conflict with the WCF, that the text declared by them to be infallible was, in fact, a contrived text reflecting systematic corruption. This is found in Warfield's explicit affirmation of Hort's explanation for the origins of the Byzantine text--it was the result of a systematic and deliberate act of corruption on the part of the pre-Nicene Church (see Westcott and Hort on the Lucianic recension and Warfield's naked affirmation of this in his handbook, pp. 157 ff. Here is a sample of Warfield's 19th cen. Hortian rhetoric:

*When all the phenomena are closely scrutinised, it is made out positively that the Syrian [the Ecclesiastical Text] text was made by a revision out of the other three classes, and preserves nothing from antiquity not already in them.*

That is, this text, used universally in the Greek speaking church since the council of Nicea, until the dawn of the Reformation and then by the Reformers and the post-reformation dogmaticians and commentators, was a fabricated text created by the church--or more properly, a portion of the church--in the 3rd to 4th centuries. Do not be surprised if this sounds exactly like what the Jesus Seminar teach, because it is! One of the most shameful events in the late 20th century is the fact that Edward F. Hills, soon after gaining his Th.D. from Harvard, wrote a treatise demonstrating that 2nd and 3rd century Egyptian papyri had "distinctively Syrian readings" in them 100- to 200 years before the birth of this "corrupt" Syrian text was manufactured, thus revealing that both Warfield and his false guide Hort were fundamentally wrong about the true nature of the Byzantine (Syrian) text. Harry Sturz came along years later and went over the same ground that Hills did and got all the credit.

Warfield felt that by claiming the Ecclesiastical Text was the preserved text, the Westminster Divines were hopelessly naive and he said so explicitly when he condescendingly said that their "reverence for the Word of God, perversely but not unnaturally exercised, erected the standard or received text into the norm of a true text," *The Ecclesiastical Text*, p. 4.

May I conclude as I do in the chapter just cited above? Warfield was careless and committed great harm by surrendering the WCF, to which he was pledged to up-hold, in order to freely engage in the "science" of text criticism, which has long since given up the canons of Westcott and Hort to which Warfield clung, for very life, as the means to correct the "corrupted" text handed down by the Church.

Theodore P. Letis