

## Book Review

Charles L. Surret. *Which Greek Text? The Debate Among Fundamentalists*. Kings Mountain, NC: Surret Family Publications, 1999. 122 pp.

Reviewed by James D. Price

The author is pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, and a faculty member at Ambassador Baptist College in Lattimore, North Carolina. The book is a defense of the *Textus Receptus* form of the Greek New Testament, however, the author claims to reject the concept of inspired translations.

### What's the Big Problem

In the first chapter, Surret attempts to define the problem. He correctly and wisely demonstrated that the problem does not involve comparing English translations, but that it involves comparing Hebrew and Greek texts. The book, of course, deals only with the Greek text of the New Testament. Surret asserts that the problem centers on differing views of divine preservation of Scripture. He associates the differing views of preservation with the differing views of how one recovers the autographic readings from the existing manuscript evidence. He discussed three different methods: (1) the Westcott-Hort method, (2) the Majority Text method, and (3) the *Textus Receptus* method. He categorized those who prefer the first method as follows:

On the one hand, there are those who think that the Word of God has *not* been verbally preserved by God, at least not in one given text or translation. Some of these think that God *has* preserved His Word, but that all the extant manuscripts must be studied to discern where it is. In practice, since no one can consult all the manuscripts every time he translates from Greek, this position denies preservation from the standpoint of *accessability* [sic]. (p. 3; emphasis his)

Next, based on an estimate that all the existing Greek manuscripts fully agree on about 93 percent of their words and that the remaining seven percent has some degree of uncertainty, he concludes that those who do not accept the *Textus Receptus* (TR) must really believe in “partial preservation” (p. 7). Then he asserted that “it is typical for advocates of the TR position to espouse *complete preservation* of God’s Word” (p. 7, emphasis his).

Regarding the Majority Text view, Surret stated, “since the 1982 Majority Text proponents follow essentially the same line of reasoning as do those who use the *Textus Receptus*, there will not be an attempt here to defend the TR over the 1982 text” (p. 9). This is an oversimplification of the case, however, because the Majority Text differs from the *Textus Receptus* in well over a thousand places. Without dealing with the Majority Text view, the author has not make his case for the TR.

Of course, Fundamentalists that do not prefer the *Textus Receptus* do not agree that Surret’s representation of them is accurate. None of them really believes that one must “consult all the manuscripts every time he translates from the Greek” (p. 3). Nor do any believe that

because a small percentage of the words have alternate readings, that somehow he does not have a complete text. They believe that in every place of variation the autographic reading is one of the available alternate readings—that is, the text is wholly preserved, one must just distinguish which variant is original. Surretts has presented an inaccurate picture of his opposition.

The problem does indeed involve preservation, but not in the way Surretts pictures it. It is not a matter of whether the text has been preserved. All Fundamentalists agree that the text has been wholly preserved—complete preservation. The real questions to answer are: How was the text preserved? And how does one distinguish the autographic words from the alternate readings that occur in places of variation?

### **Evolution and Textual Criticism**

In the second chapter, Surretts likens the Westcott-Hort theory of textual history to the “Gap Theory” of creation. He stated,

The basic position of the W-H theory of textual transmission involves the fact that their body of texts was hidden from the public for about fourteen centuries of Church history. The early manuscripts (MSS) to which Westcott and Hort gave greatest credence were not available for general use from the fourth century to the nineteenth. Thus the W-H concept presents a textual ‘Gap Theory’ as its foundation. This, of course, denies that God’s Word has been available for every generation of mankind. (p. 14)

Here Surretts imposes the condition of general availability upon his theory of preservation. But there are problems with this newly imposed condition. First of all, Surretts doesn’t know the history of those manuscripts and their availability. Because they are dated in the fourth century and were “discovered” in the nineteenth, he assumes that they were unavailable in the intervening time—an assumption based on ignorance, and an argument from silence.

A better assumption would be that those manuscripts (Bibles)--or Bibles with the same kind of text--were available throughout the history of the church in the region where the existing manuscripts originated, and they were available to those few in other regions who were interested in comparing texts. Since a Bible is the most prized possession in any church, what church would be long without one if they could afford it. The same would be true of every believer who could afford it. What was the most likely means of acquiring a Bible? People hired a scribe to make a copy of the most prominent Bible in the region. The extant manuscripts are surviving copies of the Bibles used by the people of history. They have survived as representative samples of the Bibles used in the region in which they originated.

A second problem is that Surretts’s condition of general availability is contrary to reality. Most ancient Bibles (manuscripts) were the private property of individuals or churches, and would not have been available for general use in the sense that Surretts implies.<sup>1</sup> It is not how

---

<sup>1</sup> By “general use” Surretts surely means that the Bibles (manuscripts) were available for textual purposes, not merely for general use. Otherwise, what is the point of his argument?

widely the ancient Bibles were available for use that makes them important to a theory of textual preservation, but the fact that they still exist. The fact that God allowed them to survive means the form of their text has been preserved, and that implies that God intends for them to function as witnesses to the identity of the autographic text.

Finally, Surretts likens accepting the Westcott-Hort theory of textual criticism to accepting the theory of evolution. Of course, this is a false analogy intended to discredit the W-H method and the people who prefer it. The theory of evolution states that things develop from inferior to superior, and in the process of time they change to something entirely different and better. On the other hand, the Westcott-Hort theory starts with a perfect autographic text that has survived only in mildly defective copies. Their methodology works to restore the text to its pristine purity. As more evidence becomes available, and the methodology improves, the restored text becomes more and more free of uncertainty. Thus the autographic text did not evolve; it has been there all the time, unchanged. It's only our ability to recognize it that improves. Our ability or lack of ability to recognize it has no bearing on whether the text exists or not, whether the text has been preserved or not.

### **Preservation: the "Watershed" Issue**

In chapter three Surretts correctly and wisely argued that the integrity of the text is not dependent on the integrity of those who have been involved in bringing it to the Christian community. He stated,

Since some writers of the original autographa were blasphemers, persecutors, murders, liars, adulterers, and Christ-deniers, it is obvious that the integrity of the Bible does not depend upon the integrity of the human vessels through whom it was transported. If that was true of the originals, it must also be true of the copies. (p. 17)

However, in this chapter he also assumes that conservative scholars who accept the Westcott-Hort theory of textual criticism also accept all the details of Westcott and Hort's theory of preservation. This too is a defective assumption. Such conservative scholars accept the traditions of church history that the New Testament books were written by the traditionally accepted authors, and that they were written in the traditionally accepted dates. They believe there were actual autographs. They just prefer the improved Westcott-Hort method as the best method available.

In this chapter, Surretts also seems to assume that the autographic text has been preserved in only one text tradition, the *Textus Receptus*. He was critical of a Fundamentalist who stated that God might not have preserved the text in just one text tradition. There is a serious problem with Surretts's assumption, because it violates his own criterion of the best text—one that is "long standing" and "widely accepted" (p. 14). If preservation is limited to only one text tradition (the Byzantine), then its distribution was limited to mainly the eastern Greek speaking churches. That means that all the churches in the South and West and in Palestine were deprived of the Word of God, in the sense Surretts states it in absolute terms. The criterion of "widely accepted" falls short of the mark. Instead of an alleged time gap, he now has created a geographical gap. One cannot argue that these areas were deprived of the true text because of heresy, because the eastern

churches had their own share of heresy. Surely Surretts doesn't accept many of the doctrines of the Greek Orthodox Church—the custodians of the Byzantine text tradition; he doesn't accept them as “orthodox” in the sense that he understands the term. It seems far better to accept the possibility that the autographic text is preserved in the joint witness of all the manuscript witnesses God saw fit to preserve.

### Uncertainties

In chapters four and five, Surretts assumes that because some conservatives acknowledge an element of uncertainty in reconstructing the autographic text, that this means they do not believe the text was wholly preserved. He listed numerous places in the text where textual critics discuss some degree of uncertainty. He then concluded:

The above samplings . . . clearly reveal that those who follow the W-H approach to the text of Scripture do not believe that God has Providentially preserved an accessible Greek text for every generation of mankind. (p. 39)

Of course, the statement “for every generation of mankind” is farfetched. Surely Surretts means only those generations since the time of Christ. Also, the word “accessible” is somewhat ambiguous. Evidently he means “easily and universally accessible,” because the fact that all the existing manuscripts have survived means that they were accessible to some degree, and the texts that they represent were accessible to some degree. That is, in any generation since the time of Christ, anyone who was able and wanted to examine any of the existing manuscripts (and the text they represent) could theoretically have done so. So it is not a matter of accessibility, but ease of accessibility that has affected how the text has been preserved. The truth is that in every generation and in every place, very few manuscripts were easily accessible for textual purposes. Usually only the locally available ones were used in the scriptoriums where most copies were made. So, the Alexandrian text was not easily accessible to the Western, Eastern, and Palestinian churches. Likewise, the Byzantine text was not easily accessible to the Egyptian, Western, and Palestinian churches, and so forth. That is, the various text traditions were rather mutually isolated, with very little mutual accessibility. That explains why such diversity developed among the text traditions, plus the fact that there was no centralized authority to control the copying and distribution of Bibles in antiquity.

Following Surretts's line of reasoning, one may say that Surretts does not believe that that God has Providentially preserved the *Textus Receptus* for every generation of mankind. This is true because Surretts regards Scrivener's printed edition of the *Textus Receptus* as the autographic text. However, before Scrivener published that text in 1894 that exact text did not exist in any printed edition of the Greek New Testament, or in any existing Greek manuscript (Bible). It is a new text. It is an eclectic text put together from earlier printed editions in order to assemble into one book the Greek words that lie behind the English words of the Authorized Bible. Let's be honest! That exact Greek text, as a “text,”<sup>2</sup> was not contained in any known printed edition or

---

<sup>2</sup> It is important to clearly understand the technical use of the word here. The word *text* here means a collection of words precisely as they are found in a specific document—in this case, Scrivener's 1894 edition.

manuscript before 1894. Thus, as far as all existing evidence that God has preserved is concerned, Surretts's TR text was not accessible to any generation before 1894.

However, Surretts and his TR defenders may respond: Yes, but the words of the text were available in the editions and manuscripts. But that's the whole point. That's exactly what advocates of the W-H method have said all along. The words exist in the existing manuscripts, but one must learn to distinguish the autographic words from the others. That requires a rational method for distinguishing them—a textual critical method. That's what the King James translators had to do, and the translators and producers of the various Greek texts that preceded them.

When the King James translators or their predecessors examined the Greek texts available to them at the time, they found numerous places where the texts differed. There was some degree of uncertainty as to which reading they should follow. On the basis of whatever methods of textual criticism they used—we don't know what method, if any, they used—they decided which words to translate and which ones to ignore. Did they believe that the uncertainty they observed meant that God had not providentially preserved an accessible Greek text? No, certainly not!

When Erasmus produced the first printed edition of the Greek New Testament, he collated a small handful of Greek manuscripts he had available. When he found numerous places where the texts differed, there was some degree of uncertainty as to which reading he should accept. On the basis of whatever methods of textual criticism he used—we don't know what method, if any, he used—he decided which words to include in his text and which ones to exclude. Did he believe that the uncertainty he observed meant that God had not providentially preserved an accessible Greek text? No, certainly not! The same can be said of subsequent editions of the Greek New Testament produced by Erasmus, Beza, Stephanus, and Elzivar. They all found places of uncertainty, and sometimes corrected their earlier decisions, but they didn't believe that God had not providentially preserved an accessible Greek text.

Is it really true that because a Bible may have a small percentage of its words that may not be exactly like those of the autographic text, that it somehow is not the Word of God? That's what Surretts would have his readers believe. But if that's true, then no existing Greek manuscript (Bible) can be regarded as the Word of God, because not one of them is a perfectly accurate copy of the autographic text. If that's true, then no Christian, or church, has had the Word of God since the autographs perished—at least until 1894, according to Surretts. There is something seriously wrong with that line of reasoning, and there is something wrong with a theory of preservation that is based on that faulty assumption. The truth is that according to all the factual evidence available, throughout history God saw fit to provide His people with His Word by means of Bibles (manuscripts) that were not perfect replicas of the autographic text—that is, they contained imperfections. That is the method God used to preserve His Word. But that doesn't mean that the autographic text has not been preserved in all its perfection.

### **Biblical Evidence of Preservation**

In chapter six, Surretts attempts to discredit the value of history as a witness to the preservation of Scripture. Instead, he prefers to rely on what the Scripture says about preservation. Evidently he doesn't understand that the existing Greek manuscripts are part of history. They are the Bibles that were used by the Christians in history. Without them Erasmus could not have printed the first Greek New Testament used by the translators. Without them—without history—we would have no Bible to read what it says about preservation. Without them those promises would not have been true. We only know the promises were true because of that historical evidence.

After unwisely dismissing history, Surretts then appeals to the number of manuscripts (history) as support for his *Textus Receptus* theory:

Furthermore, if history is to be the sole witness of the Bible's preservation, it would not point to the W-H text or any of its variations as that which has been preserved for the most people and for the longest time. History points to the TR. (p. 43)

Evidently he is bothered by the word "sole" which he introduces into the discussion. He wants to include what Scripture says about preservation. But he fails to see the distinction between a promise to preserve and the historical evidence of what has been preserved. But without the historical evidence of what has been preserved Surretts would have no promises of preservation. The promises are contained in the preserved historical manuscripts.

Surretts then provides a discussion of numerous passages from the Old and New Testaments that infer that Scripture will be preserved. None provide an unambiguous, explicit statement of preservation. Some of his discussion goes beyond good exposition. However, it is useless to quibble with him over these passages. Fundamentalists that do not prefer the TR nevertheless agree that preservation is both logical and in harmony with the implications of Scripture. In this arena of the battle, Surretts is shooting at phantoms.

### **Historical Denial of Preservation**

In chapter seven, Surretts attempts to discredit the Westcott-Hort method by providing quotations that imply that some of its advocates seem to deny preservation. Here he seems not to understand the W-H method very well. The quotations are discussions of places in the text where variations occur, and of the degree of uncertainty involved in determining which reading among the variants is autographic in the given passages. Here again Surretts seems to confuse a discussion of uncertainty with denial of preservation. However, preservation is rarely the topic in a technical discussion of textual critical matters. The admission of uncertainty is not equivalent to denying that the autographic reading has been preserved. Clearly that is not the case for the conservatives and Fundamentalists who prefer the W-H method; these scholars see no disharmony between the W-H method and the doctrine of preservation.

His main argument against the W-H method is an appeal to numbers. He claims that the TR is supported by the majority of manuscripts, and that the W-H dependence on genealogical

relationships cannot outweigh the force of numbers. He gives his readers the false impression that there are at least 5,250 manuscripts in the TR tradition with full consensus. However, there is no book of the New Testament that has that many manuscript witnesses. According to Kurt Aland, one of the worlds leading authorities on Greek New Testament manuscripts, there are only 59 manuscripts that contain the whole NT, and another 149 that contain all the books except Revelation. There are only 2,328 manuscripts that contain the Gospels (178 of which are fragmentary), 655 manuscripts of Acts and the Catholic Epistles (42 of which are fragmentary), 779 manuscripts of the Pauline Epistles (62 of which are fragmentary), and only 287 manuscripts of Revelation (8 of which are fragmentary).<sup>3</sup> These numbers include the many manuscripts of the non-Byzantine traditions. So his appeal to numbers must be viewed as an overenthusiastic exaggeration.

However, in his appeal to numbers for support of the TR, he overlooks the fact that many readings in the TR are not supported by the majority of manuscripts, some are supported by a very few, and some by none at all. He further overlooks the fact that there are many places in the text (including the whole book of Revelation) where the Byzantine witnesses are divided and no reading has a clear majority. His appeal to numbers, therefore, is insufficient to discredit the W-H method, because it cannot resolve the uncertainties present within the Byzantine tradition itself. His criterion of originality (numbers) must be supplemented by other tests for originality—tests similar to the canons of Westcott and Hort's method.

### **Historical Evidence of Preservation**

In chapter eight, Surretts appeals to the historical evidence provided by Burgon and Miller, and concludes that the witness of the ante-Nicene fathers, the Old Latin Version, and the Peshitta Version support the readings of the TR. There are several problems with this argument. First, Burgon and Miller supported what they called the Traditional Text, but their text, while similar to the TR, differed from it in many places. Furthermore, it is not true that the ante-Nicene fathers, the Old Latin, and the Peshitta always support the readings of the TR. Often these sources support non-Byzantine readings. They tend to support the form of the text that was current in their region. All one needs to do is check the critical apparatus of the available Greek texts to verify this.

Next, Surretts appealed to the work of Harry Sturz whom he interpreted to support the TR. Sturz argued that the Byzantine tradition should not be ignored, as the W-H method tends to do. He found a number of Byzantine readings in the very early manuscripts that suggest that the Byzantine tradition may be older than formerly supposed. However, Sturz found only a portion of the solely Byzantine readings in those early manuscripts, not all of them.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the presence of random Byzantine readings in otherwise non-Byzantine manuscripts is not evidence

---

<sup>3</sup> Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Sturz catalogued 150 solely Byzantine readings, and 170 Byzantine-Western readings. But this is a small part of the total number of Byzantine readings that distinguish that text tradition from the others. Harry Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), pp. 145-174.

of the existence of the Byzantine text, only evidence of the existence of some Byzantine readings. Evidence of a text consists of an actual manuscript containing all or most of the readings characteristic of the Byzantine tradition. None exists before the fourth century. Harry Sturz understood that, and according to my own personal conversation with him, Sturz didn't prefer the *Textus Receptus*, or even the Byzantine tradition. Sturz's work doesn't justify Surretts's assumption that the Byzantine text actually existed prior to the fourth century. No manuscripts of that tradition exist before the fourth century. This must not be regarded as an argument from silence, because early manuscripts do exist for the other text traditions. Further, the statistics of the existing manuscripts indicate that the manuscripts supporting the Byzantine tradition didn't become a majority until about the ninth century. It is ironic that in this chapter Surretts appeals to evidence from history to support his view, but in chapter six he criticized Glennly for his appeal to history.

### **The Vehicle of Preservation**

In chapter nine, Surretts discusses what he regards as the vehicle of preservation—local churches and saints. While this sounds nice from a Baptist perspective, it has no support from reality—history. Churches and saints were primarily consumers, not producers of Bibles. Throughout history before the advent of the printing press, Bibles (manuscripts) were copied mainly in monasteries and scriptoriums, not in churches or private homes, by professional scribes, not by pastors or private citizens.

Independent local churches, as Surretts understands the expression, were exceedingly rare or nonexistent in most quarters of Christendom. Such a small number of independent churches could not possibly account for the vast number of existing manuscripts. After the first few centuries, most local churches were under the governance of an elaborate hierarchical system, with bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and popes. The Byzantine churches were no exception. After the split between the eastern and western churches, the eastern branch became the Greek Orthodox Church with its own hierarchical system. Most churches were not independent, but depended on the Church hierarchy to assign pastors, determine doctrine, and oversee most of what actually happened. Surretts's proposal is a good idea, but preservation just didn't happen that way. The text was preserved through the Church at large in spite of its sad theological and political condition throughout most of history.

Furthermore, if local churches and saints were the vehicle of preservation, as Surretts supposes, then he must admit that the local churches and saints also preserved the Alexandrian, Western, and Caesarean texts as well. Surretts and his fellow TR advocates may counter that the non-Byzantine "saints" were not true saints because of their heretical doctrines. But then he must explain how orthodox the "saints" of the Greek Orthodox churches were that preserved the Byzantine text tradition. Church history reveals that throughout most of history several important orthodox doctrines were held only by believers outside the Church at large; they were in the minority and on the fringes of Christendom until the time of the Reformation.



### What About Translations?

In chapter ten, Surretts discusses the translation issue. It is fair presentation of the issues involved. He discusses the difference between the formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence theories of translation, and illustrates the differences in the way several translations handle a passage of Scripture. He compares the KJV, which uses the TR and formal equivalence, with the NASV, which uses the critical text (CT) and formal equivalence, the NIV, which uses the CT and mild dynamic equivalence, and the TEV, which uses the CT and paraphrase. He concluded that the preference should be a translation that used the right text, the TR, and the right translation theory, formal equivalence—that is the KJV.

The most interesting aspect of this chapter is what Surretts left out. He failed to mention the New King James Version, which uses both the right text and the right translation theory, according to Surretts's definition. This omission cannot be regarded as an oversight, however, because the NKJV is too hot an issue in TR circles. It must be interpreted as a tacit disapproval of the NKJV, and that reveals Surretts's true colors—he is a King James Only advocate under the guise of a supporter of the *Textus Receptus* like many of his fellow bed partners.

### Practical Considerations

In chapter eleven, Surretts again addresses the question of uncertainty. He concludes that one must have a flawless text or exegesis “would be an exercise in futility if the text were in doubt” (p. 109). However, this is not very practical. It sets up a false dichotomy that is contrary to sound reasoning and reality. It is not that one has a perfect copy of God's word with absolutely no uncertainty, or he doesn't have the Word of God at all. If that were true, then, as I demonstrated earlier, no one has had the Word of God since the autographs perished. No Fundamentalist, including Surretts, is willing to accept that drastic conclusion. The truth is that God preserved His Word through copies that were not wholly free from differences. They had a small percentage of places where variations occur. In most of those places there is enough evidence to distinguish the autographic reading from the others. In a few places the evidence may not be conclusive, and one must choose the most likely reading or reserve judgment. The King James translators had the practical approach to the problem of uncertainty:

Some perhaps would have no variety of senses to be set in the margin, lest the authority of the Scriptures for deciding controversies, by that show of uncertainty, should somewhat be shaken. But we do not hold their judgment to be so sound in this point.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, they were referring primarily to possible alternate meaning of the Greek or Hebrew words, but their wisdom was extended to textual differences, because they also included textual differences in their marginal notes. They went on to defend the use of marginal notes in places of uncertainty:

Now in such a case, does not a margin do well to admonish the reader to seek further, and not to conclude or dogmatize upon this or that without investigation? For as it is a fault of

---

<sup>5</sup> “The Translators to the Reader,” front matter in *The Authorized Version of the Bible*, 1611 edition.

incredulity to doubt those things that are evident, so to determine such things as the Spirit of God hath left questionable (even in the judgment of the judicious), can be no less than presumption.<sup>6</sup>

So the wisdom of those revered Biblical authorities teaches that the presence of some uncertainty does not detract from the authority of Scripture, but challenges us to caution and care. Surretts should heed the wisdom of the translators he so highly respects.

Next Surretts equated a belief in Biblical inerrancy with belief in preservation of the TR. He asserted:

Since inerrancy has been the consistent belief throughout Church history, and since the only Greek text that has been available to man in all those periods has been the Traditional text, the assumption of preservation again points to the TR as the true text. (p. 111)

This argument also has serious flaws. His assertion that most of the Church fathers believed in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scripture is true. But it is not true that they all used the Byzantine text and regarded that text as inerrant. He mentioned Irenaeus, but most of his quotations support the Western text tradition; this would also be true of Jerome and most of the Greek fathers to the end of the third century. He mentioned Augustine, but his quotations frequently side with the Alexandrian text against the Byzantine. It is a wrong assumption that the Byzantine text was the only text that was available. There exist sporadic Greek witnesses to the non-Byzantine traditions that are dated throughout the span of history. Likewise, the ancient translations sustained the textual tradition from which they were translated.

The problem is that there is not a direct connection between the doctrine of inerrancy and that of preservation. The doctrine of inerrancy applies only to the autographic text, and allows for variations in the manuscript witnesses that may appear to be errors. It is a fatal logical error to conclude that a belief in inerrancy demands the acceptance of the TR as the flawless replica of the autographic text. The evidence doesn't support it.

Next, Surretts constructed another false dichotomy that is contrary to reality. On the one hand, the bad guys, those who prefer the W-H method, do not believe that God promised to preserve His word. On the other hand, the good guys, those who accept the TR, do believe that God promised to preserve His word. So he concluded:

There is a great deal of dependency upon the studies and observations of others. The view here is to accept the historical interpretations of those that believe that God has promised to preserve His Word. Thus, when men like John Burgon, Edward Miller, and Jakob Van Bruggen offer explanations that differ from Westcott and Hort's conclusions about such phenomena, the choice here is made to follow Burgon. (p. 111)

There are numerous problems with this alleged dichotomy. The first is the way Surretts worded the dichotomy. His wording implies that those who don't believe that God made explicit

---

<sup>6</sup> "The Translators to the Reader," front matter in *The Authorized Version of the Bible*, 1611 edition.

promises of preservation also don't believe in preservation. That is false. While they don't believe God made explicit promises, they do believe in preservation, and that there are Scriptural inferences to preservation, and that preservation is a logical expectation. Furthermore, Surretts didn't demonstrate that Burgon and Miller believe that God made explicit promises of preservation; there are no quotations to that effect. For all I know, Burgon and Miller believe only that there are Scriptural inferences.

So it is not really a good guy versus bad guy situation at all. There are textual authorities who prefer the W-H method whose theology is much more like Surretts's than is that of Burgon and Miller. That is, there are "good guys" and "bad guys" on both sides. Not everyone who accepts the TR accepts Surretts's basic canons of theology, and not everyone who prefers the W-H method rejects them. After all, the problem is not theological but methodological. There is good theology on both sides of the issue. So theology cannot serve as the guide for making a choice between methods. The choice should be made on the basis of sound reasoning and the available evidence. This leads to Surretts's last false dichotomy—science versus faith.

He came to the conclusion that the final decision on which method should be followed must be based on faith rather than scientific analysis. He stated,

At that point it becomes a *faith* issue, rather than one of clearly-demonstrable historical information. It need not be an unreasonable faith, however, but one that is based upon the Bible and logic. (p. 112, emphasis his)

However, after having said that, he provided a table on page 114 that contrasts the scientific (W-H) approach with the faith (TR) approach. By this table, he implies that those who prefer the W-H method proceed without Biblical faith, and that the TR method alone is based on Biblical faith. But this is a false dichotomy that is unbiblical and irrational. No disharmony exists between Biblical faith and the scientific method. It is not either faith or science. Biblical faith doesn't expect believers to abandon the common sense with which God created them. Surretts confuses the scientific method with unbiblical, godless science. But not all science is unbiblical and godless. The scientific method is a common-sense approach to problem solving that helps people avoid making logical blunders and stupid mistakes. It is a great benefit to mankind when properly used. The Bible doesn't condemn the scientific method. It condemns the wisdom of the world that is based on unbiblical, godless philosophy and presuppositions. The Bible nowhere commends faith that is devoid of sound reasoning. It merely commends believing God in circumstances that go beyond our ability to comprehend. The problem of textual criticism is complex, but not incomprehensible; and God has preserved an abundance of factual evidence for solving the problem.

In this table, Surretts states that in every generation of Christians the form of preservation was by means of copies of the autographa,<sup>7</sup> that every generation had every word available in

---

<sup>7</sup> He implies that these were exact copies, whereas the "scientific" method has only extant inexact manuscripts. How unfortunate that none of those exact copies has survived.

extant manuscripts,<sup>8</sup> that every word was accessible to the “grass roots” Christians,<sup>9</sup> and that the form of that text was the *Textus Receptus*. To accept that presentation really does require a great measure of faith, because none of those statements are supported by the existing manuscript and historical evidence that God has seen fit to preserve for this generation. This is a hypothetical reconstruction of history based on what he imagines must have happened in order to produce the flawless text that his idealistic heart demands. He imagines that’s how it happened, because he imagines that the Scripture promised that would happen. He imagines that the Scripture promised that because his idealistic heart cannot tolerate the possibility of any uncertainty in his English Bible—it must be a flawless translation of a flawless text, or it is not God’s word. That is an unrealistic, false dichotomy that Surretts has been persuaded to accept. It has driven him to this very impractical extreme. This is not Biblical faith; it is fallacious rationalizing. God doesn’t expect believers to blindly believe a hypothesis that has no foundation in reality.

The author’s final conclusion is that one must have an absolutely flawless form of the autographic text, and that such text is found only in the *Textus Receptus*. Only then can preachers and Bible students have full confidence in God’s Word. “For the lost to be won to Christ, there must be no question about the accuracy of God’s Word” (p. 116). Of course, in my opinion, anyone who would introduce a lost person to textual variants should have his head examined. And I feel almost the same about anyone who declares or implies that no one can be saved apart from the TR or the KJV. Surretts comes very close to that position. This either-or approach to the text is not Biblical faith. It is not supported by Scripture, by common sense, or by practical experience.

Obviously, I do not recommend the book as a source of reliable information on the textual issue. Much of its information is unreliable, its arguments are fallacious, and its conclusions are faulty. In my opinion, this book creates more problems than it claims to solve.

James D. Price

---

<sup>8</sup> Here again he implies that the extant manuscripts were exact copies, because in the contrasting “scientific” view, for the people of history the exact words were scattered among the manuscripts and had to be searched out. How unfortunate that God saw fit to preserve only the flawed manuscripts.

<sup>9</sup> This implies that the majority of ancient Christians had flawless copies of the Bible throughout history, whereas, in the “scientific” method the true text became available only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a few scholars. It’s strange that he overlooks the fact that the “scientific” text is currently available to thousands of pastors and students, and that translations of that text are available to “grass roots” Christians all over the world in hundreds of languages.