PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM IN THE SERMONS OF WESTMINSTER DIVINES

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Abstract: The men who claimed that Scripture had been "kept pure in all ages" were also regular preachers who routinely dealt with textual variations and marginal readings. By giving attention to the manner in which they addressed text-critical problems in the pulpit, we can understand more precisely what the Westminster divines believed about the manner of God's preservation of his word. It is argued that the authorial intent of WCF 1.8 allows room for the practice of textual criticism and that it does not require adoption of one particular strand of the Greek textual tradition as "approved" in every point of variation.

Key words: textual criticism, providential preservation of Scripture, doctrine of Scripture, preaching, textus receptus, Westminster Confession of Faith

As a concise statement regarding the authenticity, authority, and preservation of Holy Scripture, consider the detail and clarity of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), chapter 1, section 8, whose first full sentence reads as follows:[1]

> 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 authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them.[2]

Despite the lucidity and power of these words, disagreement exists among Reformed Christians about how to understand and apply them.[3] One particularly significant set of questions relates to the practice of textual criticism, which is the effort to identify the authentic text of Scripture from among competing variant readings. To put the matter bluntly, does the doctrine of Scripture expressed in the Westminster Confession allow room for the modern practice of textual criticism?

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[1] Special thanks are due to Richard F. Brash and Chad Van Dixhoorn for commenting on earlier drafts of this essay.

[2] "Confession of Faith," The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, https://opc.org/wcf.html.

[3] The corresponding section of the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 (§1.8) is nearly identical (though note the use of "authentic" instead of WCF's "authentical"). "Of the Holy Scriptures," The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-1.

For some, the answer is no. According to this view, affirmation of God's providential preservation of his word is fundamentally incompatible with textual criticism as it has been applied to other ancient books, because it is a discipline that is based on naturalistic presuppositions and practically denies that God has faithfully preserved his word for his church.[4] God's word does not need to be identified from among competing variants through the use of critical methods because in his providence he has preserved it for the church in the form of a single approved version, namely the *textus receptus*, or "received text."[5] Given the theological and practical implications of such an understanding, it merits careful consideration.

One method of testing such claims is to examine writings of the men who authored the Confession, contributed to its development, and willingly subscribed to it, and then consider their practices and decisions when confronted with textual variants in Scripture. Notable efforts to do so in recent years have focused primarily on dogmatic writings and commentaries.[6] The present study aims to pursue the same question but within the substantial corpus of published sermons by the Reformed orthodox—particularly by the Westminster divines themselves.[7] More specifically, it seeks to determine what the divines said and did (or did not say and do) when confronted with textual variation within their expositions of Scripture in the context of public worship. These sermons provide a rich and challenging yet underused source of evidence regarding their views on textual criticism and consequently the doctrine of preservation. In this article, I argue that the sermons of the Westminster divines demonstrate that an affirmation of God's providential preservation does not preclude the practice of textual criticism, nor does it require the unqualified adoption of one particular version or set of versions as authentic or approved.

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[4] For a prominent statement of this position, see Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 4th ed. (Christian Research Press, 1984), and for a recent engagement with Hills, see Richard F. Brash, "Must Presuppositionalists Be KJV Only? A Re-Examination of Van Til's Presuppositions in Respect to Providential Preservation," *WTJ* 84.2 (2022), 225–43. For other positions that are often compared to that of Hills, see Theodore P. Letis, *The Ecclesiastical Text: Text Criticism, Biblical Authority, and the Popular Mind*, 2nd ed. (Just and Sinner Publishing, 2000), and Garnet Howard Milne, *Has the Bible Been Kept Pure? The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Providential Preservation of Scripture* (self-published, 2017).

[5] Hills distinguishes between "naturalistic" textual criticism, which uses the tools and methods of modernity, and "consistently Christian" textual criticism, which recognizes the *textus receptus* as the true text of Scripture (Hills, *The King James Version*, 3, 62–86, 111–12).

[6] See, for example, Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., 2nd ed. (Baker Academic, 2003), esp. 2:392–425, and also Jack Bartlett Rogers, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession: A Problem of Historical Interpretation for American Presbyterianism* (Eerdmans, 1967), esp. 387–403. More recently, see Stephen Steele, "The Westminster Divines and the Alexandrian Codex," *Foundations* 85 (2023), 35–52, and Milne, *Has the Bible Been Kept Pure?*.

[7] On Puritan preaching in general see Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, *The Age of the Reformation* (Eerdmans, 2002), and Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God's Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643–1653* (Reformation Heritage, 2017).

By way of method, I survey instances of text-critical discussion within the sermons of men appointed to the Westminster Assembly.[8] These theologians and pastors had direct influence on the crafting of the Confession and so their sermons provide valuable evidence for understanding and applying its bibliological affirmations. To simplify the discussion, I present only examples taken from passages of the NT, but the observations made below are consistent with the treatment of textual criticism of the OT. The discussion concludes with summary observations and reflections on the relationship between textual criticism and the doctrine of providential preservation of Scripture.

I. "DIVERS COPIES HAVE IT DIFFERENT"

The phenomenon of textual variation in Scripture appears with notable frequency in sermons of the Westminster divines. Due to their emphasis on detailed, expositional, verse-by-verse preaching, seventeenth-century Reformed pastors had ample opportunities to comment on variant readings in the texts they exposited. This century in particular saw a rise in public awareness of text-critical issues.[9] From at least 1550, textual variants in the NT were well known to scholars, primarily through the famous third edition of the Greek NT produced by Robert Estienne (Stephanus), known as the *Editio Regia*, which identified variant readings in its margins. Furthermore, the several printed editions of Theodore Beza (1565–1604), much used by Protestants, offered comments on these and other textual variants in the footnotes. By the seventeenth century many of these variants had become accessible to the laity as well, particularly through marginal notes included in English Bibles, such as the King James Version of 1611. As we will see, Reformed pastors often made reference to such marginal notes while preaching to their congregations. As the century progressed, public consciousness of textual criticism continued to increase, boosted by such notable events as the arrival of the great Codex Alexandrinus (GA A/02) in London in 1627.[10] The wording of this important fifth-century pandect, in many ways different from the received text, would not be widely available until 1657, when Brian Walton published his London Polyglot Bible, which printed the readings of Alexandrinus in its apparatus. Yet the frequency with which pastors discussed such topics from the pulpit is a measure of the general awareness of text-critical issues during the seventeenth century.

One example appears in a sermon preached in 1656 by William Bridge (1600/1–1671). Bridge's text was Isaiah 53:11, but he had occasion to cross-reference Acts 2:24: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death

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[8] On the historical context and personalities of the Westminster Assembly, see Chad Van Dixhoorn and David F. Wright, ed., *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2012).

[9] Regarding the Bible in the seventeenth century in general, see Euan Cameron, ed., *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 3 (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[10] On which, see W. Andrew Smith, *A Study of the Gospels in Codex Alexandrinus: Codicology, Palaeography, and Scribal Hands*, NTTSD 48 (Brill, 2014), 7–34.

[θανάτου]: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24, KJV).[11] As Bridge observes, this verse contains a notable textual variant. Some "books" contain the word "hell" (ᾅδου) instead of the more common reading "death" (θανάτου): "It is said that he was sometimes in the pains of Death; some books read it, in the pains of hell; but the word rendered pains, signifies the pains and pangs of a woman in travail."[12]

As we will see below, by "books" Bridge means Greek manuscripts, rather than modern printed editions. Clearly he is identifying a legitimate point of textual variation here rather than simply a difference between English translations. Indeed, the margin of Stephanus's third edition lists ᾅδου as an alternative reading found in manuscript β, which refers to Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (GA D/05).[13] What is significant for our purposes is Bridge's willingness not only to draw attention to this variant, but also to leave it unresolved. He does not pronounce any clear judgment on its authenticity, but simply carries on with the sermon. In fact, later in the sermon Bridge argues that Christ did in fact "endure the torments of hell," not simply death, which perhaps gives a clue as to why he chose to mention the variant reading.[14] Bridge's brief, almost casual, observation of this textual problem suggests a certain degree of text-critical awareness among his congregation.

Another example comes from a sermon by Jeremiah Burroughs (d. 1646) focused on the second beatitude in Matthew's sermon on the mount: "Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt 5:4, KJV). As Burroughs turns to the exposition of this text, he observes two points of interest: first, Luke's version of the beatitudes reads differently than Matthew's, and second, "divers copies" of Matthew have changed the order of words. He notes,

> We come now to the second beatitude. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." We find that Luke cites it in another way, and divers copies have it different. You shall find two or three blessednesses set in a different order there. But for the thing itself, it is one of the strangest paradoxes in the world; "Blessed are those that mourn."[15]

Burroughs here mentions that some manuscripts of Matthew—such as D/05, 33, and the Latin—present verses 4 and 5 in reverse order, although the words themselves are substantially the same. Having briefly noted the redactional and text-critical differences, Burroughs carries on with his exposition, evidently feeling no need to explain further or resolve the discrepancies.

Many similar examples of this phenomenon could be adduced, but these will suffice to allow some preliminary observations. First, preachers who raised text-

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[11] Where possible, I have retained the spelling, punctuation, and capitalization of the original publications.

[12] William Bridge, *The Works of Rev. William Bridge, M.A.* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 3.201.

[13] This reading also appears in the Latin tradition and in Irenaeus.

[14] Bridge, *Works*, 3.208.

[15] Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints' Happiness, together with the several steps leading thereunto…* (Edinburgh: Nichol, 1867), 37.

critical problems in this manner evidently did not expect that occasional references to textual variation would startle, confuse, or rattle their flocks. Indeed, we as modern readers may well be surprised by the settings in which some divines deemed it appropriate to mention variant readings. For instance, Anthony Burgess commented on a text-critical problem in Mark 1:2 while preaching to the House of Commons.[16] Obadiah Sedgwick observed a textual variant when preaching to a company of soldiers.[17] And, as we will see below, Simeon Ashe did not refrain from text-critical discussion even while preaching at the funeral of a nine-year-old boy. We can thus safely infer that many Westminster divines expected a significant portion of their congregations to have at least a basic understanding of textual criticism.

Second, preachers who chose to mention text-critical problems did not necessarily feel compelled to resolve those problems for their congregations by indicating which reading is preferable or approved. Of course, some did. As we will see below, some preachers not only identified text-critical problems, but they also resolved them, often in great detail. Yet the frequency with which these preachers explicitly identified but did not adjudicate textual variation reveals an important aspect of their bibliology in practice. These Westminster divines held the conviction that Scripture had been "kept pure in all ages" by God's care and providence, and this conviction was not endangered or compromised by the mere existence of textual variation in the manuscript tradition. Nor did it require that one reading be explicitly identified as superior or approved at each point of variation. In what follows, both of these observations are reinforced and further substantiated.

II. "THE ORIGINALL IN OUR GREEK COPIES"

Another important trend is the conviction that the Greek textual tradition is to be preferred above the Latin. Where the witness of Greek manuscripts contrasts with that of the Latin, Westminster preachers often appealed to (or asserted) the superiority of the Greek. For the sake of space we consider just one example, namely from Simeon Ashe (d. 1662) even while preaching at the funeral for a young boy, as noted above. While expositing Colossians 1:27, Ashe drew attention to potential ambiguity regarding the antecedent of the relative pronoun ὅς, "which." The verse runs as follows, "To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which [ὅς] is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27, KJV). Does this relative pronoun ὅς refer to the *riches* or to the *mystery*? According to Ashe, the answer is found in the Greek "Originall":

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[16] Anthony Burgess, *The Difficulty of, and Encouragements to A Reformation. A Sermon Preached before The Honourable House of Commons at the Publike Fast, Septem. 27. 1643* (London: R. Bishop for Thomas Vnderhill, 1643), 2.

[17] Obadiah Sedgvvicke, *Military Discipline for the Christian Souldier. Drawne out in a Sermon Preached to the Captaines and Souldiers exercising Armes in the Artillery Garden, at the Generall meeting In Saint Andrew's Vndershaft, in London, October 18. 1638* (London: G. M. for Thomas Nicholes, 1639), 52.

> The Relative (*which*) must necessarily be referred unto the word *Riches,* in the fore-going part of this verse, as is manifest from the Originall in our Greek Copies. Although the vulgar applieth the Relative (*which*) unto *mystery,* and I acknowledge Christ to be a mystery as the holy Ghost doth often suggest in the holy Scriptures; And indeed his conception and his hypostaticall Union, *&c.* give us just occasion to call him *wonderfull,* Isa. 9. 6. yet in this place I humbly conceive that he is held forth to our view, as the Riches of the glorious mystery of the Gospel.[18]

Ashe here appeals to the grammatical rule of concord. In the *textus receptus*, the word "riches" is grammatically masculine (ὁ πλοῦτος), and the word "mystery" is neuter (τοῦ μυστηρίου, from τὸ μυστήριον). Accordingly, the masculine relative pronoun ὅς must necessarily modify "riches" rather than "mystery."[19] Ashe grants that the Latin reading, which has "mystery" as the antecedent rather than "riches," is theologically sound, but he prefers the "Originall." Ashe's logic is important: since the Greek is the original, it is to be preferred. Notably, this use of the word "original" contrasts with modern usage of the term. Whereas today it is often used to identify one specific reading as authentic amidst a variegated Greek tradition, Ashe uses it to mean the Greek tradition *as a whole* in contrast to Latin. As has been shown elsewhere, for the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox, the term "original" is primarily a linguistic designation.[20] In any case, this example illustrates one of the key convictions expressed in WCF 1.8, namely that the original Greek and Hebrew, and not the Latin, were immediately inspired by God, kept pure, and thereby authentical and authoritative.

III. "SUCH COPIES ARE OF LESS CREDIT"

We turn now to examples of divines who, while preaching, addressed textual variation within the Greek tradition and argued in favor of the received text, with or without appeal to text-critical criteria.

One example comes from a sermon by Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) on 2 Peter 2:20, titled "That a man[']s leaving those gross sins he hath lived in is no Sign of Grace." In the context, Burgess is particularly concerned with the phenomenon of apostasy. His text seems to imply that regenerate believers are capable of falling away from Christ, what Burgess calls "the Saint[']s Apostasie." The text reads: "For

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[18] Simeon Ashe, *Christ the Riches of the Gospel, and the hope of Christians. A sermon preached at the funerall of Mr William Spurstow the only childe of Dr Spurstow at Hackney near London, Mar. 10* (London: A. M. for G. Sawbridge, 1654), 1. https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A75703.0001.001, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections.

[19] Unbeknownst to Ashe, the Greek tradition itself is not unanimous. Although most Greek manuscripts contain ὅς here, many contain the neuter ὅ instead.

[20] See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology,* 2nd ed. (Baker, 2017), s.v. "autographa." More recently, see Richard F. Brash, "*Ad Fontes!*—The Concept of the 'Originals' of Scripture in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy," *WTJ* 81 (2019), 123–39.

if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Pet 2:20, KJV). Burgess states that those interpreters who hold to the "Saint[']s Apostasie" gain further support from the word ὄντως in an earlier verse, 2:18, which reads, "For when they speak great swelling *words* of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, *through much* wantonness, those that were clean [ὄντως] escaped from them who live in error" (2:18, KJV). This verse seems to indicate that regenerate believers—those who had "clean escaped"—can be allured once again into fleshly lust. In response, Burgess mentions a set of textual variants:

> Those that hold the Saints Apostasie … presse that word in the verse before ὄντως, they *did indeed escape*; I confesse that is all the probability, but divers have read it ὀλίγως or ὀλίγον or οὕτως, *for a little time*, or *almost they had escaped*, as *Agrippa* was almost a Christian, and thus reading it would be no advantage, and so we see it in the Margin of our Bibles.[21]

Burgess there directs his congregation's attention to the margin of their Bibles, and in fact, the KJV offers two alternative readings in the margin at 2 Pet 2:18: "*Or, for a litle* [*sic*], *or a while as some read.*" He suggests that these marginal readings are sufficiently distinct in meaning that they would allow a different interpretation of 2:18. The verse would thus indicate that those who were allured by lust had not truly escaped but *nearly* or *temporarily* escaped. As such, it would lend no support to the view that regenerate believers could fall away. Nevertheless, even though these marginal readings are more amenable to Burgess's interpretation of the passage, he does not insist on them. Why? He states: "I think it dangerous to depart from universally received copies."[22] In short, Burgess believes it unwise to prefer a marginal variant over the "universally received copies," even when it appears on the surface more agreeable to biblical doctrine.

Somewhat different are instances in which divines prefer the received text but appeal to text-critical evidence for support. For example, in a sermon on 1 Peter 5:10, William Bridge addresses a text-critical issue related to the grammatical mood of several verbs. He clearly favors the received reading, but he rests his decision on text-critical considerations. Here are the opening lines of his sermon:

> SOME think these words are spoken in the way of a promise from God; others think they are spoken in the way of a desire and prayer to God. They are a promise, say some, because they are brought in to comfort and relieve these dispersed saints against the temptations of Satan and opposition of the world, which the apostle had mentioned in the former verses (8 and 9), as also because those words, "perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you," are found in some books in the future tense of the indicative mood, to be read thus: "Shall perfect, stab-

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[21] Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or A Treatise of Grace and Assurance…* (London: A. Miller for Thomas Underhill, 1652), 188.

[22] Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 188.

lish, strengthen and settle you;" but I find the copies ordinarily to give them in the optative.[23]

Bridge notes that the verbs in 1 Peter 5:10 appear "in some books" as future indicatives while most copies have the optative mood. Thus far he has appealed only to what is most common among the manuscripts, but he goes on to cite additional evidence in support of this reading:

> Beza tells us that all our books, excepting three, do read these words in the optative mood. And Estius, though the vulgar latin renders them in the future tense of the indicative, saith that all such copies are of less credit, and that although the words should be in the future tense, it comes all to the same reckoning; forasmuch as the Hebrews, whom the New Testament follows much, do ordinarily put futures for optatives as well as for preceptives.[24]

Bridge thus expresses his preference for the common reading by commenting on the number and quality of manuscripts, which are aspects of what we now call external evidence. According to the commentary of Willem Hessels van Est, the manuscripts that contain the future indicative are few in number, just three in the Greek tradition, and they are "of less credit" and thus less weighty as evidence.[25] These considerations echo the modern text-critical dictum that manuscripts are to be weighed, not merely counted. For Bridge, such considerations lend support to the received reading, even though—he concedes—"it comes all to the same reckoning." In any case, what is significant for our purposes is that during his sermon, Bridge appeals not to the authority of the received text as such but to text-critical criteria as support for his decision.[26]

A similar example comes from John Wallis (1616–1703), who in 1691 preached three sermons in Oxford on the doctrine of the Trinity.[27] In his second sermon, focusing on John 17:3, Wallis gives an extended discussion of 1 John 5:7–8, which contains the so-called Johannine *Comma*: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (KJV). Having quoted the *Comma* in support of the doctrine of the Trinity, Wallis

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[23] Bridge, *Works*, 4.260.

[24] Bridge, *Works*, 4.260.

[25] Gvillelmo Estio, *Absolvtissima in omnes beati Pavli et septem catholicas Apostolorvm epistolas commentaria tribus tomis distincta…* (Paris: Claudium Iosse, 1666), 1159. Here van Est makes direct reference to the apparatus of Stephanus's third edition (1550), which lists the following three Greek manuscripts in support of the future indicative: δ, ι, and ιγ (= GA 5, 2298, and 398).

[26] As Stephen Steele observes, Thomas Goodwin came to the opposite conclusion about the text-critical problem in 1 Peter 5:10, departing from the received text and preferring the reading of Codex Alexandrinus, "the ancient manuscript sent by Cyril into England" (Goodwin, *Works*, 9.370). See Steele, "The Westminster Divines and the Alexandrian Codex." Bridge himself most likely did not know about the text of Alexandrinus, since, as noted above, its text was not widely publicized until the publication of Walton's Polygot in 1657, well after Bridge's sermon, which was delivered 6 January 1655.

[27] John Wallis, *Three Sermons Concerning the Sacred Trinity* (London: Printed for Tho. Parkhurst, 1691), 42–43. As Van Dixhoorn notes, Wallis was appointed as a non-voting scribe at the Assembly, *Minutes and Papers*, 1.142–43.

immediately responds to the well-known objection that these words are not found in older Greek manuscripts and are thus not likely to be genuine. Wallis's answer to this objection is lengthy and detailed. He grants the fact that this text is not found in some "ancient Copies" and versions. Yet its absence is no serious problem, he maintains, since "transcribers" often mistakenly omitted text. In fact, inadvertent omission was "hardly avoidable" even for conscientious scribes. Wallis then argues at length on the basis of both internal and external evidence that omission of the phrase would have been significantly more likely than its addition.

First, he appeals to the transcriptional phenomenon of homoioteleuton, "to leap from one word, to the same recurring soon after."[28] And since this omission does not disturb the sense of the text, it would have been relatively easy to lie undetected for many years: "In such case, the Fuller Copy is likelyest to be True."[29] Second, he considers the possibility of deliberate falsification. A popular argument against the *Comma* was that it was a later addition by orthodox scribes to counter the errors of Arians. Wallis finds this suggestion wholly unsatisfactory. On the one hand, it is plain that Arians would have had an interest in deleting the *Comma*, which could explain its absence from some manuscripts. On the other hand, there is no clear reason why the orthodox would seek to add it, since there are other clear statements about Jesus's divinity in the NT, such as John 10:30: "I and the Father are one."[30] Third, he then considers evidence from the language of the verse: the fact that Jesus Christ is called "the Word" in the *Comma* reflects genuine Johannine style and is not likely to be from a later writer.[31] Fourth and finally, Wallis examines patristic evidence, quoting lines from the Latin fathers Cyprian and Tertullian, both of whom he cites as evidence for the *Comma* prior to the outbreak of the Arian controversy.[32] In sum, to make his case for the *Comma*, Wallis appeals not to the authority of the received text but to text-critical criteria, including transcriptional probability, authorial style, internal likelihood, and patristic testimony.

IV. "THE PLAIN MEANING OF THE HOLY GHOST"

Another trend we find among the divines is the idea that diverse readings can be reconciled. That is, occasionally we find preachers addressing a text-critical problem in some detail, and instead of arguing for one over the other, assert that they amount to the same thing. Consider, for instance, Thomas Goodwin's (1600–1680) exposition of Ephesians 1:18:

> Here is, first, *the subject of spiritual knowledge*; it is the understanding, "the eyes of your understanding." Some copies read it τῆς καρδίας, "the eyes of your heart." There are *variae lectiones* of the New Testament, as well as of the Old; that is, var-

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[28] Wallis, *Three Sermons*, 43.
[29] Wallis, *Three Sermons*, 44.
[30] Wallis, *Three Sermons*, 44–45.
[31] Wallis, *Three Sermons*, 45–46.
[32] Wallis, *Three Sermons*, 46–50.

ious readings. The king of Spain's Bible readeth it, "the eyes of your heart." Ordinarily we read it, "the eyes of your understanding."[33]

Here Goodwin refers to a variant reading found in some Greek manuscripts and the Complutensian Polyglot ("the king of Spain's Bible"), which read τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς καρδίας instead of the received reading τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς διανοίας. Instead of arguing for one reading over another, Goodwin seeks to demonstrate the basic similarity of these two readings. To do so, he refers to places in Scripture where "heart" and "understanding" are closely connected or substituted for one another, such as when the Hebrew word [*leb*], which means "heart," is translated in the Septuagint as διάνοια, *understanding* (for example, Gen 24:45). He states: "Understanding, and a man's heart, in the Scripture phrase, are put both for one."[34] Goodwin shows no effort to identify and prove the authenticity of one reading over against a later corruption. Rather, his expressed goal in pursuing this text-critical issue is to "reconcile those diverse readings which the copies have,"[35] based on the conviction that they are the same.

A similar example appears in a sermon on Revelation 11 by Francis Woodcock (1614–1649 or 1651) preached in 1643. In the context, Woodcock has given detailed verse-by-verse exposition of the passage and its vision of the two witnesses. In the passage, these two witnesses first prophesy, then suffer martyrdom, afterward stand once again, and finally ascend to heaven (11:3–12). After the ascension of the two witnesses, verse 13 narrates a devastating earthquake in which thousands perish and many more give glory to God. But when exactly does the earthquake occur? Is it the same *hour* of the two witnesses' ascension or the same *day*? Manuscripts are divided here. Woodcock addresses the textual variation directly:

> Some copies reade, "The same day." But whether *day* or *hour*, both seem to come to one; neither to be understood of either *day* or *hour* properly so taken.

Similar to Goodwin, Woodcock seeks to assert that the essential meaning of these two variants is the same. He goes on to explain how this is the case:

> If you read, "The same hour" it is not to be taken properly, for the 24 part of a naturall day; no more then 'tis in the 14 Chapter of this Prophesie, and 7 verse; *The hour of his Judgement is come*: Or at the 17 Chapter, and 12 verse; *These receive power one hour with the Beast*; besides many such like instances, which might be fetcht from other places.
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> If you read, "The same day," it seems not to be understood either of a naturall or artificiall day properly so called, no more then in many other places. But whether one, or other, *day*, or *hour*, this appears the plain meaning of the holy

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[33] Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1861–66), 1.299.

[34] Goodwin, *Works*, 1.299.

[35] Goodwin, *Works*, 1.299.

Ghost; About the time of the Resurrection and Ascension of the Witnesses, about that time, there is a great earthquake.[36]

Woodcock makes no further comment on this text-critical question and indicates no clear preference for or against the received reading. His main concern is to assert that the meaning of the text is "about that time," regardless of which reading we follow.

It is not as though Woodcock is averse to making text-critical decisions. Earlier in the same sermon he identifies a variant reading in 11:12, noting that some witnesses have, "And *I* heard a voice" rather than, "And *they* heard a voice." Nevertheless, he maintains, "better me thinks as we read it, 'And they heard a voice'."[37] Although he offers no rationale for this decision, he clearly indicates which one is preferred. Not so in 11:13. Rather, Woodcock seeks to argue that, whichever wording is chosen, the text nevertheless conveys the same basic idea. These examples demonstrate that the divines did not consistently recognize one single form of the text as received or approved, but sometimes put emphasis instead on the sense of the text conveyed by the words.

V. "THE ANCIENT AND BEST COPIES"

Sometimes preachers give credit to readings outside the received text and refer positively to variants in older manuscripts. A particularly interesting example comes from John Hacket (1592–1670), who preached a series of five sermons on "the Descent of the Holy Ghost" in Acts 2.[38] At several points in the series, Hacket is concerned to clarify the identity of those upon whom the tongues of fire appeared on the day of Pentecost (2:3). Did these tongues of fire appear upon the apostles alone or upon all one hundred and twenty souls who had gathered (cf. 1:15)? Hacket suggests that a clue can be found in the various readings of Acts 2:1, which states, "they were all with one accord in one place."

> In the *old Missals,* I am sure, I have not perused the latter, it reads the Epistle thus, *omnes discipuli,* all the Disciples were with one accord in one place, and *Beza* says in two antient *Greek* Copies [*sic*], he had found ἅπαντες Ἀπόστολοι, all the

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[36] Francis Woodcock, *The Two VVitnesses: discovered in severall sermons upon the eleventh chapter of the Revelation…* (London: J. R. for Luke Fawne, 1643), 63–64. https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A96871.0001.001, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections.

[37] Woodcock, *The Two VVitnesses*, 59.

[38] John Hacket, *A Century of Sermons upon Several Remarkable Subjects…*, ed. Thomas Plume (London: Andrew Clark for Robert Scott, 1675), 641. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (New York: Macmillan, 1885–1900), 23.419, Hacket was "appointed a member of the Westminster Assembly of divines, but soon ceased to attend the meetings of that body, as the episcopal divines had no weight in their deliberations."

Apostles, and none other mentioned. Certainly they were primarily intended to reap the benefit of the day.[39]

Hacket here cautiously gestures toward the inclusion of ἅπαντες Ἀπόστολοι ("all the apostles"). After noting that this reading is found in old Latin missals and two ancient Greek manuscripts, he expresses agreement with the substance of the addition but goes no further. However, in the third sermon in the series, Hacket elaborates fully on the likelihood of this reading as he comments on Acts 2:3:

> But upon whom did they [the tongues of fire] descend and sit? For now I make haste. Upon *every one of the hundred and twenty* that were gathered together? Or upon the *Apostles* only? Somewhat is in it, that when all are named to whom this fire appeared, all to be filled with the *Holy Ghost,* yet the Tongues are said *to sit upon each of them.* In two ancient Copies some of our Cricks say that the Text runs, they sate upon each of the *Apostles,* and I think that a very probable gloss.

Returning to the two ancient manuscripts that contain ἅπαντες Ἀπόστολοι, Hacket describes the phrase as a "very probable gloss." His turn of phrase is significant. He does not mean that these words are probably a later gloss *that can be set aside,* but rather they are a gloss that is probably true. This much is clarified by what follows, where he enumerates four reasons why ἅπαντες Ἀπόστολοι is a plausible detail:

> The Reasons are, First, the Spirit in some particular manner was promised to them only, *Acts* i. 7 [*sic*]. Secondly, when some Scoffers said *they were full of new wine* that had the gift of Tongues, St. *Peter* makes his apology for himself and the Eleven only. Thirdly, it is said hereupon that *they all spake or preacht the mighty things of God.* This befits the *Apostles,* and not those one hundred and twenty, among whom was the *Blessed Virgin,* and other women, whose office it was not to preach. Fourthly, the standers by said, *Are not all these of Galilee that speak with divers tongues,* which was true in the *Apostles,* now *Judas* was taken away, but very improbable to agree to all the rest. Howsoever let there be no discord about this, it is not worth the while; no more is the next quere upon what part of them the *Cloven Tongues* did sit?[40]

Hacket thus identifies four contextual indications that ἅπαντες Ἀπόστολοι makes good sense of the narrative. He therefore seems to argue that these words elucidate or clarify what really happened when the tongues of fire fell from heaven. The significance of Hacket's comment is that it signals a positive use of a variant reading. Rather than identifying a variant reading in order to set it aside, Hacket argues that ἅπαντες Ἀπόστολοι can provide helpful clarification of the text of Acts 2:3.

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[39] Hacket, *A Century of Sermons*, 641. Other Reformed interpreters understood Acts 2:1 as referring to the twelve apostles rather than all one hundred and twenty persons, which can be seen in the Geneva Bible's marginal note clarifying what is meant by the word *all*: "That is, the Apostles."

[40] Hacket, *A Century of Sermons*, 662.

Another example appears in a sermon by Jeremiah Burroughs, recorded in his book, *Christ Inviting Sinners to Come to Him for Rest*.[41] In the context, Burroughs seeks to show that Christ is all sufficient for the believer's sanctification because he is the foundation of all God's promises. Doing so leads him to expound 2 Corianthians 1:20, which, according to the common text reads, "For all the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea and in him Amen" (KJV), following the text of Stephanus. Burroughs affirms this reading not only by quoting the verse in this form but also by paraphrasing it and applying it: "That is[,] they are confirmed to us in Christ, in him they are made certain to us, they are made good in him."[42]

But then Burroughs observes a variant form of the text: "[I]t is read in some copies thus, *Therefore in him let them be yea and Amen, unto the glory of God by us*."[43] The textual differences here are the inclusion of the inferential phrase διὸ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ("therefore also in/through him") instead of καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ, and the resulting grammatical mood of the implied verb, whether an indicative ("are yea") or a subjunctive ("let them be yea"). Instead of rendering a text-critical judgment about this alternate form of the verse, he goes on to expound and apply it:

> As God hath made al[l] promises in him as certain, so let us look upon Christ, and see the promises of God in him, and beleeve in them, and so by our faith say Amen unto the promises that are made in him unto the glory of God, so shal[l] we Glorifie God, when we shal[l] look upon the promises by our faith, and say, Amen unto our soules.[44]

As additional validation for this second reading, Burroughs notes that John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and still "other interpreters" observe it in some manuscripts.[45] In fact, Calvin states in his commentary that he prefers this second form of the verse because it is more suitable to the context, even though he admits it is the less common one.[46] For his own part, however, Burroughs does not explicitly choose one reading over the other or employ any text-critical criteria to adjudicate the discrepancy. To be sure, his exposition strongly implies a preference for the alternate reading: "[T]hat is the meaning here, therefore al[l] the promises in him are yea, they are made in Christ and affirmed in Christ as certain, therefore in him let them be Amen unto the soul, let them be as firme and certain things unto us."[47]

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[41] Jeremiah Burroughs, *Christ Inviting Sinners to Come to Him for Rest* (London: Peter Cole, 1659). See the preceding "Testimony to the Reader."

[42] Burroughs, *Christ Inviting Sinners,* 321.

[43] Burroughs, *Christ Inviting Sinners,* 321.

[44] Burroughs, *Christ Inviting Sinners,* 321.

[45] Beza's annotation to 2 Corinthians 1:20 refers to one Greek manuscript (uno Graeco exemplari) which contains διὸ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ and resulting subjunctive verb (ad loc.).

[46] Calvin's commentary states that the "Greek manuscripts do not agree," and he prefers the inclusion of διὸ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ (plus the subjunctive) because it "is easier, and contains a fuller meaning," namely, it "reminds the Corinthians of their duty—to utter their Amen in return." He then concedes that some of his readers may be "reluctant to depart from the other reading" (*Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, ad loc.; trans. John Pringle).

[47] Burroughs, *Christ Inviting Sinners,* 321.

Neverthless, in the absence of a clear text-critical judgment, we cannot be certain what Burroughs believed regarding the authentic text of 2 Corinthians 1:20. In the least, we can see that Burroughs gives credit to an alternate form of the verse and makes substantial use of it in his exposition.

Yet a third example can be found in a sermon by James Ussher (1581–1656), commenting on the time of Jesus's crucifixion:

> Consider withal the time how long it was. St. Mark saith, "It was the third hour, and they crucified him." In St. John it is the sixth hour, but the ancient and best copies have the third hour, and so hath Nonnus. The ninth hour he gave up the ghost: so that it was six long hours by the clock that our Saviour did hang upon the cross.[48]

Here Ussher refers to an apparent discrepancy between Mark and John regarding the hour of Christ's crucifixion. Mark puts it at the third hour (Mark 15:25) while John puts it at the sixth hour (John 19:14). Never mind, says Ussher, since "the ancient and best copies" of John also read the third hour, in agreement with Mark. So does Nonnus of Panopolis, an Egyptian poet who wrote a paraphrase of the Gospel of John in the fifth century.[49] This reading is not listed as a variant in Stephanus's third edition (1550) or in the margins of the Geneva and King James Bibles (1560; 1611). Nevertheless, similar to Hacket and Burroughs, Ussher gives credit to tradition found in textual witnesses older than the received text, once again with reference to ancient manuscripts.

Ussher's willingness to preach this form of the text is particularly significant given his bibliological convictions. Though he did not take his appointed seat in the Assembly, his influence upon its proceedings is widely recognized.[50] According to B. B. Warfield, "The most important proximate source of the chapter on Holy Scripture [in the Westminster Confession] … was those Irish Articles of Religion which are believed to have been drawn up by Ussher's hand."[51] One can further appreciate Ussher's sympathy for the Confession's statement on Scripture by identifying the similarity of language used in his *Body of Divinity* regarding the doctrine of preservation: "Let me hear some of those reasons which prove that God is the Author of the holy Scriptures:… Fourteenthly, the marvellous preservation of the Scriptures;… God hath still by his providence preserved them, and every part of

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[48] James Ussher, *Eighteen Sermons Preached at Oxford, 1640* … (London: S. Griffin for John Rothwell, 1660), 387.

[49] Nonni Panopolitae, *Metaphrasis Evangelii Ioannei* (Leipzig: Frid. Christ. Guil. Vogelii, 1834), 201. This Nonnus is not to be confused with the ninth-century Nonnus of Nisibis, who wrote a commentary on John's Gospel.

[50] See, for example, J. V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Crossway, 2014), 60.

[51] B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (10 vols.; Baker, 1981), 6:169.

them."[52] And regarding the purity of the original languages, "As the water is most pure in the Fountain by the springing thereof, so the right understanding of the words of the holy Scriptures is most certain in the originall tongues of Hebrew and Greek."[53] Such convictions did not, as it turns out, prevent Ussher from amending the received text according to older and better copies.[54] Another indication of his influence is that Thomas Hill, himself a member of the Westminster Assembly, positively refers to Ussher's text-critical solution to the discrepancy between Mark 15 and John 19 and deems it "a short and full answer" to the problem.[55]

VI. "I SHALL MAKE USE OF BOTH"

Three final examples go somewhat further in actively making use of marginal readings.

First is a 1644 sermon by Richard Vines (1599/1600–1656) titled, "The Impostures of Seducing Teachers Discovered." In the context, Vines is warning his congregation about false teachers who will entice the people of God using sensual lust as "bait." He finds this theme in several verses from 2 Peter 2 and quotes them directly, though he notes that one of these verses contains a textual variant:

> 2 Pet. 2. 18. *They allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonnesse:* and *ver. 14. Having eyes full of adulteries, or of an adulteresse, as the originall carries it*; and again, *ver. 2. many shall follow their lascivious wayes*: for some copies have ἀσελγείαις. But you will say, Is there any such affinity between seducing by doctrine and sensuality?[56]

The variant to which Vines alludes is the difference between ἀσελγείαις ("sensual, lascivious") and ἀπωλείαις ("destructive, pernicious"). The vast majority of Greek manuscripts have ἀσελγείαις here. The alternative ἀπωλείαις appears to be unattested in Greek manuscripts, but is nevertheless the reading of Stephanus, which is in turn followed by the KJV.[57] What is particularly interesting here is that when Vines refers to 2 Peter 2:2 in his sermon, he quotes the reading found in the margin of the KJV rather than the text itself. Based as it is on the *textus receptus*, the printed text of the KJV reads: "And many shall follow their *pernicious* wayes," reflecting

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[52] James Vsher [*sic*], *A Body of Divinitie, or The Svmme and Svbstance of Christian Religion, Catechistically propounded, and explained, by way of Question and Answer: Methodically and familiarly handled* (London: M. F. for Tho. Dovvnes and Geo. Badger, 1645), 8–10.

[53] Vsher, *A Body of Divinitie*, 23.

[54] Cf. this example from Ussher with Milne, *Has the Bible Been Kept Pure?*, 255–90.

[55] Thomas Hill, "The Best and Worst of Paul," in Six Sermons of Thomas Hill D. D. (London: for Peter Cole, 1649), 15.

[56] Richard Vines, *XII. Sermons Preached Upon Several Publick Occasions: By that Learned and Powerful Divine, Mr. Richard Vines …* (London: Richard Vines for Abel Roper, 1658), 32.

[57] Stephanus's reading ἀπωλείαις has no Greek manuscript support in Tischendorf's 8th edition, von Soden, UBS5, NA28, the Center for New Testament Textual Studies Critical Apparatus, rev. ed. (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), nor the *Editio Critica Maior* of the Catholic Epistles (2nd ed., 2013).

ἀπωλείαις. It is in a marginal comment in the KJV that we find, "*Or, lascivious wayes, as some copies reade*" [*sic*].[58] Why does Vines quote the marginal reading of the KJV instead of its printed text? A clue is the lexical link to the verse just quoted, 2 Peter 2:18, which also has the word ἀσελγείαις. Thus, Vines seeks to reinforce the point that false teachers use lasciviousness to tempt others, and he chooses to use a textual variant from the margin rather than the received reading to do so.

Second is a sermon by Daniel Cawdrey (1587/88–1664) focusing on 2 John 8. The KJV reads as follows: "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (2 John 8). As Cawdrey observes, each of these first-person plural verbs (we lose, we have wrought, we receive) is given as second-person verbs in some manuscripts (you lose, you have wrought, you receive). He provides an extended paraphrase of the verse that draws on both versions of the text:

> And the words carry this meaning with them; As if the Apostle should have said, *We* (or *you,* for the copies differ) *doe expect to receive a reward, yea a full reward of our labour* (and you of yours;) *if you doe not circumspectly looke to your selves, we, or you, or both, shall come short of our hope; and lose, if not all, yet at least, some part of our reward; our reward shall not be so full as we expect;* therefore I admonish and exhort you to look to your selves, lest wee and you, losing the things which wee (or you) have wrought, lose also our reward.[59]

Here Cawdrey makes repeated reference to the three related textual problems in 2 John 8. At first glance, Cawdrey appears merely to observe the existence of the variant readings rather than comment directly on their merit: "the copies differ."[60] However, in his paraphrase of the verse, he subtly yet clearly indicates an appreciation for both readings, repeatedly making reference to both the first and second person pronouns. Importantly, Cawdrey does not seek to argue that both readings mean the same thing, as we saw above with Goodwin and Woodcock. Rather, "we" and "you" are genuinely different in meaning but are both expounded in his sermon as though they are similarly legitimate.

A final and even more striking illustration comes from Anthony Tuckney (1599–1670), who on one occasion consciously exegetes two versions of the same text. Preaching at St. Mary's in 1649, Tuckney gives an exposition of Luke 21:19, which reads: "In your patience possess ye your souls" (KJV). Tuckney raises a text-critical question in this text and boldly asserts that he will "make use of both":

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[58] The same comment on 2 Peter 2:2 is found in the Westminster annotations (ad loc.).

[59] Daniel Cawdrey, *Three Sermons* … (London: R.Y. for Ph. Nevill, 1641), 62.

[60] The KJV includes a marginal note to this effect. So do the Westminster Annotations (ad loc.): "Some copies read, *which ye have gained, but that ye receive,* &c."

Κτήσασθε, *Possess ye,* so it's usually read, and so it holds forth a Command; though some read it *κτήσεσθε,* ye may, or so ye *shall* possess; and so it contains a *promise.* I shall make use of both.[61]

Sure enough, Tuckney does make use of the two readings. He first makes use of *κτήσεσθε,* the marginal reading that puts the word in the future indicative: "you shall possess."

But when the Psalmist tells us that the *Meek shall inherit the Earth* [Ps 37:11]; that Phrase expresseth as a *surer title,* so a *longer continuance;* and thus, as our *Souls* are sometimes put for our *Lives,* even so by our Patience we are kept in *possession* of them. So *κτήσεσθε* (as I said some read it) you *may,* you *shall.*[62]

Having exposited the verb as a promise, Tuckney then exposits it as a command:

And therefore for the Application, *κτήσασθε* (as the common reading is) Christ here commands us to endeavour that we may *possess* our lives in *Patience.*[63]

As we can see, Tuckney sees no inherent contradiction between the two readings but interprets them as two harmonious ideas: "A dear and great Pledg it is, which both God and his People do mutually betrust each other with, and both to our present purpose."[64] As with Cawdrey, Tuckney does not seek to assert that these two readings are essentially the same. He recognizes that they are different and can be interpreted accordingly. Yet instead of identifying which reading is approved, Tuckney self-consciously exposits both versions of the text in some detail.

In sum, these sermons of the Westminster divines show comfortability with and acceptance of certain marginal readings. The practice of preaching two versions of the same text raises some significant theological questions that we do not have scope to consider here in detail. The main point for our present concerns is that the preceding examples further demonstrate that instead of insisting on the adoption of only one particular form of the text as approved or genuine, many of the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox overtly used, preached, and applied marginal readings.[65]

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[61] Anthony Tuckney, *Forty Sermons upon Several Occasions* …, ed. Jonathan Tuckney (London: J. M. for Jonathan Robinson and Brabazon Aylmer, 1676), 552.

[62] Tuckney, *Forty Sermons,* 555.

[63] Tuckney, *Forty Sermons,* 555.

[64] Tuckney, *Forty Sermons,* 557.

[65] According to Hills, the variant readings found within the *textus receptus* (i.e., where editions of the *textus receptus* disagree with one another) are not adjudicated through text-critical means, but received by the logic of faith, which traces God's providential preservation of the true text to the King James Version (Hills, *The King James Version,* 203–4, 221–23): "Hence we favor that form of the Textus Receptus upon which more than any other God, working providentially, has placed the stamp of His approval, namely, the King James Version, or, more precisely, the Greek text underlying the King James Version."

VII. CONCLUSION

The preceding survey enables a number of significant observations about the relationship between textual criticism and the doctrine of providential preservation as held by the Westminster divines.

First and most obviously, the men who affirmed that the word of God had been "kept pure in all ages" were aware of textual criticism and its challenges. Their belief in providential preservation was held and articulated in the midst of text-critical awareness not ignorance of it. Furthermore, they did not seek to hide such realities from their congregations, but openly acknowledged the existence of textual variation from the pulpit and expected that their congregants were able to handle it. In the minds of the Westminster divines, there appears to be no *prima facie* contradiction between the existence of variant readings among manuscripts and the doctrine of preservation.

Second, we do not find our preachers engaging in conjectural emendation, that is, advocating a reading that lacks extant manuscript support. Rather, in each case of a preacher expressing preference for a particular reading, it is one that is attested in the manuscript record somewhere, though not always in the most commonly received text. This trend exemplifies the conviction that, although it has suffered transcriptional errors in the process of transmission, God's word itself has not been lost. God has indeed preserved his word through all ages. Furthermore, there is a clear—though not exclusive—preference for the Greek tradition over against the Latin, following the belief that it was the NT *in Greek* that was "immediately inspired by God" and so "authentical." The divines show a willingness to use ancient translations and at times give credit to their testimony, yet there is a clear prioritization of the original languages of Scripture.

Third, beyond these similarities across our preachers, we also find a modest diversity of approaches and practices when adjudicating textual problems. Occasionally divines appealed to the authority of the commonly received text. Others, however, explicitly engage text-critical criteria of internal and external evidence in their sermons, giving credit to "ancient" and "best" copies, considering transcriptional and transmissional probabilities, and citing the testimony of versions and church fathers. In certain cases, such text-critical considerations led preachers to reinforce the commonly received text, but in others it led them to make use of marginal readings. On this basis, it would be incorrect to interpret WCF 1.8 in a way that precludes the similar use of text-critical methods. As these examples illustrate, some of the men who articulated and espoused the doctrine of providential preservation themselves openly engaged in textual criticism, using criteria still recognized today—even while they were standing in the pulpit. For these Westminster divines, a commitment to the inspiration, providential preservation, and purity of God's word did not rule out need for and legitimate use of the tools of textual criticism.

Fourth, several of the Westminster divines show a degree comfortability with textual variation. This comfortability can be seen in several ways: in the tendency to mention, but not resolve, textual problems; in statements that suggest the inter-

changeability of some forms of text; in giving credit to the testimony of older man-uscripts, versions, and fathers; and in preaching variant readings. Once again, these were men who championed Reformed orthodoxy and contributed to the development of the Westminster standards, yet they did not consistently require the acceptance of only one form of the text or one family of editions. It would therefore be problematic to interpret WCF 1.8 in a way that requires adopting only one particular strand of the Greek textual tradition as "approved" in each and every point of variation.

As we consider the significance of these sermons for the present day, we do well to recognize that many things have changed. The field of textual criticism looks very different than it did four hundred years ago. We now know of literally thousands more manuscripts than did the Westminster divines, and along with these manuscripts we also know of thousands more textual variants than they did. Yet we can still agree with them that God's word remains unchanged. Indeed, it stands forever. These sermons illustrate the conviction that God has preserved his word, but they do not specify precisely how he saw fit to do so. I hope to have shown that even if the practice of textual criticism might look different in our day, and even if we might disagree about how best to go about the task, it remains a legitimate and worthy endeavor.