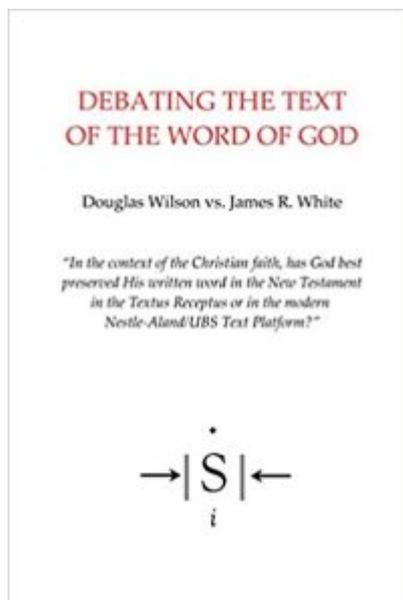


In 2004, John Robbins and Sean Gerety wrote a rebuttal to Doug Wilson's inconsistent and indefensible promulgation of the convoluted and very much "not reformed" Federal Vision theology. In that book the authors claim that Wilson "accepts on one page what he rejects on another"[1], is "very adept at inventing misleading analogies and very inept at constructing valid arguments"[2], "and exhibits a "facile glibness and an adolescent smart-aleckness that readers of his magazine and books apparently find attractive".[3] They go on to say that

"Wilson simply makes a statement and expects his readers to accept it. His thought and writing are episodic and oracular.... Rather than providing valid arguments from true premises, Wilson offers his 'conviction' that this or that is so. His appeal to 'conviction' fits his irrational, anti-intellectual philosophy, but it carries no probative weight. Rather it reveals Wilson's intellectual bankruptcy."[4]

If these seemingly harsh criticisms were true thirteen years ago, it doesn't seem that much has changed in Wilson's method of defending errant and groundless assertions and "just-so" statements.



When it comes to textual criticism, technical details are best left for the scholars (which I am not). That should not stop the average Christian from endeavoring to have at least a general understanding of pertinent issues at stake with regard to competing NT text

platforms. This book, while deficient in many ways, is a welcome and useful introduction to the NT text debate due to its brevity and avoidance of complicated technical examples. The reader is introduced to the fundamental issues and assumptions at hand, and in my opinion, the fundamental flaw in *textus receptus*-onlyism is refuted by its own absurdity before James White even gets a chance to demolish it.

Even after writing that last statement, I can imagine Doug Wilson objecting that *TR*-onlyism misrepresents his position. While I do not intend to misrepresent him, it is quite possible that I misunderstand him. By the end of the book even James White appears to be unclear as to what exactly it is that Wilson is advocating.

I share the same preference of English Bible translations as Doug Wilson (NKJV) and was for a time persuaded that the Dean Burgon Society was on to something when they advanced their defense of the “traditional text underlying the KJV”. While it is somewhat embarrassing to admit that I had been taken in by the DBS’s superficial passion for preserving the purity of Scripture, it also gave me an opportunity to become acquainted with the circularity of their reasoning and the absurdity of their arguments. Doug Wilson (in this book) does not quote any of the Dean Burgon Boys (as I like to call them)[5] and my guess is that he would not want to align himself with them. However, as my review of a recent Dean Burgon Society publication can attest,[6] some of the same unwarranted and baseless assumptions are found in Wilson’s writing, along with the similar tendency to take the limited space intended for the development of his argument and fill it with misleading analogies and meandering drivel, as Robbins and Gerety warned. Indeed, when it came to the cross-examination, I would forget what the question was after I got done reading Wilson’s answer. In all honesty, his is the sort of pretentious writing that I find hard not to detest.

James White, on the other hand, both answered and challenged Wilson with directness and clarity. This is important due to the subject matter and the limited space provided by the publisher to adequately interact in any substantive depth. In fact, if the publisher really wanted to engage this issue with any thoroughness they could have allowed for more cross-examinations and interaction as well as space for extensive rebuttals and longer closing arguments. In any event, it is pretty clear that Doug Wilson’s strange variety of *textus receptus*-onlyism—sort-of—which depends on Stephanus’ 1550 yet allows for a very specific anti-Alexandrian textual criticism—is arbitrary and defenseless.

To keep this review brief and not to reiterate the points I made in my review of Kriessman’s

book, I will summarize what I believe to be the fundamental flaw in TR arguments in the form of a question: Is it reasonable to assume that had Erasmus (or Stephanus, or Beza) had access to the multitudinous manuscripts before us today and possessed the ability to consult and examine such an expansive collection, would they have done so? The answer is an obvious and unequivocal 'yes'. They would have utilized, and did utilize, all of the manuscripts available to them. For Wilson and others who have such an affection for the so-called *textus receptus*, it would make more sense for Stephanus and his contemporaries to say, "No thank you, I have no need of fourth-century codices or early papyri manuscripts. This handful of fragments on the backdrop of the Latin Vulgate will suffice."

Additionally, it is often overlooked by TR advocates that Erasmus himself clearly had to engage in textual criticism. He had to take even the small sample that was available to him and make decisions about which renderings to use for his printed text. Then he revised this allegedly inerrant "traditional text" four times before it was revised again by others who would follow him. On the one hand Wilson acknowledges this, yet he still never provides an explanation as to how this differs fundamentally from what modern regenerate textual critics do today.

One more note. Wilson more than once appeals to "faith" as to the starting point of his argument for the TR1550. He gives no objective reason why this should be the base text. Since I am a strong advocate of presuppositionalism (more accurately, Clarkian scripturalism), it should be noted that Wilson's blind allegiance to a particular text platform cannot hide behind a reformed apologetic. Our starting axiom is pretty simple: "The Bible alone is the Word of God". This we presuppose up front and build our arguments from there. We make no pretense about "neutrality" or act as if this axiom is derived from something empirical (obviously, since empiricism is itself a failed epistemology). Such an idea would be totally absurd as axioms cannot be proven. These are the starting axioms from which arguments proceed. We offer no apology for this foundational component of logical reasoning. However, it appears that Wilson might expect us to allow his allegiance to TR1550 to hide behind an apologetic of presuppositionalism. No, our axiom states that the Bible alone is the Word of God, and this is perfectly consistent with both the Westminster and the Second London Baptist Confession. The axiom does not, however, denote a particular NT text platform. We recognize with Warfield that inerrancy applies to the autographs, not a sixteenth-century printed text, and it is our desire to get as close to the very wording of the autographs as possible. While textual variants do not undermine any fundamental Christian doctrine we still desire to obtain the most faithful representation of the original wording. That is the work of the textual critics. For such they should be commended not criticized.

In light of Doug Wilson's aberrant Federal Vision theology and consequent undermining of *sola fide*, he is in a bad position to be criticizing the critics as if *they* are the ones guilty of undermining the work of the Reformers.

[1] Robbins, J.W. and Gerety, S., *Not Reformed At All*, The Trinity Foundation, Unicoi, TN, 2004, p. 15.

[2] Robbins and Gerety, ref. 1, p. 50.

[3] Robbins and Gerety, ref. 1, p. 17.

[4] Robbins and Gerety, ref. 1, p. 20.

[5] I am speaking of the Dean Burgon Society based in NJ and headed up by D.A. Waite, not to be confused with Dean John Burgon himself who was a contemporary of Westcott & Hort and therefore oblivious to the arguments currently being perpetuated in his name. DBS is *textus receptus* only, but in their case this equates to a form of KJV-onlyism albeit less cultic and extreme (and subsequently less consistent) than Ruckmanism. It is unclear to me whether or not Burgon would have agreed with all of the central tenets put forth by the DBS.

[6] Book review: 'Modern Version Failures', by Charles Kriessman, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 29(56):104-106, 2016. At the time that I submitted this review for publication I was not yet persuaded that the critical text method of White and modern scholars in general was one I felt comfortable with being still sympathetic to the Majority Text view. Yet even then the *textus receptus*-only arguments simply collapsed under their own weight of circularity and self-defeat. At that point I had read virtually nothing by advocates of modern textual criticism and was hoping for some ammo to fight off those "liberal textual critics". As it turned out, DBS had simply refuted itself.

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