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## Paul's Discourse on the Use of Head Coverings During Public Worship — Part Two:

An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

By Richard Bacon

[Note: The following article is from an edited transcript of the material presented in a video lecture on the same topic. Thanks go to David Knight for the initial transcription work. Part One appeared in the May 1998 *Blue Banner*.]

### 5. Authority and Angels

First of all, angels are messengers from God in heaven to his church on earth appearing at the *most critical points* in the history of redemption. This, of course, is not the only time that the angels appear, but it is the first thing we need to know about angels. See **Table 5A**.

Table 5A

<b>5. Authority and Angels (1 Cor. 11:10)</b>
<b>A. The Reformed View of Angels</b>
<b>(1) Angels are messengers from God in heaven to his church on earth appearing at the most critical points in the history of redemption.</b>
<b>(Luke 2:13-14, Matthew 28:5-6, Acts 1:10-11)</b>

In Luke 2:13-14, the “herald angels” cried out regarding the birth of Christ. In Matthew 28:5-6, “the angel answered and said to the woman” at the tomb, “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” Christ’s birth and resurrection were witnessed to by angels. So too his ascension in Acts 1:10-11, “While they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by

them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

Second, there are angels whose business it is to guard the people of God and their children. See **Table 5B**. There *is* such a thing as a “guardian angel.” Please do not think of those “Precious Moments” statuettes, or fat little babies with wings flying around. Angels are *terrible* creatures, *marvelous* creatures, *wonderful* creatures, whose business it is to guard the people of God and their children. Psalm 91:11, “He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways.” Matthew 18:10, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”

Table 5B

<b>5. Authority and Angels (1 Cor. 11:10)</b>
<b>A. The Reformed View of Angels</b>
<b>(2) There are angels whose business it is to guard the people of God and their children.</b>
<b>(Psalm 91:11, Matthew 18:10)</b>

Third, there is a sense in which the angels observe what is happening on the earth at least in the life of the church and in the life of his saints. See **Table 5C**.

Table 5C

<b>5. Authority and Angels (1 Cor. 11:10)</b>
<b>A. The Reformed View of Angels</b>
<b>(3) There is a sense in which the angels observe what is happening on the earth, at least in the life of the church and the lives of his saints. (Luke 15:10, Ephesians 3:10)</b>

In Luke 15:10, “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” So in the life of the church, when a sinner repents, there is joy among angels. There is joy “in the presence of the angels of God.” Ephesians 3:10, “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.” The “principalities and powers in the heavenly places” we understand may very well be these angels. See too Hebrews 12:22.

Table 5D

<b>5. Authority and Angels (1 Cor. 11:10)</b>
<b>A. The Reformed View of Angels</b>
<b>(4) The angels are reapers in the great harvest at the end of the world.</b>
<b>(Matthew 13:40-42, Matthew 24:31)</b>

Fourth, the angels are the reapers in the great harvest at the end of the world. See **Table 5D**. Matthew 13:40-42, “As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so also shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and *they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend*, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” We must stop for a moment and consider these verses. If this is the context of the authority being on a woman “because of the angels,” so that the angels will not pluck out of the kingdom those “things that offend” and cause “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” is that not *reason enough* to have heads covered in worship? Is there need to adduce further reasons? In Matthew 24:31, “He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” This teaches that

there is not only a “plucking out” of that which offends, but there is also a “harvesting” of the elect.

Table 5E

<b>5. Authority and Angels (1 Cor. 11:10)</b>
<b>A. The Reformed View of Angels</b>
<b>(5) Finally, we must notice that there is a change worked in the relationship between the angels and us due to the great victory that Christ achieved as Captain of our salvation.</b>
<b>(Hebrews 1:4, 1 Corinthians 6:3)</b>

Finally, we must notice that there is a change worked in the relationship between the angels and mankind due to the great victory that Christ achieved as Captain of our salvation. See **Table 5E**.

“Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (Hebrews 1:4). Notice in 1 Corinthians 6:3, there is a promise that man shall judge the angels. “Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?” The angels being spoken of here in the same book (1 Corinthians) are beings that do not pertain to this life. If we are to judge angels “how much *more* things that pertain to this life?” Paul is making a distinction between things that do and do not pertain to this life. How is this related to chapter eleven?

First, we need to understand that whatever it is that a woman has on her head, it is a symbol of authority. It makes *no sense* to think of hair as a symbol of authority. Whatever that symbol is, it is a symbol of authority! Whatever it is that she has on her head, it indicates somebody’s authority: either hers or someone else’s. It is also visible. If you can see it, you can see that there is authority on this person. If it symbolizes authority, then it must be something you can see, *a visible symbol of authority*. We have symbols of authority showing us the benefits of Christ’s death. These are Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Both of these symbols are visible. Baptism is a *visible symbol of authority* and the Lord’s Supper is a *visible symbol of authority*. The question originally was; “In what sense either in this passage or anywhere else are we given the slightest idea that hair is a symbol of authority?” My point is that if women have a symbol of authority on their heads, it must be other than hair because *no where* in this passage are we given the slightest indication that “hair” might be a symbol of

authority. There is one verse where “hair” is called a “covering,” which I will discuss later.

**Table 5F**

<b>5. Authority and Angels (1 Cor. 11:10)</b>		
<b>B. How Related to this Passage?</b>		
<b>A symbol of authority. Whose?</b>		
<b>The angels are related:</b>		
<b>Hebrews 1:14</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 4:9</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 6:3</b>
<b>Ephesians 2:6</b>	<b>Hebrews 12:22</b>	

See **Table 5F**. Hebrews 12:22 really kind of “says it all.” Hebrews 12:21, “And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.” Moses came to a very fearful place. “But ye are come to Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to *an innumerable company of angels.*” When we come to Mount Zion; when we come to the worship service; when we gather together in an assembly; not only do we gather with God, not only do we gather with others of God’s saints, we also gather with “an innumerable company of angels.” In Isaiah 6:2, we read that the angels are *covered* as they worship God. In this passage, Paul arguing from the greater to the lesser. He explained that if angels are covered in the presence of God, then so ought woman’s glory to be covered in the presence of God.

There are several other places we need to examine very briefly. Revelation 2:1, “Unto *the angel* of the church of Ephesus write;” verse 8, “And unto *the angel* of the church in Smyrna write;” verse 12, “And to *the angel* of the church in Pergamos write;” verse 18, “And unto *the angel* of the church in Thyatira write;” Revelation 3:1, “And unto *the angel* of the church in Sardis write;” verse 7, “And to *the angel* of the church in Philadelphia write;” and in verse 14, “And unto *the angel* of the church of the Laodiceans write.” In each of these seven churches in Asia Minor, there was an office or a person who was referred to as “*the angel*” of that church. It probably was either a pastor or an elder, but it may have been a supernatural spirit. I personally do not think it was a supernatural spirit, because I do not think that they have need of writing. I think that the pastors and elders of these churches would have that need. The Greek word used here is *aggelos*, which can be translated “ministering messengers,” “angels,” or “deputies.” The word *aggelos*

means “a messenger or deputy.” The word means one who delivers a message. It does not matter which of these translations it is. Do we know what the meaning of “angels” is in the Corinthian passage? It does not really matter. In each of these instances, each was associated with the Church. Whether it is an innumerable company of supernatural spirits or whether it is a supernatural spirit in charge of a particular congregation or whether it is a pastor or a ruling elder in each instance, it is associated with the Church. Just as 1 Corinthians 11:2, 11:10 and 11:16 also *associate this practice with the Church*; with the assembling together of the saints.

### 6. Creation in the Lord.

Verse 11 states, “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.” Why did Paul bring this up? For the same reason he brought up the responsibility of the man to love his wife in Ephesians chapter 5. If he did not bring this up, there are some men who would treat their wives like dirt. Men, that is the way we are. Men *would* do that. Men *would* take advantage of their wives if Paul did not very carefully circumscribe their authority with *the law of love*. This is not simply a *bare* authority but a *loving* authority. There is a mutual dependence between man and woman.

Paul continued in verses 11 and 12, “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.” Woman came forth from the man; men come forth from the woman. Each is the source of the other. This is why it was so important to understand that the meaning of “head” is “authority” and not “source.” See **Table 6**. In creation the woman came from the man, and the man is therefore the source of the woman *on earth*. In reproduction, the man as a male child comes from the woman, and the woman is therefore the source of the man *on earth*. But the source of all things, both man and woman, as well as everything else, is the Lord *in heaven*. The Creator in heaven is “he who created all things.” Verse 12, “For as the woman is of the man, even so the man also by the woman; but all things are from God (or of God).” This overcomes any possibility of a pagan or Gentile distortion of headship. Neither the man nor the woman should consider himself or herself independent of the other.

Table 6

6. Creation in the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:11-12)		
Neither woman without man	Nor man without woman	in the Lord
Woman is from man	Man is born of woman	and all things are from God
NB:		
Source of woman	Source of Man	Source of all things:
Creation on earth	Reproduction on earth	Creator in heaven

Let us look at verses 14 and 15. I am going to skip over verse 13 because I am going to discuss verses 13 and 16 together later. Looking at the discourse itself, it seems to me that verses 14 and 15 are parenthetical. At the end of verse 13 Paul asked, "Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?" Then he went on to ask other questions, which I believe were parenthetical to help lead the Corinthian Christians to a proper answer to the question in verse 13.

### 7. The Natural Order of Things.

See **Table 7**. In verse 14, Paul asks, "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" It is a shame to "himself." In verse 15, "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering." Her hair is a glory "to her," to herself. We need to understand that if a man has long hair, he is not shaming his head, he is shaming himself. If he would cover his head with fabric, then he would shame his head, Christ. But if he grows long hair he shames himself. If a woman uncovers her head she is shaming her husband; if she has long hair, she is glorifying herself. Here is the significant thing, Paul has explained three glories: the glory of God, the glory of man and the glory of woman. *God does not share his glory with another.* In the worship service, therefore, God's glory alone is to be seen. God's glory alone is to be uncovered. But who is the glory of God? The man. The glory and image of God is the man, the *anèr*. But man's glory is to be covered. Who is man's glory? The woman. She is to be covered. But in what sense is she to be covered? Her glory, *also*, must be covered. But where

is her glory found? In her hair. So her hair must be covered.

Table 7

7. The Natural Order of Things (1 Corinthians 11:14-15)		
Nature teaches you	A man has long hair	It is a <i>shame</i> to him
But	A woman has long hair	It is a <i>glory</i> to her
Reason	Her hair is given to her for a covering	

We must make this statement. The hair of a woman cannot be both the glory *and* that which covers the glory! "A" is not "non-A." Nothing can be both "A" and "non-A" at the same time and in the same way. Paul taught us that the object which *is* the glory cannot also *cover* the glory! And he taught us that only God's glory is to be seen in the worship service.

We must now try to understand verse 15, "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering." Why is a woman's hair a glory to her? Because her hair is given to her as a "covering." The word that is used in verse 15 for "covering" is not the same word used in verse 6 for "covering." The word that is used for "covering" or "veil" in verse 6, *kaluma*, comes from the Greek word *katakalypto*, "to cover." The word in verse 15 is *peribolaion* which is "a shawl, a wraparound" (*peri*, around, *ballo*, to throw) or a wrap. The Greek words that are both translated into English as covering are two very different words. If the words were the same then some could say that Paul is being inconsistent here. But the words are *not* the same.

### 8. The Question Decided.

Verses 14 and 15 form a parenthetic statement between the question in verse 13 and the answer given in verse 16. See **Table 8A**.

Table 8A

8. The Question Decided: Judge for Yourselves (1 Cor. 11:13, 16)
A. Verses 14 - 15 form a parenthetic statement between the question in verse 13 and the answer given in verse 16. The question, "is it comely..." The answer; "we have no such custom..."

The question in verse 13 was “Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?” The question was, “Is it comely?” Verse 16, “If any man seem to be contentious (or disputatious), we have no such custom.” No such custom as what? No such custom as a woman praying to God uncovered. The custom Paul mentioned was *not* that of being disputatious. True, we have no such custom as being disputatious either, but that was not Paul’s point. Paul’s point was that we have no such custom as a woman praying to God uncovered in the public worship.

See **Table 8B**. Is a woman praying covered culturally bound custom? Was that what Paul meant by “custom?” When Paul said, “We have no such custom” was he talking about something that was culturally bound to ancient Corinth? There is not a single indication in the passage that Paul’s intent was to appeal to custom at Corinth.

**Table 8B**

<p><b>8. The Question Decided: Judge for Yourselves (1 Cor. 11:13, 16)</b></p>
<p><b>B. Is this a "culturally bound" custom? There is not a single indication in the passage that Paul's intent is to appeal to the custom at Corinth. What about the covering being a symbol of authority on her head? Why did Paul refer back to the creation order?</b></p>

What about the covering being a symbol of authority on her head? What kind of authority is it to which hair speaks? As already indicated, all that a woman has to do is walk into an assembly with her head covered where there are feminists present and it will be *clear* what that covering means. Why did Paul refer back to the creation order if this is simply a cultural custom? Why did Paul go all the way back to creation in Genesis chapters 1, 2 and 5 if this is simply something that has to do with the culture in Corinth? I think that these are questions that feminists have yet to answer.

See **Table 8C**. The woman’s glory, that is *her hair* (in verse 15), must be covered in worship. The man’s glory, that is *the woman* (in verse 7), must be covered in worship. Thus *only* God’s glory, which is *the man* (in verse 7), is uncovered in worship. God will not share his glory with another (Isaiah 48:11); thus both the man’s glory and the woman’s glory must be covered. But if the man’s glory is covered, where is the covering worn? On the woman’s head. But if the woman’s glory is covered, where is the covering worn? It is worn on the woman’s

head. Paul wrote about a fabric covering that covers both the man’s glory and the woman’s glory, so that the only glory that is evidenced (uncovered) in the worship service is the glory of God. This can only be accomplished when both *the head* and *the hair* of the woman are covered.

**Table 8C**

<p><b>8. The Question Decided: Judge for Yourselves (1 Cor. 11:13, 16)</b></p>
<p><b>C. Her glory (her hair, v. 15) must be covered in worship. His glory (the woman, v.7) must be covered in worship.</b></p> <p><b>Thus only God's glory (the man, v.7) is uncovered in worship. God will not share His glory with another. Thus both man's and woman's glory must be covered. This is accomplished when the hair and head of the woman are covered.</b></p>

See **Table 8D**. This passage does not speak directly to the question as to whether a woman may pray in public. The passage does not speak directly to the question that either the woman ought or ought not to pray or prophesy in public. That subject is handled very clearly in 1 Corinthians 14:33 and following. But the passage we are discussing does not speak to the subject.

**Table 8D**

<p><b>8. The Question Decided: Judge for Yourselves (1 Cor. 11:13, 16)</b></p>
<p><b>D. This passage does not speak directly to the question as to whether women may pray when they are not doing so as the voice of one, but are being led in congregational prayer by the worship leader. They also prophesy when they sing the Word of God.</b></p>

### Concluding Remarks

We have essentially done a discourse analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. If we look at the entirety of the discourse, by the time we get to verse 15 we will find out that any other interpretation of verse 15 does not make any sense. The reason that one may think that Paul is inarticulate or inconsistent is because he is imposing his view on the passage, rather than Paul’s view. It is the one who objects to this passage who is inarticulate and inconsistent. It is this author’s contention, which has yet to be disproved, that *every commentary claiming that the covering was hair has been written since the rise of egalitarian feminism.*Ω

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# The Ecclesiastical Text:

Text Criticism, Biblical Authority and the Popular Mind, by Theodore P. Letis

Reviewed by Mark Arvid Johnson

[*The Ecclesiastical Text: Text Criticism, Biblical Authority and the Popular Mind*, by Theodore P. Letis (Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies, 1997).]

Like many works by those connected with the Reconstructionist movement, this book is a curious collection. There are valuable historical insights, yet there are also points contrary to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Theodore P. Letis is a Lutheran with a Ph.D. in ecclesiastical history. *The Ecclesiastical Text* is a collection of his previously published essays. These can be divided into three main groups: historical reviews of the Protestant reaction to textual criticism, the canonical criticism of Brevard S. Childs, and refutations of the Anabaptist position.

## I. Historical Reviews

The first three essays are historical reviews. The first, entitled “B. B. Warfield, Common-Sense Philosophy and Biblical Criticism,” presents Warfield as a paradigm shift for Princeton. Warfield treated the text of sacred scripture differently than had his predecessors at the seminary. He endorsed conjectural emendation, the practice of guessing at the original reading of the New Testament on the assumption that all existing manuscripts are corrupt. Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Caspar Wistar Hodge had all regarded this practice as illegitimate. In this they followed the standard set by men like Francis Turretin, whose theology played such a large role at Princeton. Warfield, on the other hand, was more strongly influenced in text critical matters by English New Testament critics Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-1892). He shared their belief that in textual matters, the sacred scriptures must be treated like any piece of profane literature.

The second essay, “The Protestant Dogmatists and the Late Princeton School on the Status of the Sacred Autographa,” contrasts the view of the

seventeenth century Protestant Scholastics with that of Princeton Theological Seminary regarding the value of the apographs, manuscript copies of the Old and New Testament used within the church. The Scholastics located inspiration and authority in the Hebrew and Greek copies, providentially preserved in the public usage of the church, as trustworthy transcripts of the autographs. The Lutheran Scholastics reviewed include Martin Chemnitz (1522-1589), Johann Gerhard (1582-1637), Johann Andreas Quenstedt (1617-1688), John William Baier (1647-1695), Andre Musaeus (1613-1681) and David Hollaz (1648-1713). Their view is summarized in the following quote from Quenstedt:

We believe as is our duty, that the providential care of God has always watched over the original and primitive texts of the canonical scriptures in such a way that we could be certain that the sacred codices which we now have in our hands are those which existed at the time of Jerome and Augustine, nay at the time of Christ Himself and his apostles. – Quenstedt, cited in *The Ecclesiastical Text (hereafter ET)*, p. 40.

The Reformed Scholastics reviewed include John Owen (1616-1683) and Francis Turretin (1623-1687). They taught that God has providentially safeguarded a pure textual tradition within the church catholic.

Far be it from the thoughts of any good man, that God, whose covenant with his church is that his word and Spirit shall never depart from it, Isa. lix.21, Matt. v. 18, 1 Pet. i.25, 1 Cor. xi. 23, Matt. xxviii 20, hath left it in uncertainties about the things that are the foundation of all that faith and obedience which He requires at our hands. – John Owen, p. 350, “Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture,” in *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. 16.

Finally, Reformed creeds are cited, including the Westminster Confession of Faith (I:8) and the Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675). Because the Helvetic Consensus Formula is all but forgotten today, it is profitable to say a little about it. The HCF was the last,

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most mature confession of the Swiss Reformed Church. Its statement of providential preservation as promised by the scriptures themselves is unmistakable.

God, the supreme Judge, not only took care to have his word, which is “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, but also has watched and cherished it with paternal care ever since it was written up to the present time, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore the Church justly ascribes it to His singular grace and goodness that she has and will have to the end of the world, a “sure word of prophecy” and “Holy Scriptures” (2 Tim. 3:15), from which, though heaven and earth perish, “one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass” (Matt. 5:18). – Helveticus Consensus Formula, First Canon.

B. B. Warfield broke decisively with this view, and instead spoke of a Bible at least partially lost to the church:

The inerrant autographs were a fact once; they may possibly be a fact again, when textual criticism has said its last word on the Bible text. In proportion as they are approaching in the processes of textual criticism, do we have an ever better and better Bible than the one we have now. – Warfield, *ET*, p. 53.

Warfield integrated liberal criticism with the Westminster Confession of Faith by re-interpreting WCF I:8. He ignored the historical context of this section, and instead interpreted it in such a way as to include the views of modern textual critics:

In the sense of the Westminster Confession, therefore, the multiplication of the copies of scripture, the several early efforts toward the revision of the text, the raising up of scholars in our own day to collect and collate MSS., and to reform the text on scientific principles—of our Tischendorfs, and Tregelles, and Westcotts and Hort’s—are all parts of God’s singular care and providence in preserving [read: *restoring*] His inspired Word pure. – Warfield, *ET*, p. 22.

## II. Brevard S. Childs and Canonical Criticism

Letis accurately identifies a paradigm shift in the Reformed view toward textual criticism; from being carefully bounded by Reformed theology, to a naturalistic method which treats scripture as any other document. His proposal for a better relationship between sacred text and modern criticism, however,

presented in the fourth and fifth essays, is problematic at best. The author distinguishes sharply between “pre-critical advocacy” and “post-critical advocacy” of the Received Text. “Pre-critical advocacy” is the defense of the Received Text as a faithful transcript of the original Hebrew and Greek sources. This is the view of the Westminster Confession, and men like Francis Turretin, John Owen, and John William Burgon (1813-1888). It is called “pre-critical” because this approach predates and ignores the results of higher criticism. “Post-critical advocacy” is the defense of the ecclesiastical text assuming or based on the results of higher criticism. Letis accepts modern higher criticism, including source and redaction criticism. He attempts to bring forward the doctrines of the Protestant Scholastics into a post-critical milieu.

In his attempt to reconcile higher criticism and a high view of sacred scripture, Letis adopts “Canonical Criticism” put forth by Brevard S. Childs. Academy (university) and Sanctuary (church) are separated into separate spheres, each with its own goals and methodology. Within the Academy, the “sacred notion of academic freedom” must not be challenged. Within the Sanctuary, however, the Bible is treated as a sacred text because of its reception by the religious community.

My understanding of canon was offered as a major criticism of late seventeenth and eighteenth century Reformed orthodoxy which tended to place the authority in a divinely inspired book apart from its reception by the communities through the work of the Spirit. By defining canon as those sacred writings which were received, treasured, and shaped by a community of faith, I proposed a very different dynamic from that, say, of Charles Hodge, but one which was akin to the early Church Father’s [sic] view of a rule-of-faith. – Brevard S. Childs, cited approvingly in *The ET*, pp. 2-3.

This approach raises important questions: How does canonical criticism compare with the protestant and papist positions presented in the first few essays in *The Ecclesiastical Text*? If each community of faith rightly shapes its own canon, what objective criteria are available to decide between conflicting truth claims of different faith communities and their respective canons? Letis does not address these questions. Ultimately, the approach advocated by Letis fails. Canonical criticism is not a suitable vessel for adapting the theology of the Protestant Dogmatists to a post-critical age, because

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their theology is antithetical to the theology behind canonical criticism. The theory behind canonical criticism is that the sacred scripture is a product of the ecclesiastical community. It is the same approach used by Roman Catholics to support the Latin Vulgate. The Reformers opposed the claims of Rome that the Latin Vulgate was authentic and canonical. It is not the reception of scripture that confers authentic status, but that God is its author. Rather than follow vain traditions of man (Matthew 15.1-10), we ought to follow the law and testimony of God (Isaiah 8.20). The Westminster Confession summarizes the issue at hand in these terms.

The authority of the holy scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, (who is truth itself,) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God. – Westminster Confession of Faith I:4. The Authority of Scripture.

The fifth essay, “The Prologue of John and the Egyptian Manuscripts: John 1:18 as a Case Study in the Canonical Approach” is the only essay in the book that treats a textual variant specifically. This essay is meant to be an example of the canonical approach to textual criticism. Though Letis has often associated himself with Burgon and Hills, here he explicitly distances himself and canonical criticism from their approach. The basic idea behind the canonical approach to textual criticism is to limit the application of modern text criticism within the framework of an actual ecclesiastical textual tradition, such as the Byzantine Greek or the Latin Vulgate. The initial choice of text will in large measure determine the end result. It follows that the initial choice is crucial to canonical criticism, but Letis does not speak to this issue. Again we see the problem of a translation put on equal footing with the original language text. If the Latin Vulgate may be used as the defining textual tradition for canonical criticism, why not another version, such as the ancient Syriac Peshitto? Why not Luther’s German translation for Lutherans? Why not the King James Version for Anglicans and English protestants? Letis certainly holds no favor toward the “KJV Only” view (see below), but this approach opens the door for that position.

### III. Refutation of the Anabaptists

The last major essay of the book deals with a radical Anabaptist position toward the Authorized Version (AV)

that has come to be called “KJV Onlyism.” This position lifts the AV out of its historical milieu and treats it like an original autograph, rather than a translation of the Hebrew and Greek. In church history, two versions have been held superior to the original language texts: the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and the Latin translation of Jerome. Jerome was criticized for translating from the Hebrew Old Testament rather than the Greek LXX which was thought to be an inspired translation. His critics, such as the notable Augustine, were unskilled in Hebrew. The Reformers were criticized for holding to the original Greek and Hebrew rather than Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, which had come to be regarded as an inspired translation. The papists presiding at Trent, which declared the Latin Vulgate alone authentic, were unlearned in the Hebrew and Greek. Today the same error is being committed regarding the AV, most often by those with little to no knowledge of the Hebrew or Greek.

As Westminster correctly declares, only the original language texts are normative for the church:

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 authentic; so in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. – WCF I:8a. The Language of Scripture

Letis demonstrates that Dean William Burgon and Edward F. Hills were not “KJV Only” supporters.

Once for all, we request it may be clearly understood that we do not, by any means, claim perfection for the Received Text. We entertain no extravagant notions on this subject. Again and again we shall have occasion to point out that the Textus Receptus needs correction. – Dean William Burgon, cited in *ET*, p. 190.

Do we believing Bible Students “worship” the King James Version? Do we regard it as inspired, just as the ancient Jewish philosopher Philo (d.42 A.D.) and many early Christians regarded the Septuagint as inspired? Or do we claim the same supremacy for the King James Version that Roman Catholics claim for the Latin Vulgate? Do we magnify its authority above that of the Hebrew and Greek Old and New Testament Scriptures? We have often been accused of



such excessive veneration for the King James Version, but these accusations are false. – Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, page 229.

This is important because “KJV Only” publications often represent Burgon and Hills as “KJV Only” supporters. As Letis demonstrates, they clearly were not.

In the opinion of this reviewer, this book, though flawed, deserves a place in the library of those interested in the history of the Reformed reaction to textual criticism of sacred scripture. It contains useful critiques of the modern “King James Only” position, and a valuable historical overview of the position of the church on textual criticism. However, the book clearly departs from confessional Reformed doctrine in the approach recommended to replace the current naturalistic view held by many in the church today. Ω



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In March of 1996 the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton AB separated from the Reformation Presbyterian Church. The PRCE had embraced the errors of the Steelites who claimed that a "church is not a properly, truly, biblically constituted church if it has not formally adopted the Solemn League and Covenant," the historic covenant between Scotland and England that led to the Westminster Assembly and its work. Ironically, while the modern Steelite apologists often call their critics promoters of papist errors, *Defense Departed* shows clearly that in raising a particular stream of history or tradition, albeit one claiming to be reformed, to the level of Scripture, the Steelites have committed the same error in kind as the papists who treat their tradition so. This paper was originally posted on the FPCR web site, and is now available in a printed format those who do not have internet access or would like a printed copy.

