



The Cultic Root System of David Otis Fuller & King James Onlyism

by G. Richard Fisher

King James Version? New King James Version? New International Version? New American Standard Bible? The use of a specific English translation of the Scriptures is a matter of personal preference, as the following survey of senior pastors reveals:

“The poll, conducted by Ellison Research, found the NIV was chosen as the personal favorite by 31 percent of the ministers, followed by the King James Version (23 percent), the New Revised Standard (14 percent), the New King James (13 percent) and the New American Standard (10 percent).”¹

Based upon the survey, 77% of American ministers apparently do not favor the King James Bible. A tiny minority of those who prefer the KJV would, if they had their way, burn all other versions. However, few of them probably are familiar with the origins of their position.

One of the best-kept secrets of the religious world is the cultic roots of the modern King James Version Only (KJVO) camp. To speak of “King James Only” or “King James Onlyism” is to refer to those who believe the King James Version is superior to all other versions. Its supporters run the gamut from those who simply prefer it and think it is superior because of its style and longevity, to

those who castigate anyone using another translation. Not all within this camp are militant, but the militant voices receive the most attention.

LAY OF THE LAND

King James Onlyism is not a unified camp. There are at least six basic positions:

1. The reinspiration position. This view says that the 1611 edition of the King James Bible is superior to the Greek and Hebrew texts. They wrongly believe that the translators were almost, if not actually, inspired to write this version in English. The primary proponent of this position is Peter Ruckman.² The biggest hurdle of all for those aligning with Ruckman is: “Which King James Version?,” because it has come through major revisions since 1611. The original 1611 King James Version contained the Apocrypha, as well as listings of Church feasts including the Virgin Mary’s feast days. We presently use an 18th-century revision, minus the Apocrypha. The simple facts are:

“The 1762 revision, undertaken by Dr. Thomas Paris of Trinity College, Cambridge and the 1769 edition, revised by Dr. Benjamin Blayney of Hertford College in Oxford, brought us to the text of our present day beloved KJV.”³

We may firmly conclude from the reinspiration position that no one had

the preserved, perfect, and pure Word of God until 1611. Those holding this point of view confuse inspiration and translation. Another serious drawback for Ruckman is his use of inappropriate and foul language when referring to his opposition.⁴

2. The Received Text position. This position argues that the best and almost — if not completely — infallible text is the 1624 Greek revision of Roman Catholic priest Erasmus. After a number of revisions, this text was dubbed the *Textus Receptus*. Why it is so esteemed is difficult to fathom. Though earlier editions of the Erasmus text (and other sources as well) were used to compile the KJV, the so-called Received Text was not born until 13 years after the KJV was completed and contains numerous differences from the one used by the KJV translators.⁵

Names associated with this position are David Otis Fuller, Edward Hills, and Donald Waite. The so-called *Textus Receptus*, though different in places from the KJV, is still held to be the superior text. A.T. Robertson refers to this view as “a fictitious worship of the letter of Erasmus’s last edition.”⁶ Those holding this position can, at times, be very strident and in fact obnoxiously militant as they confuse inspiration and preservation.

3. The rigid tradition position. This (continues on page 10)

position, which first was championed by Dean Burgon in his volume, *The Revision Revised*, held that Church tradition alone made the final call. Because a group of manuscripts called the "Byzantine text-type" or "Majority Text" had been preserved by the Greek Orthodox Church since the fourth century and was the underlying text for Erasmus and the KJV translators, it was to be preferred. Added was the fact that the Anglican Church had used the KJV for a number of centuries, so in Burgon's view that tradition dictated the day. Burgon said, "the test of *Catholic Antiquity*. ... I decline to recognise any other criterion of Truth."⁷

They confuse inspiration with esthetics.

5. The reasoned eclecticism position. This, at times, is also referred to as the "right to be considered" position of Harry Sturz. Sturz argued that the Byzantine family of texts (forerunners of the KJV and designated as the Majority Text-type) are independent of other text types.

As well, it is claimed, they are equal to them, having a right to stand on their own and be considered as equal witnesses with all other text-types. These, it is said, are not superior or inferior, but inherently authoritative enough to be taken seriously.

However, it is tough sledding for Sturz because of the paucity of unam-

tions were developed from the understandings and cultic mindset of Seventh-day Adventist Benjamin Wilkinson. Doug Kutilek explains:

"In the realm of King-James-Version-Onlyism, just such a genealogy of error can easily be traced. All writers who embrace the KJV-only position have derived their views ultimately from Seventh-day Adventist missionary, theology professor and college president, Benjamin G. Wilkinson (d. 1968), through one of two or three of his spiritual descendants. In 1930, he wrote *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, a book of several hundred pages which attracted almost no attention in its day (no doubt chiefly because it was awash in a vast ocean of error)."⁸

Although Wilkinson escaped the notice of most, and his book was largely ignored, some understand that he is the real "father" of the modern King-James-Onlyism viewpoint. It would be brought into evangelicalism by stealth.

WHOLESALE BORROWING

The foremost promoter of Wilkinson was David Otis Fuller in the 1970s through his book, *Which Bible?* Fuller deceptively hid the Adventist background of Wilkinson and simply said, "here is a scholar of the first rank with a thorough knowledge of the subjects about which he wrote. Dr. Wilkinson taught for many years in a small and obscure Eastern college."⁹ Fuller had to know that Wilkinson, who converted to Adventism in 1891, studied for ministry under the Seventh-day Adventists, served as an Adventist missionary in Haiti, was Dean of Theology at Adventist Washington Missionary College, and eventually became its president. Wilkinson was an active Adventist leader and promoter for 56 years.

Just in case it has been forgotten what Adventists taught during Wilkinson's time, they believed Ellen G. White was a prophetess and her visions and commands to keep the Sabbath as an essential part of the

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The case was closed for Burgon, even though this text-type could not be dated earlier than A.D. 350. Many today opt for the superiority of the Byzantine text-type simply on faith. A more recent promoter of this view is Zane Hodges, though he leans more toward the Byzantine text-type, not because of tradition, but being superior in its own right. With Burgon there was a confusion of inspiration and tradition.

4. The readable and reverence position. Some hold to the KJV, citing grandeur of language and out of reverence for Elizabethan English. Within this position many simply prefer it and are a bit more tolerant. The "thees" and "thous," they say, are more respectful of God. They prefer the flow of the translation.

biguous Byzantine readings before A.D. 350. There is no confusion of inspiration here, but rather simply an absence of any hard evidence for his position.

6. The rummage and pick position. This view is simply a mix-and-match conviction. Take any or all of the above and combine them any way you wish. Without clarity or sense, some weave in and out of numbers one through four, never stopping to fine-tune any one of them. It is a subjective stew. Christian-witnessing tract entrepreneur Jack Chick seems to be a model of this. This is a confusion of inspiration and argumentation.

ENTER THE MAIN PERPETRATOR

The bulk of the present KJVO posi-

Christian life were straight from God. They legislated dietary regulations and believed that upon death even believers went into a kind of soul sleep. They believed that going to church on Sunday was the mark of the beast and that Satan would bear the sins of the world as he wandered the earth during the millennium as the true scapegoat of Leviticus 16.

Add to that the teaching that Jesus entered into some heavenly compartment on Oct. 8, 1844, to begin to do an “investigative judgment” as to who was in and who was out of the Kingdom. It was necessary for Christ to finish His atoning work in this way, despite the fact that He said, “it is finished” on the cross.¹⁰

Offshoot Adventists today are trying to move toward a more “evangelical” position, but the Adventism of Wilkinson’s era was monolithic and unbending. It definitely had many marks of a cult.

Dale Ratzlaff was a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist and was educated in SDA schools from first grade through seminary. He taught their doctrine in an SDA high school for seven years and was pastor at two SDA churches. As a former Adventist he reminds us:

“SDAs believe the writings of Ellen G. White (EGW) are inspired on the same level as the Bible. Because she is the later inspired writer, many SDAs hold that her interpretation of the Bible is to be preferred.”¹¹

DECEPTION BY ELIMINATION

If Fuller did not know Wilkinson’s background, his research abilities and scholarship are extremely poor. If he did know — and many that know say he did, but concealed it — he is guilty of outright deception. On that count alone he needs to be rejected. It is fairly evident that Fuller knew and worked at disguising Wilkinson’s SDA background. Doug Kutilek further observed that when quoting long passages of Wilkinson:

“Fuller carefully concealed Wilkinson’s theological orienta-

tion by deleting footnote references to the writings of Adventist prophetess Ellen G. White, although he left the quotes themselves in the text. Fuller also deleted other statements in Wilkinson’s book that would have immediately disclosed Wilkinson’s Adventism.”¹²

Wilkinson’s work is full of error on its own and it was not entirely unknown as to who he was. Kutilek additionally offers:

“That book, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, was written by Seventh-Day Adventist missionary, educator, and theologian Benjamin G. Wilkinson (1872-1968). That Wilkinson was an Adventist was not widely known (and was not announced by those that knew it). The book was little noticed when it was first released and for good reason. It was full of misinformation, inaccuracies, defective reasoning and distortion. Wilkinson, for example, was the first person to assert that the Old Latin version, instead of the Vulgate, was the Bible of the medieval Waldensians and that the Old Latin corresponds textually with the Greek Textus Receptus, both of which assertions are demonstrably false.”¹³

Kutilek continues outlining the famous firsts:

“He was the first person to demonize Wescott and Hort, making them the ‘bogey men’ in the text and translation debate often by distorting their words. Wilkinson was also the first person to misapply Psalm 12:6-7 as though it were a promise of the preservation of the KJV.”¹⁴

Truth be known, any translation other than the KJV robbed Wilkinson of ammunition for his cultic beliefs. Adventists make much of KJV readings to “prove” soul sleep and their denial of hell, for instance, when punishment is referred to as destruction.

Wilkinson’s hatred of the Vulgate is clear in his writing. He either is

ignorant of or oblivious to Church history. Erasmus used the Vulgate and even used those Latin readings for his Greek text. Fuller has helped us by inserting most of Wilkinson’s chapters in his *Which Bible?* Wilkinson’s assertion is this:

“When we come to Origen, we speak the name of him who did the most of all to create and give direction to the forces of apostasy down through the centuries. It was he who mightily influenced Jerome, the editor of the Latin Bible known as the Vulgate.”¹⁵

So he is claiming that Jerome was infatuated with Origen, a heretic, and the only conclusion was that neither Jerome nor his work could be trusted.

However, the translators of the King James Version constantly praised Jerome, whom they refer to as “Saint,” throughout their long Preface to the Authorized Version, which was contained in the first editions of their work. Consider the following:

“This moved St. Jerome, a most learned Father, and the best linguist without controversy of his age, or of any that went before him, to undertake the translating of the Old Testament out of the very fountains themselves; which he performed with that evidence of great learning, judgment, industry, and faithfulness, that he hath for ever bound the Church unto him in a debt of special remembrance and thankfulness.”¹⁶

According to Wilkinson, we cannot trust Origen or Jerome, but somehow Erasmus — whose text is used for the KJV — is fine even though Erasmus revered both Jerome and Origen.

“Between that year [1516] and 1518 Erasmus also published a nine-volume edition of the works of Jerome, Erasmus’s favorite church father. Less ambitious editions of other fathers including Irenaeus, Augustine, Chrysostom, and Origen followed in the succeeding eighteen years.”¹⁷

Wilkinson promotes a wild suggestion and slanders Bishop Brooke Foss

Wescott (translator of the Revised Version of 1881) by calling him a Gnostic because of Wescott's use of the phrase "age of the ages" rather than "forever and ever." Wilkinson says this refers to Gnostic *aeons*.¹⁸ *Aeons*, according to the Gnostics, were emanations somewhat like angels:

"The aeons were attributes thought of as personal, and took the place of the abstract ideas of Greek philosophy."¹⁹

These emanations or *aeons* do not even come close to the word age. Yet, no matter what dissatisfaction one might have with Anglicans such as Wescott, they are not Gnostics.²⁰

In defense of Wescott, Stewart Custer produced two pages of quotes from Wescott's commentaries showing the absolute commitment to all the fundamental and foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. Wescott was committed to the deity of Jesus, as well as the pre-existence and virgin birth of Christ. He expressed faith in Jesus' resurrection and as well to His sinlessness and sacrificial blood atonement for our sins.²¹

If it is true that as Wilkinson writes, "The first stream which carried the Received Text in Hebrew and Greek, began with the apostolic churches,"²² then why are there not abundant readings of this text in extant manuscripts from A.D. 100 to A.D. 300? They just are not there. Then, the massive blunder of Wilkinson to say the "Received Text in Hebrew," is mind-boggling. The Received Text is Greek and the Hebrew texts used for the King James Version are from the tenth-century A.D. Masoretic text.

Since Wilkinson is so anti-Catholic and anti-papal, it is puzzling that he is not upset that the Received Text — which he says "was the true apostolic Bible"²³ — was composed by a Catholic Priest and authorized by a Pope. Erasmus saw his work as a continuation of Jerome's and, in fact, called his text *his* Jerome. He longed for the approval of Pope Leo X, and petitioned to lay his work "at the feet of

Leo, with a request to be allowed to dedicate his labours to him."²⁴

In the *Life and Letters of Erasmus*, Wilkinson's nemesis Origen is clearly praised,²⁵ celibacy is upheld,²⁶ the worship of St. Anne is advocated,²⁷ as well as repeated endorsements of the Roman Catholic Church expressed.²⁸ Erasmus also affirmed confession,²⁹ and transubstantiation.³⁰

A.T. Robertson is right when he concluded that the Erasmus text had become "almost an object of worship for some," even though "no two editions are precisely alike."³¹

SHELL GAME WITH THE BIBLE

If it were not so serious, it would be almost laughable to read Wilkinson rhapsodize about the Pilgrims in a flight of sheer fantasy:

"The Authorized Version was translated in 1611, just before the Puritans departed from England, so that they carried it with them across stormy seas to lay the foundation of one of the greatest governments the world has ever known. The Authorized Version of God's Holy Word had much to do with the laying of the foundation of our great country."³²

The Authorized Version is, of course, the King James Version. However, the Puritans were firmly committed to the Geneva Bible, which, according to F.F. Bruce, "was produced by English Protestants who sought refuge at Geneva during the reign of Mary Tudor (1553-58); it was issued with a dedication to Elizabeth."³³

Numerous historical sources verify that the Puritans and Pilgrims sailed to the new world with the Geneva Bible. The Geneva Bible was the first version to include verses and preceded the KJV by 50 years, as R.C. Sproul explains:

"The Geneva Bible dominated the English-speaking world for a hundred years. It was the Bible used by Shakespeare. The King James Bible was published in

1611 but did not supplant the Geneva Bible until fifty years later. The Pilgrims and Puritans carried the Geneva Bible to the shores of the new world. American colonists were reared on the Geneva Bible. They read it, studied it, and sought to live by its light."³⁴

The Puritans resisted the KJV and embraced the Geneva Bible because of its more Calvinistic note system. They used it and preferred it for at least a hundred years into our country's founding. Further, we know the Geneva Bible was loved by many, yet despised by others:

"The key factor was the Geneva notes. The marginal comments designed to explain the text to the reader were strongly anti-monarchy, anti-Anglican, and anti-Catholic. Those Protestant notes further emphasized individual soul liberty, predestination, and ecclesiastical separation from apostate religion. The Geneva Bible with its notes achieved widespread acceptance among the laity in the sixteenth century much like the Scofield Reference Bible with its notes has impacted believers in the twentieth century. ... It was noteworthy to find that even some of the Anglican bishops used the Geneva Bible in their sermons from 1611 to 1630. The Pilgrims took the Geneva Bible, not the King James Bible, with them on the *Mayflower* in 1620, and it was popular in the New England colonies for many years."³⁵

It can be shown that the Anglican translators of the KJV dropped a bias or two into their translation. Their refusal to translate the word "baptism" and simply transliterate it is telling. Their use of "bishop" for the simple Greek word *episkopos*, which merely means "overseer," likewise reveals a bias for their hierarchy.

It is hard to understand why one would insist we read a 400-year-old translation with words such as "bolloed," "ouches," "eared," "days-

man," "neesings," "abjects," "anon," "bestead," "eschew," "trow" and "ghost."³⁶

CULT OR NOT? — THAT'S THE QUESTION

Cultic roots bring forth cultic fruits. Kutilek is on target when he writes:

"The King James-Only movement has been more destructive and distractive among Baptists than any controversy since the Campbellite heresy of the nineteenth century. This modern movement may well exceed the Campbellites in its overall evil effects."³⁷

Cultic fruits do not please God. James says that the wisdom from above is marked by gentleness, peace, good fruit, and a willingness to yield to others (3:17). Where there is commotion and evil fruit, James says it is from the world, the flesh, and the devil (3:16).

That one could believe that God has given an infallible Bible only to English-speaking people is the height of arrogance and a staggering display of cultural and biblical ignorance.

Perhaps we can make exceptions for positions 4 and 5. As for the rest, our only conclusion is that they are cultic at best, and a full-blown cult at worst.

Here is a modern movement that has its roots in cultism and fruits that display cultism. Since the *Textus Receptus* only dates to the 17th century and the Byzantine line of texts only to the 4th century, the whole KJVO position is ultimately a faith position. Some of that faith is squarely on the man Benjamin Wilkinson.

There are text-types, such as the "P" manuscripts, which go virtually to the Apostles' doorstep and are used in translating the more modern versions. These were undiscovered at the time the KJV translators did their work and were still unknown in the time of Wescott and Hort. The "P" fragments have since helped us fine-tune our text in minor areas and are in no way decisive to doctrine. These have been recovered in the 20th century.³⁸

The KJVO advocates cannot demonstrate decisively with textual evidence that their text type is anywhere near the first-century originals. Presently there is a gap of at least 300 years from the original autographs, which is devastating to their position. To trust a cult leader — namely Benjamin Wilkinson — is to lean on a broken reed. KJVO advocates can only span the 300-year gap by wishing or bullying others into believing it is not there or use a cult leader to bolster their case. Cults base their teaching on their founders and — setting aside the hard evidence — exercise implicit faith in his word. Like father, like son — or rather like Wilkinson (and Fuller), like offspring.

Endnotes:

1. "Protestant pastors reveal Bible preferences," World Net Daily, May 5, 2004. Document available at: www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=38339. The complete survey is available on Ellison Research's web site: <http://ellisonresearch.com/ERPS%20II/release%209%20versions.htm>.
2. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "Ruckmanism or Wreckmanism — The Teaching That K.J.V. Translators Were Inspired Is Dangerous," *PFO Newsletter*, April-June 1982, pp. 1, 5.
3. James B. Williams, Editor, *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man*. Greenville, S.C.: Ambassador-Emerald International, 1999, pg. 159.
4. For additional information on Peter Ruckman, see James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995, pp. 6-7, 109-121), and Stewart Custer, *The Truth About the King James Controversy*, (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1981).
5. See further, Robert A. Joyner, *King James Only?* Newport, N.C.: self-published, 2000, pg. 35.
6. A.T. Robertson, *Studies in the Text of the New Testament*. New York: George H. Doran and Company, 1969, pg. 47.
7. Dean Burgon, *The Revision Revised*. Paradise, Penna.: Conservative Classics, nd, pg. XXV, italics in original.
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9. David Otis Fuller, *Which Bible?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1971, pg. 91.
10. For more information on Seventh-day Adventists see, *Seventh-day Adventism: The Spirit Behind the Church*, (Phoenix: Grace Upon Grace Productions, 1998, 50-minute video); and D.M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Refuted In a Nutshell*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1962).
11. Dale Ratzlaff, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventist "Truth."* Glendale, Ariz.: Life Assurance Ministries, 2000, pg. 6.
12. Doug Kutilek in Roy E. Beacham and Kevin T. Bauder, General Editors, *One Bible Only?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregal Publications, 2001, pp. 45-46.
13. *Ibid.*, pg. 44.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Which Bible?*, op. cit., pg. 109.
16. "The Translators to the Reader," North Australia: Covenant Press, 1984, pp. 8-9. This reproduction of "The Preface to the Authorized Version" has been updated with modernized spelling.
17. J.D. Douglas, Editor, *Who's Who in Christian History*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992, pg. 235.
18. See *Which Bible?*, op. cit., pp. 101-102.
19. Everett Harrison, Editor, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1973, pg. 238.
20. See further, Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1999, "Gnosticism," pp. 273-275.
21. Stewart Custer, *The Truth About the King James Controversy*. Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1981, pp. 26-27.
22. *Which Bible?*, op. cit., pg. 104.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 114.
24. J.A. Froude, *Life and Letters of Erasmus*. New York: Charles Scribners and Son, 1899, pg. 184.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 87.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 121.
27. *Ibid.*, pg. 80.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 253-254, 267, 272, 332, 356-357.
29. *Ibid.*, pg. 351.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 376.
31. *Studies in the Text of the New Testament*, op. cit., pg. 48.
32. *Which Bible?*, op. cit., pg. 233.
33. F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988, pg. 107.
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36. See further, G. Christian Weiss, *What You Should Know About Bible Translations*. Lincoln, Neb.: Back to the Bible, 1977.
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