

# Westcott and Hort: The Root of the Tree

## I Who are Westcott and Hort

A. Brooke Foss Westcott, 1825 – 1901  
Cambridge University 1848  
Worked on Greek NT with Hort **1853-1871**  
Revised Version 1870-1881



B. Fenton John Anthony Hort, 1828 – 1892  
Cambridge University 1851  
Worked on Greek NT with Westcott  
Served on RV Committee



C. Both were High Church Anglican clergy.  
Low Church clergy were mostly evangelical.  
High Church clergy were more free thinking.

D. Westcott and Hort are the individuals who dethroned the Textus Receptus. Up to this point, the textus Receptus was accepted by all evangelical groups as the true New Testament text, and its ultimate English translation, the King James Bible, was accepted as the Word of God in English. Westcott and Hort created a new Greek text to take its place. Others (Greisbach, Tischendorf, etc.) had attempted to do this, but their texts never gained enough popularity. Westcott and Hort maneuvered the Revised Version committee to accept their text as the source for the translation. This gave it the prestige to eventually gain superiority over the TR among scholars.

E. Westcott and Hort hated the Textus Receptus before they even knew Greek well.

Hort to John Ellerton, 1851. "I had no idea till the last few weeks of the importance of texts , having read so little Greek Testament, and dragged on with the villainous Textus Receptus ... Think of that vile Textus Receptus leaning entirely on late MSS .; it is a blessing there are such early ones ..." <sup>1</sup>

F. Hort's Character

### Hort's Mother:

"Her religious feelings were deep and strong . Circumstances had made her an adherent of the Evangelical school , and she was to a certain degree hampered by it ; the Oxford Movement filled her with dread and anxiety as to its possible effect on her son . She was unable to enter into his theological views , which to her school and generation seemed a desertion of the ancient ways ; thus , pathetically enough , there came to be a barrier between mother and son . The close inter- course on subjects which lay nearest to the hearts of each was broken, to the loss and sorrow of both . His love and veneration for his mother remained unimpaired , and his letters to her show his delicate consideration for her different point of view; but it is sad that he should have had to recognise that the point of view was different. She studied and knew her Bible well , and her own religious life was most carefully regulated." <sup>2</sup>

### Wikipedia:

"He had been brought up in the strictest principles of the evangelical movement, but ... he finally moved towards liberalism." <sup>3</sup>

### Hort's Admission to Ellerton, 1872,

"Possibly you have not heard that I have become Harold Browne's Examining Chaplain. I have only seen him two or three times in my life, not at all intimately, and was amazed when he made the proposal, in the kindest terms. I wrote to warn him that I was not safe or traditional in my theology, and that I could not give up association with heretics and such like;" <sup>4</sup>

#### G. Westcott's character

Westcott to J. B. Lightfoot, Oct. 24, 1866:

"The Churchman ( ! ) I see praises the book on the Canon as a necessary article in a clergyman's library. It is strange , but all the questionable doctrines which I have ever maintained are in it." <sup>5</sup>

### II **An Objection: What About the Fact that They Wrote Conservative Commentaries?**

Hort's Answer in a letter to Westcott, 1861, 8 years into the Greek text project:

"Also - but this may be cowardice - I have a sort of craving that our text should be cast upon the world before we deal with matters likely to brand us with suspicion . I mean, a text, issued by men already known for what will undoubtedly be treated as dangerous heresy, will have great difficulties in finding its way to regions which it might otherwise hope to reach, and whence it would not be easily banished by subsequent alarms."<sup>6</sup> (They hid their true beliefs.)

### III **They Denied Biblical Infallibility**

Westcott, 1860, Age 35

"I too 'must disclaim setting forth infallibility' in the front of my convictions ... and that at present I find the presumption in favour of the absolute truth - I reject the word infallibility - of Holy Scripture over whelming."<sup>7</sup>

Hort, 1858, Age 30

"The positive doctrines even of the Evangelicals seem to me perverted rather than untrue. There are, I fear, still more serious differences between us on the subject of authority, and especially the authority of the Bible;" <sup>8</sup>

Hort to Lightfoot, May 1, 1860

"But I now feel that I must say a word about more general principles . If you make a decided conviction of the absolute infallibility of the N. T. practically a sine qua non for cooperation , I fear I could not join you , even if you were willing to forget your fears about the origin of the Gospels ... which he discovered that I did 'recognise' 'Providence' in Biblical writings . Most strongly I recognise it; but I am not prepared to say that it necessarily involves absolute infallibility."<sup>9</sup>

### IV **They Denied that Genesis was Historical**

Westcott, 1890, Age 65

"No one now , I suppose , holds that the first three chapters of Genesis, for example, give a literal history - I could never understand how any one reading them with open eyes could think they did ..." <sup>10</sup>

Hort To Mr. H. Brinton ( An Oxford undergraduate, who had asked for help in difficulties suggested by the Thirty - nine Articles, which he had to study for the -- now obsolete examination in the ' Rudiments of Faith and Religion . ') Cambridge, January 1886:

"The authors of the Article doubtless assumed the strictly historical character of the account of the Fall in Genesis . This assumption is now , in my belief , no longer reasonable . But the early chapters of Genesis remain a divinely appointed parable or apologue setting forth important practical truths on subjects which, as matter of history, lie outside our present ken." <sup>11</sup>

Hort to Westcott Mar 10, 1860

"Have you read Darwin? How I should like a talk with you about it! In spite of difficulties, I am inclined to think it unanswerable. In any case it is a treat to read such In a book." <sup>12</sup>

Hort to John Ellerton April 3, 1860

"But the book which has most engaged me is Darwin . Whatever may be thought of it , it is a book that one is proud to be contemporary with . I must work out and examine the argument more in detail , but at present my feeling is strong that the theory is unanswerable . If so , it opens up a new period in - I know not what not." <sup>13</sup>

## V Error in Doctrines of Salvation

Westcott - commentary of John 15:8, "a Christian never 'is' but always 'is becoming' a Christian." <sup>14</sup>

**ESV, NIV** - 1 Cor. 1:18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Hort to Westcott, 1860 – “I entirely agree - correcting one word — with what you there say on the Atonement, having for many years believed that ‘the absolute union of the Christian (or rather, of man) with Christ Himself’ is the spiritual truth of which the popular doctrine of substitution is an immoral and material counterfeit. But I doubt whether that answers the question as to the nature of the satisfaction. Certainly nothing can be more unscriptural than the modern limiting of Christ's bearing our sins and sufferings to His death; but indeed that is only one aspect of an almost universal heresy.” <sup>15</sup>

The Necessity of Purgatory-like cleansing, Hort to H. Brinton, Jan. 1886

“ ‘Purgatory’ is not a word that I should myself spontaneously adopt, because it is associated with Roman theories about the future state for which I see no foundation. But the idea of purgation, of cleansing as by fire, seems to me inseparable from what the Bible teaches us of the Divine chastisements;” <sup>16</sup>

## VI They Believed in Baptismal Regeneration

Hort, 1848, Age 19

“we maintain ‘Baptismal Regeneration’ as the most important of doctrines, ...” <sup>17</sup>

Hort to a Lady who recently joined the church, Feb. 23, 1867, Age 38

“Baptism assures us that we are children of God, members of Christ and His body, and heirs of the heavenly kingdom.” <sup>18</sup>

Hort to his son, Arthur, March 16, 1879, Age 50

“While yet an infant you were claimed for God by being made in Baptism an unconscious member of His Church ...” <sup>19</sup>

Westcott, 1849, Age 24

“By birth he may, if he will, truly live here; by baptism he may, if he will, truly live for ever. I do not say that Baptism is absolutely necessary, though from the words of Scripture I can see no exception, but I do think we have no right to exclaim against the idea of the commencement of a spiritual life, conditionally from Baptism, any more than we have to deny the commencement of a moral life from birth.” <sup>20</sup>

## VII Did they believe in the Historical fact of the Resurrection?

Westcott, 1865, Age 40

“However much I may wish to maintain that the Resurrection and the Ascension are both facts, yet I am forced to admit that they are facts wholly different in kind, and for us the historical life of the Lord closes with the last scene on Olivet ...” <sup>21</sup>

## VII They were involved in the Occult

Hort, 1851, Age 23, while attending Oxford

“Westcott, Gorham, C. B. Scott, Benson, Bradshaw, Luard, etc., and I have started a society for the investigation of ghosts and all supernatural appearances and effects, being all disposed to believe that such things really exist, and ought to be discriminated from hoaxes and mere subjective delusions; we shall be happy to obtain any good accounts well authenticated with names. Westcott is drawing up a schedule of questions ... our own temporary name is the ‘Ghostly Guild.’” <sup>22</sup>

From Arthur Westcott about his father’s involvement

“He (Westcott) devoted himself with ardour, during his last year at Cambridge, to two new societies. One of these was the “Ghostly Guild” and the other the “Choral Society.” The “Ghostly Guild,” which numbered amongst its members A. Barry, E. W. Benson, H. Bradshaw, the Hon. A. Gordon, F. J. A. Hort, H. Luard, and C. B. Scott, was established for the investigation of all supernatural appearances and effects. Westcott took a leading part in their proceedings, and their inquiry circular was originally drawn up by him. He also

received a number of communications in response ... One of my father's earliest letters to Mr. Hort concerns this Guild. Writing from Bristol in January 1852, he says: "I am sorry I have delayed so long to write to you about our "ghostlie circular," but in truth I have had very little leisure since I left Cambridge; my first spare time was bestowed on the revision of the form which was drawn up at our discursive meeting , and as soon as the task was accomplished, I sent it to Benson; from him it will pass to Gordon, and then I will send it to you; of course it is merely provisional, but when anything is once moulded it is easy to reshape its details. I expect to return home on Saturday, and then possibly I may find time. Perhaps when you receive the "form" you will make any corrections which occur to you at once and let me have it again as soon as possible, for I am anxious to make a commencement this Christmas. I had a note from Gordon the other day, and he tells me that he has an admirably authenticated communication. I have collected very little, but all my inquiries have met with a certain sympathy, which shows that many will echo what they do not choose to say." <sup>23</sup>

Westcott to Hort, January 1852.

"The interest and importance of a serious and earnest inquiry into the nature of the phenomena which are vaguely called "supernatural "will scarcely be questioned. Many persons believe that all such apparently mysterious occurrences are due either to purely natural causes , or to delusions of the mind or senses , or to wilful deception . But there are many others who believe it possible that the beings of the unseen world may manifest themselves to us in extraordinary ways , and also are unable otherwise to explain many facts the evidence for which cannot be impeached . Both parties have obviously a common interest in wishing cases of supposed "supernatural " agency to be thoroughly sifted. If the belief of the latter class should be ultimately confirmed , the limits which human knowledge respecting the spirit - world has hitherto reached might be ascertained with some degree of accuracy. But in any case, even if it should appear that morbid or irregular workings of the mind or senses will satisfactorily account for every such marvel , still some progress would be made towards ascertaining the laws which regulate our being, and thus adding to our scanty knowledge of an obscure but important province of science." <sup>24</sup>

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Comment by David Sorensen

'Today the "Ghostly Guild" is listed in The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology as an occult organization in which its members related personal experiences with ghosts.' <sup>26</sup>

Hort continued involvement after the Ghostly Guild, Hort to his wife, 1864, eleven years into the Greek text revision project:

"We had a pleasant evening, six of Westcott's Sixth Form boys dining with us .... Then we worked till near dinner, when we had a very nice little party, the two De Morgans, H. M. Butler, Farrar, Brady and his mother, and H. W. Watson. Mrs. Brady ... came in the evening. We tried to turn tables, but the creatures wouldn't stir." <sup>27</sup>

Note: The phrase "we tried to turn tables" is a direct reference to an occult seance and "the creatures" that "wouldn't stir" is a reference to the spirits that Hort and his guests were invoking to establish communication with. Westcott and Hort were accomplished practitioners of the occult.

### Westcott and the "Communion of the Saints"

"The Communion of Saints , seems peculiarly associated with Peterborough , and is published in a volume of Peterborough Sermons . The subject , too , is one so very dear to himself. He had an extraordinary power of realising this Communion . It was his delight to be **alone** at night in the great Cathedral, for there he could meditate and pray in full sympathy with all that was good and great in the past. I have been with him there on a moonlight evening when the vast building was haunted with strange lights and shades , and the ticking of the great clock sounded like some giant's footsteps in the **deep silence**. Then **he had always abundant company**. Once a daughter in later years met him returning from one of his customary meditations in the **solitary** darkness of the chapel at Auckland Castle , and she said to him , "I expect you do not feel alone ? " "Oh no," he said , "**it is full**"; and as he spoke his face shone with one of his beautiful smiles." <sup>28</sup>

### **IX Why is This Important?**

- A. Westcott and Hort' Greek text is the foundational source for 99.9 % of modern English Versions.
- B. Even the popular modern versions that say they come from the Textus Receptus show influence from the WH text.
  - 1. In the footnotes
  - 2. In the way some verses are translated.
- C. A Bitter Fountain cannot give Fresh water (James 3:11-12)  
This is the fountain from which all popular modern English versions have flowed.  
What kind of fountain is it?
- D. Westcott and Hort had a serious amount of spiritual blindness. Do not follow the blind  
Matthew 15:14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

All who follow modern versions are following Westcott and Hort.

## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Arthur Fenton Hort. The Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort, Vol. 1. Google Edition. P. 211.
- <sup>2</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 1. P. 7-8.
- <sup>3</sup> Wikipedia. Hort.
- <sup>4</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 2. P. 165.
- <sup>5</sup> Arthur Westcott. The Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott, Vol. 1. Google Edition. P. 290.
- <sup>6</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 1. P. 445.
- <sup>7</sup> Westcott, Life. Vol. 1. P. 207
- <sup>8</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 1. P. 400.
- <sup>9</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 1. P. 420-421.
- <sup>10</sup> Westcott, Life. Vol. 2. P. 69.
- <sup>11</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 1. P. 329.
- <sup>12</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 1. P. 414
- <sup>13</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 1. P. 416.
- <sup>14</sup> D. A. Waite, The Theological Heresies of Westcott and Hort, (Collingswood, NJ, The Bible for Today, Inc., 1979), p. 5. Cite. Dr. Peter Putney. Westcott & Hort: their heresies and occult activities. RVG Bible Society. Apr 11, 2022. <https://www.sociedadrvg.com/en/post/westcott-hort-their-heresies-and-occult-activities>.
- <sup>15</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 1. P. 430.
- <sup>16</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. II, P. 336.
- <sup>17</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 1. P. 76.
- <sup>18</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 2. P. 78.
- <sup>19</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 2. P. 273.
- <sup>20</sup> Westcott, Life. Vol. 1. 160.
- <sup>21</sup> Westcott, Life. Vol. 1. 287.
- <sup>22</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 1. P. 211.
- <sup>23</sup> Letter to Hort, January 1852. Westcott, Life. Vol. 1, P. 117.
- <sup>24</sup> Westcott, Life. Vol. 1. P. 118.
- <sup>25</sup> Westcott, Life. Vol. 1. P. 118.
- <sup>26</sup> David H. Sorenson, Touch not the Unclean Thing, p. 177. Cite. Dr. Peter Putney. Westcott & Hort: their heresies and occult activities. RVG Bible Society. Apr 11, 2022. <https://www.sociedadrvg.com/en/post/westcott-hort-their-heresies-and-occult-activities>.
- <sup>27</sup> Hort, Life. Vol. 2. P. 36
- <sup>28</sup> Westcott, Life. Vol. 2, p. 312, 313