

Essay

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SHOULD FUNDAMENTALISTS USE THE NASV?

INTRODUCTION

The most recent entry in the spate of literature questioning the value of the *King James Bible (KJB)* and recommending as an alternative the *New American Standard Version (NASV)* is the volume edited by Roy Beacham and Kevin Bauder, *Only One Bible?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publication, 2001), pp. 149,179 . This new volume of 238 pp. is another effort, following on the heels of a recent article on preservation (William W. Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture.” *Detroit Baptist Theological Journal* 5 [2000]: 3-44), and a recent book (James B. Williams, *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man*, 3rd Edition. Greenville: Ambassador-Emerald International, 1999) by professing fundamentalists connected either directly or indirectly to the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship (FBF) and Bob Jones University (BJU), advocating the superiority of the *NASV* over the *KJB*. The thrust of the argument of this recent element in fundamentalism seems to be that the fundamentalist public is endangered by the “*King James-Only Movement*” (*KJOM*). This alleged endangerment is serious for several reasons. First, the *KJOM* is dangerous because it “soweth discord among brethren” (cf. Prov. 6:19) by insisting that only one translation be used by those professing to be fundamentalists. This insistence for the *KJB* obviously precludes fundamentalists from using the *NASV* and other modern versions. Second, the *KJOM* is dangerous because of its collective ignorance of history (i.e., not all fundamentalists have used only the *KJB*) or insensitivity to the values of the Westcott-Hort textual criticism theory (the oldest manuscripts are the best, recent discoveries offer new evidence, etc.). Third, the *KJOM* is dangerous because it obfuscates the merits of the *NASV* through verbal and/or theological smoke screens that may not allow the fundamentalist public to recognize the supposed comparable if not superior value of the *NASV*.

However, the Bible clearly teaches that “the bastion of fundamentalism” is the local church which is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15).

Although several responses are necessary to the first two alleged dangers of the *KJOM*, the substance of this essay will be to examine the value of the *NASV* that is being foisted upon the fundamentalist public. In response to the first alleged danger, those fellowships and educational institutions that tout themselves as “bastions of fundamentalism” apparently fail to recognize that the sword of theological separation swings both ways. For them, separating from other fundamentalists is “standing for the truth,” but

when others separate from them it is “sowing discord among the brethren.” However, the Bible clearly teaches that “the bastion of fundamentalism” is the local church which is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15). That local New Testament (NT) churches have the biblical responsibility to separate from all theological error regarding any doctrine, including bibliology, is non-controversial. Pastors and members of NT churches should not be cajoled into thinking they are sowing discord when they personally or collectively fulfill their God-given mandate to separate from systems of theological compromise.

Regarding the second alleged danger, the *KJOM*, for the most part, is neither ignorant about nor insensitive to the issues at hand. The *KJOM* is not a novelty; in point of fact from about the middle of the 17th century to the end of the 19th century, fundamentalists had no other serious translation option than the *KJB*, and that was because of deliberate text/translation choices. Furthermore, there are those within the *KJOM* who know and teach Greek and Hebrew at the seminary level and are intimately acquainted with the Westcott-Hort textual theory, yet are unconvinced about any merit in the theory whatsoever.

VALUE OF THE NASV

The agency which attempted to rescue the *ASV* “from an inevitable demise” (Preface to the *New American Standard Bible*, AD 1963) was The Lockman Foundation (for whom *BJU* faculty consulted). The NT, using the 23rd edition of the Nestle Greek New Testament (commonly known as the *Critical Text* [*CT*]), was completed in 1963, and the Old Testament (OT) was added in 1970 to complete the translation (the updated *NASV* came out in 1995). The Lockman Foundation pursued the goal of producing a true and grammatically correct rendering of the original language texts. As commendable as this goal may seem, the *NASV* is nevertheless flawed with serious problems. These problems are real and present dangers to the fundamentalist public. The *NASV* is dangerous because of the translators’ approach to bibliology, the quality of the text they used, and the merit of their translation. In light of these dangers of the *NASV*, it is unimaginable why professing fundamentalists would recommend to the fundamentalist public a translation of such a pernicious nature.

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The Approach to Bibliology

Rationalistic Evidentialism

An initial fallacy in the approach of those who promote the *NASV* and its underlying text is the utilization of the rationalistic approach to bibliology. Instead of holding to a fideistic evidentialism as Scripture demands, devotees of the *NASV* argue for a secular, rationalistic evidentialism. In Heb. 11:1, the author states, “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” As the author continues, “*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things*

which do appear” (v. 3), faith must precede historical/rationalistic evidence, using as an example faith in God’s word to come to a belief in creation. However, proponents of the *NASV* argue that the historical evidence of the manuscripts takes precedence over faith in the Lord’s promises of perfect preservation. This would be akin to suggesting that since the distance of stars, and hence light travel, is so vast and thus supposedly demanding billions of years for the age of the universe, faith in the Scriptural teaching of a young universe must give way to this apparent evidence. The Bible teaches its own verbal plenary preservation and the text/translation that fits this predicted model is the *TR/KJV*, and not the *CT/NASV*. By faith, the bibliologist must require manuscript evidence to be in subjection to the clear promises of perfect preservation (e.g., Mt. 24:35).

Ministering Questions

A second problem with the approach of the *NASV* promulgators is the ongoing “ministering of questions, rather than godly edifying” (I Tim. 1:4). The pro-*NASV* devotees constantly call into question the integrity and accuracy of the *King James Bible*, which Bible the Lord has used for 390 years. The *KJB* and *NASV* are not the same so they both cannot be the Bible. The “yea, hath God said” approach against the *KJB* used by pro-*NASV* fundamentalists is detrimental to the edifying of the saints, as Adam and Eve discovered years ago.

Bible Like Any Other Writing

A third fallacy of this approach is that the architects of textual criticism treated the Bible like any other piece of literature. Lachmann applied his classical text criticism principles to the Bible that led the way for others to treat the Bible as any other book. Hort’s infamous affirmation popularized this unbiblical approach, stating “[t]he principles of criticism explained in the foregoing section hold good for all ancient texts preserved in a plurality of documents. In dealing with the text of the New Testament no new principle whatever is needed or legitimate” (B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2 Vols. [London: Macmillan and Co., 1881], p. 73). The *NASV* devotees, following their Lachmannian gurus who demanded that the Bible be treated like any other book, fly in the face of Pauline received text theology: “*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*” (I Thess. 2:13).

No Textual Tampering

Another flaw in the approach of the architects of the text of the *NASV*, and subsequently in the argument of the promoters of the *NASV*, is that no textual tampering by heretics occurred. Hort assures his followers that “our belief [is] that even among the numerous unquestionably spurious readings of the New Testament there are no signs of deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes” (Westcott and Hort, p. 282). Again, this basic approach to bibliology is contrary to the Bible. For instance, Peter warned around AD 64 that heretics perverted Paul’s letters, stating, “*as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest* (στρεβλοῦσιν,

to twist, torture, distort, wrench, or turn), *as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction*” (II Pet. 3:16). Peter warned his audience about the heretical tampering with the text of the originals and Paul warned the Thessalonians about actual canonical tampering. The latter apostle warned “*that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand*” (II Thess. 2:2). These verses teach that the first generation Christians were cognizant about the first century heretical conspiracy to change God’s revelation in both text and canon. Corrupted texts and pseudo-canonical literature originated early and were fostered by the proto-catholic churches (✠ contains the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas) and patristics (i.e., Irenaeus, Cyprian, Origen, etc.). That the Bible declares emphatically early textual/canonical corruption followed shortly after the writing of the *autographa* is non-controversial.

Evolutionary Nature of the Theory of Textual Criticism

The fifth fallacy is the evolutionary nature permeating the theory of textual criticism producing the text behind the NASV. Westcott and Hort’s unprovable argument that the *Syrian/TR/KJV* text was conflated (expanded) from earlier readings to make it longer, fuller, and later bespeaks of the basic principle of evolution, which advocates that everything moves from simple to complex. This theory that the text behind the *KJB* is later and therefore secondary and inferior because it is completely evolved is unwarranted. Since it is admittedly a fuller text than the Critical Text of the NASV shows that the Critical Text is a “deflated” text. The Biblical writers warned about those who would change the words of Scripture, including the deletion of words (cf. Dt. 4:2 and Rev. 22:18-19).

Scholars Must Restore What God Presumably Did Not Preserve

Fundamentalist proponents of the *CT/NASV* must argue that the task of scholars is to restore from the totality of manuscripts the readings closest to the originals through the use of the principles of textual criticism. They must deny the Lord Jesus Christ’s promise of the perfect preservation of all of His canonical Words (“*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*” [Mt. 24:35]) and His expectation that believers would receive these Words (“*For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them...*” [Jn. 17:8; cf. v. 20]). They must defend the unenviable position that the discipline of textual criticism *in toto* is the one discipline of Biblical Criticism which was unadulterated by anti-supernatural rationalism. And when they do “restore” God’s Words, how will anyone know it since this “truth” was determined by extra-biblical means rather than the NT pattern whereby NT church members receive God’s preserved Words (Mt. 28:19-20; I Tim. 3:15), which reception is to be confirmed by the same believers hearing His voice (Jn. 10:27)?

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All Scribes, Manuscripts, Texts and Translations Are “Good”

Since the *NASV* differs from the *KJB* in about 7% of the text (the equivalent of the Books of Jude and Revelation), advocates of the former must argue that there was no first century conspiracy against the originals, that all the scribes throughout history were “angels,” and that the manuscripts, Greek editions and conservative translations are all “good.” They cannot allow any suggestion of corruption in the history of the transmission of the text (except with known heretics such as Marcion), which suggestion might prompt believers to “*prove all things; hold fast that which is good*” (I Thess. 5:21) and thereby realize both the *NASV* and the *KJB* cannot be the Bible. Statements such as the one by J. Mincy who states “Bible believers can read, for example, the King James Version, the New American Standard Version, or the New King James Version and believe with all confidence that they are reading God’s Word” (James. B. Williams, *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man*, p. 144) are illogical and incomprehensible. This is an example of blatant bi-textualism that cannot possibly be true and must be rejected by fundamentalists.

Scholars are Authoritative over Pastors and Local Churches

Christ gave the Great Commission, which is incumbent upon each Christian in every NT church, stating “*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*” (Mt. 28:19-20). Quite simply local NT immersionist churches have the responsibility to observe (τηρεῖν to guard or keep [cf. Rev. 3:8]) the Words of Christ. Confusion abounds however, about what is and to whom was given the Great Commission. Bauder speaks of “the Church of Jesus Christ” as if it were some undefined, nebulous entity which may receive “damaging doctrine” (Beacham and Bauder, p. 17, cf. p. 122). This entity apparently embraces scholars of para-church ministries who supposedly will restore the text for and yet in fact speak condescendingly to pastors and local NT churches. The Lord has given the responsibility to recognize, receive and preserve His Words to His NT churches. That many pastors of NT churches realize this responsibility with regard to their respective churches and reject the efforts of outside “authorities” lording over them with respect to bibliology is commendable and honors the Lord Jesus Christ.

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The Quality of the Text

The *NASV* has several significant errors in the underlying Greek text of the 23rd edition of the Nestle Greek NT. That some fundamentalists would offer to the fundamentalist public a translation based on a Greek edition with known and acknowledged errors is reprehensible.

Whatever happened to the doctrine of inerrancy in the originals? Several examples of the errant 23rd edition of the Nestle Greek NT follow.

Matthew 1:7-8; 10

Matthew established the right of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Royal King of the Jews by tracing His genealogy back through the throne of David (Mt. 1:1-17). Two kings in this royal genealogy were Asa and Amon (cf. I Chron. 3: 10,14). However, **Ⲛ** and B, the two major manuscripts behind the Critical Text, read Asaph for Asa and Amos for Amon, respectively. Although Asaph the psalmist and Amos the prophet were godly men, they have no place in the royal genealogy of Christ. Fundamentalists who are promoting the *NASV* must agree with the scholars who state that Matthew drew these names from an errant source and consequently wrote errant names in his original *autographa*! For instance, B. Metzger gives his anti-supernatural defense which betrays his apostasy, stating, “[T]he evangelist [Matthew] may have derived material for the genealogy, not from the Old Testament directly, but from subsequent genealogical lists, in which the **erroneous** spelling occurred, the Committee [Metzger, Aland, Black, Martini, and Wikgren] saw no reason to adopt what appears to be a scribal emendation [e.g., change Asaph to Asa]” (Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [NY: United Bible Societies], p. 1). The *NASV* translates the correct names Asa and Amon, but it acknowledges that the Greek text reads Asaph and Amos, respectively. This translation phenomenon prompts several questions. Why does the *NASV* not follow its Greek text, and if it is not going to translate known errors, why follow the Critical Text? The manuscripts **Ⲛ** and B are untrustworthy, and yet text scholars would rather defend the errant **Ⲛ** and B than the inerrant Matthean original! Professing fundamentalists who promote the *NASV* are guilty, either deliberately or by default, of propagating errancy in the originals. This is indeed a new direction in “fundamentalism.”

Mark 1:2-3

The *KJB* reads “As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness,

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Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Mk. 1:2-3). Clearly Mark the Evangelist cites from the prophets Malachi (3:1) and Isaiah (40:3) the prophecies concerning John the Baptist. The *NASV*, following the *CT*, reads erroneously “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet...” Since Isaiah did not write “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee” (Mal. 3:1), the *NASV*, following the *CT* built upon **Ⲛ** and B, is in error. D. Wallace attempts to defend this erroneous variant stating that text critics (presumably including himself) “have sufficient respect for a

biblical author that they will not impute to him an ostensible inaccuracy unless the manuscript testimony compels them to do so. At all points, textual critics are historians who have to base their views on data, not mere theological convictions” (Daniel B. Wallace, “Mark 1:2 and New Testament Textual Criticism,” 1997, [http:// www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/mark1-2.htm](http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/mark1-2.htm), 15 Jan.

2001). Further, he states “[w]hatever one’s beliefs about inerrancy, it seems to me, they have to adjust to this piece of evidence” (p. 2). Wallace, whose view of the inerrancy of the *autographa* is certainly suspect, continues to propagate the extreme fallacy of opting for an errant **Σ** and B over an inerrant Biblical writer (i.e. Mark). Fundamentalists who defend the *CT* and modern translations such as the *NASV* must knowingly defend an unbelieving view of the doctrine of inerrancy.

Other Problems in the Quality of the Text

The *CT* and subsequent translations are not only weak because of errors in the Greek text (cf. Jn. 7:8 and Lk. 23:45 for other examples), but also because of significant passages which are missing. Since **Σ** and B omit Mk. 16:9-20, the modern versions either omit the passage (*RSV*) or bracket it (*NASV*). In the face of the evidence of the majority support of manuscripts, C. Ryrie nevertheless suggests that “the original closing verses were lost” (Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible, KJV* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1978], p. 1433). One wonders who lost these verses, Mark or God? Another significant passage that the *CT* and modern versions question either by omission or brackets is Jn. 7:53-8:11. Again, **Σ** and B and a few other manuscripts omit the *pericope de adultera* in the face of a preponderance of manuscript evidence. One is faced with the question that either a “pious scribe” introduced the passage at this juncture (but would he be pious in light of Rev. 22:18?), or a heretic omitted the passage for doctrinal purposes (cf. Rev. 22:19).

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The *CT* and *NASV* continue to promote the ancient heresy espoused by Valentinus and popularized by Origen that Jesus Christ was a created and secondary deity. The *NASV*, following the *CT* based on **Σ** and B, translates the first clause of Jn. 1:18 erroneously as “the only begotten God” rather than “the only begotten Son.” John forcefully argued for the deity of the Son in vv. 1-18, declaring that the Word was God (1:1), the Word was the only begotten (1:14), and the only begotten was the Son (1:18), thus declaring that the Son is God (Word=God, Word=Only Begotten, Only Begotten=Son, Son=God). The *NASV* has John declaring that God (v. 1) is God (v. 18), an obvious but unnecessary truism (Word=God, Word=Only Begotten, Only Begotten=God, God=God).

Another theologically significant passage besmudged by the *CT* and modern translations is Jn. 3:13; the expression “which is in heaven,” teaching the ubiquity of the Lord Jesus Christ, is omitted in the *NASV*. The *NASV* omits the incarnation of deity in I Tim. 3:16 (“he who” for “God”), and the three heavenly witnesses in I Jn. 5:7 (creating a grammatical error in the Greek text). These are representative examples of about 7% of the Greek text changed for the worse in the *CT* and subsequent translations.

The Merit of the Translation

The proponents of the *NASV* claim that it is a superior translation over the *KJB*. Yet the quality of the translation of *NASV*, some of which is based on the faulty underlying Greek text, is inferior. The following are some of the inferior qualities of the *NASV* which generate popular distrust for this translation, and which give reason that it should be eschewed by fundamentalists.

Reduction of “Thees and thous”

The modern translators treat the omission of the *KJB* usage of “thee,” “thou,” “ye,” “thine,” etc., as a great step in the effort to clarify translations (*NIV*, *NKJV*, *NRSV*). To the contrary, however, modern translations are not improved at all. The translators of the *KJB* attempted to convey in English the pronoun number (singular or plural) in what might be called “Biblical English,” translating the second person singular you as “thee” and the plural you as “ye.” Although the *NASV* does retain thee and thou for deity (as if there is theological significance in retaining “archaic” pronouns for deity only), it obscures the intended audience in many places. In one of many examples, the *NASV* obfuscates the plural audience in I Cor. 3:17, stating, “If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you (*KJB* “ye”) are.”

No “Easter”

The *NASV* gives the impossible and therefore inaccurate rendering “Passover” in Acts 12:4. According to Scripture, Herod killed the Apostle James and intended to kill Peter, whom he had captured during the days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After the *πάσχα* (*NASV* “Passover;” *KJB* “Easter”) Herod planned to kill Peter. The OT declared the order of events for the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, requiring that the Passover fell on the 14th day of Nisan and the Feast of Unleavened Bread followed on the 15th through 21st days of Nisan (Lev. 23:5-6; cf. Ex. 12:3 ff.). Luke could not possibly be referring to the Passover following the Feast of Unleavened Bread, contrary to the dictates of the OT and context, but must be referring to Herod’s “Easter” (Ishtar worship) holy day. Passover is a translational error in the *NASV*, *NIV*, *RSV*, and *NKJV*.

Pro-Romish

The *CT* text is built primarily on Westcott-Hort’s favorite manuscript, Codex Vaticanus (B), so named because of its home in Rome’s Vatican Library since 1475. This manuscript, along with **8**, has a certain proclivity for text/translation variants that promote Roman Catholic doctrine. The *NASV* promotes the erroneous doctrine of a territorial church. It follows the *CT* and translates Acts 9:31, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace...” The *KJB* is consistent with the NT and translates “*Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria...*” The NT nowhere teaches the Roman Catholic notion of a territorial, universal and visible, catholic, parish type church (cf. the *NASV*’s omission of church in Acts 2:47) .

The *NASV* promotes the Popish heresy that the elements of “the Mass are not for the laity” by omitting Christ’s command “eat” (Mk. 14:22) and “take, eat” (I Cor. 11:24). Concerning the ordinance of baptism, the *NASV* omits the confession of faith necessary for those who receive baptism by excising the whole verse of Acts 8:37, opening the possibility of infant baptism. The *NASV* allows for Mariolatry in Heb. 1:3 by removing the reflexive pronoun “himself,” which declares that Jesus Christ “by himself purged our sins.” Again, the proclivity of the *NASV* towards Rome is suggested in the retention of the Latin Vulgate reading “wash their robes” rather than the Greek reading “do his commandments” (*KJB*) supported by the majority of Greek manuscripts in Rev. 22:14. It is strange indeed for fundamentalists to promote a translation that unabashedly countenances the Roman Catholic Church.

Weak ecclesiastical separation

Theologically and historically, a characteristic of Biblical fundamentalism is strong ecclesiastical separation from apostasy. The *NASV* however, fails to warn against apostasy in local churches by expunging “*from such withdraw thyself*” in I Tim. 6:5. Although some may argue that ecclesiastical separation is taught in other books, early saints may not have had all of the NT canon and consequently this omitted warning in the tampered texts would eliminate for them any teaching on this important doctrine.

No ascension in Gospels

The *NASV* completely eliminates the Gospel passages that include the ascension of Christ. The *NASV* brackets the Markan account of the ascension in Mk. 16:9-20 (i.e., “*he was received up into heaven*”), and omits the clause “*and [he was] carried up into heaven*” (Lk. 24:51). It need not be pointed out that the actual and physical ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven is just as important theologically as His actual and physical resurrection from the grave.

Omission of the full names and titles of Christ

The Gnostics of the first century attempted to disassociate Jesus from the Christ in the heresy called Adoptionism. This Gnostic heresy taught that the Christ Spirit came upon Jesus of Nazareth at His baptism and departed from Him at His death. These Gnostics attempted to

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propagate their heresy by tampering with the early Greek text, omitting names and titles out of the full expression of the person of Christ (cf. Mt. 13:51; Acts 15:11; Eph. 3:9, etc.). John warned about this Gnostic heresy, stating, “*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?*” (I Jn. 2:22). The modern versions including the *NASV* are based on these Gnostic-laced texts displaying this vast conspiracy of antiquity by disassociating the name Jesus from the titles Christ and Lord by over 200 omissions of His name or title. How can some fundamentalists claim that both the *KJB* and the *NASV* are at the same time equal and good? How can

other fundamentalists suggest the superiority of the *NASV* over the *KJB* in light of numerous omissions with respect to the full title of Christ?

CONCLUSION

Should fundamentalists use the *NASV*? This essay is an attempt to warn the fundamentalist public that there are inherent weaknesses in this translation. This author has demonstrated that the translators of the *NASV* used a man-centered approach to biblology, translated from the *CT* which is based on known errors in its underlying Greek manuscripts (**⌚** and B), and produced a translation extremely inferior to the *KJB*. Why would some fundamentalists encourage the fundamentalist public to use a translation of such dubious nature and that has been in existence for less than one tenth of the time of the *KJB*? Are some fundamentalists so spiritually naïve as to fail to recognize Satan's subtle attack upon God's Words through the modern translation movement? Shall we not as fundamentalists defend the Bibliology enunciated by Isaiah who said about his own inscripturated sermons, "*but the word of our God shall stand for ever*" (Isaiah 40:8; cf. 34:16)?

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