

## The Inevitable Influence of Text

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From where do societies' shifts derive? What causes a stir, a change among the inhabitants of the world? In *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory*, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle write about the influence of the written word upon the world. They argue that rather than text flowing from civilizations, or being separate from the world, that we should 'say rather that text[s] make up our world'.<sup>1</sup> They argue that the essence of our culture is 'mediated by language' and that 'texts produce our reality'. While their hypothesis may seem extreme, their conclusion is not subject to mere idealism; we can see their theoretical principle proven as we look back upon historical texts and their influences upon societies and religions. History demonstrates that diction can change the world in which we live, proving that text itself precedes culture and alone can transform society. For this paper, I will be using the writing and translations of the ancient Hebrew and Greek text known today as the Holy Bible. Text altering the world is proven through additions, translations, and interpretations of the Bible at different times in history. As the text underwent changes, the world transitioned with it. We will see how text causing change is an inevitable phenomenon proven through the alteration of the text as a whole, the translations of one line, and the interpretations of a single word. While I am making intense statements about the alterations of society through Biblical text, I will not be touching on the moralistic conclusions I have personally encountered.

The authority of text can alone be proven by the addition of the New Testament to the Old Testament. The Bible is composed of two segments: the Old Testament (beginning with the story of creation in the book of Genesis) and the New Testament (beginning with the birth of Jesus Christ in the book of Matthew)<sup>2</sup>. The Old Testament was a Hebrew manuscript articulating rules and regulations for the Israelites, also known as the Children of Abraham or the Hebrews (Galatians 3:7 NIV). These statutes were the foundation for the Jewish faith and

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited, 2004), p. 30-32.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984).

date back to around 2500 AD.<sup>3</sup> While the Old Testament prophecies and monotheistic views were agreed upon by the entire Hebrew nation, they were forced to split due to the New Testament text. A massive swing took place within the Hebrew culture when the life of Jesus Christ was recorded in Koine Greek (the New Testament) and added to the Old Testament writings.<sup>4</sup> The divide created a sect which is now referred to as the Messianic Jews (also known as Christian or Christ Followers).<sup>5</sup> The Messianic Jews believe the New Testament is the fulfillment (or missing link) to the Old Testament.

The reasoning behind the split was not only due to the life of Jesus Christ, but also due to the fact that the New Testament's regulations were different than the Old Testament. Those who chose to believe the New Testament text were forced to break away from regulations followed by their Hebrew culture. For example, Old Testament laws were that the Hebrew people were not to eat certain types of meat (Leviticus 11 NIV), they were to be circumcised (Genesis 17 NIV), and they were required to give sacrifices for their sins (Leviticus 23 NIV). But in the New Testament, new regulations were created that allowed all animal types to be eaten (Acts 10), circumcision was no longer an ordeal (1 Corinthians 7 NIV), and no longer required that an animal be brought as a burnt offering before God (Hebrews 10 NIV). But besides the physical regulations shifting, there were also deeper beliefs that were altered. For example, in the Old Testament, it was lawful for a mistreated person to return the bad behavior to the one who hurt them (Exodus 21:24 NIV). However, the New Testament recording of Christ's teachings were that the Jewish world was then to love people even when they were wronged. The New Testament states, 'Do not repay evil for evil.' (Romans 12:17 NIV). This law in itself shifted the rules of the entire Mosaic world. People who were under the Jewish way were forced to rethink and react according the new way of living. Without this text, there would have been no need for a shift.

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<sup>3</sup> Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), pp. 44–47, 71–90.

<sup>4</sup> The process of the addition of the New Testament took time. It was at the Council of Laodicea (AD 363) and council at Carthage (AD 397) that the New Testament that the finalization of the New Testament *officially* merging with the Old. For more information see William Evans, *The Book of Books: the Canon of the Bible* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1902), pp. 135-136.

<sup>5</sup> Bradley Nystrom and David Nystrom, *The History of Christianity: An Introduction* (New York, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), pp.1-2.

While we can see how the addition of text changed an entire culture, it's vital to take a closer look at how individual phrases or lines (referred to as Bible verses) shaped and altered Christianity from that point forward. Although the majority of modern day Christians (Orthodox and Protestant) have common thoughts about the fundamental principles of the New Testament, a variety of verses are alone responsible for the schism of denominations amongst modern Christian sects. It was in 1054 AD that we first see a denominational split of the Messianic world. The division involved the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. This split is known as the Great East-West Schism.<sup>6</sup> The schism was caused by differing view points of New Testament ideas, such as what type of bread should be used at communion<sup>7</sup>, and the controversy of filioque<sup>8</sup>. However, the Great East-West Schism was just the beginning of the division between churches; there are currently hundreds of denominational affiliations within Christianity, and the regulations of each sect are dispersed and slanted by each verse they read. For example, the Nazarene denomination can not dance due to their readings of Matthew 22:36-39, Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 10:31-33, Philippians 1:9-11, and Colossians 3:1-17 (NIV).<sup>9</sup> The Southern Baptist women aren't allowed to be Pastors based on their readings of 1 Corinthians 14:13 (NIV).<sup>10</sup> The Mennonites believe war is wrong because of James 3:18 (NIV), and they won't allow their young men to even enter into battle.<sup>11</sup> John D. Ross, expands on the Mennonite faith, adding: 'Pacifism is one of the cornerstones of the Mennonite faith, prompting many young Mennonites to elect service to the church rather

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Fairchild, 'Christian Denominations',

<[http://christianity.about.com/od/denominations/a/denominations\\_3.htm](http://christianity.about.com/od/denominations/a/denominations_3.htm)> [accessed 4 January 2012]

<sup>7</sup> Communion is a symbolic ritual where one eats bread and drinks wine in remembrance of the death of Christ. To read more, look to Eli F. Pagan, Jr. *Secrets of Communion Never Taught to the Gentile Church* (Smashword Edition, 2010),

<sup>8</sup> Controversy (also known as the Filioque Clause) is about where the Holy Spirit came from (some say God, some say God and Jesus). To read more about this, look to Laurent Cleenewerck, *His Broken Body: Understanding and Healing the Schism Between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches* (Washington DC: Euclid University Press, 2007), pp. 424-445.

<sup>9</sup> Dennis Bratcher, ed, 'Doctrinal and Ethical Positions: Church of the Nazarene',

<<http://www.crivoice.org/creednazarene.html>> [accessed 2 January 2012]

<sup>10</sup> 'Southern Baptist Convention: Women in Ministry', <<http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/pswomen.asp>> [accessed 27 December 2011]

<sup>11</sup> 'Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective',

<<http://www.mennoniteusa.org/Home/Youth/MennoniteYouth/War/tabid/355/Default.aspx>> [accessed 6 January 2012]

than military service.<sup>12</sup> The Wesleyan denomination will not speak in tongues in church services because they believe it was solitarily for when the Early Church was formed, which they base off of several verses in the Apostle Paul's book of Acts.<sup>13</sup> Mindy Starns Clark speaks on behalf of the Amish's principles, saying, 'In deference to 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Amish women never cut their hair but instead allow it to grow. They consider a woman's hair to be her glory, which she shares only with her husband in private.'<sup>14</sup>

Ironically, none of these sects of Protestant Christianity agree with each other on any of these issues. Although it may be tempting to presuppose that conflicting belief systems flow from differing interpretation alone, one must also factor in that there are several different *translations* of the Bible. Translations assist the evidence of text changing the world. Mike Vlach in his article 'How We Got Our Bible' expands on the massive amount of translations available today:

The Bible—in whole or in part—has been translated into everything from Afrikaans to Zulu and more than 1,900 languages in between. By 1989, according to the American Bible Society, there were complete Bible translations in 314 languages (including all of the world's major tongues), New Testament translations in 715, and translations of at least one book of the Bible in 890[...] Every year between 16 and 20 new languages or dialects receive their own Bible translations.<sup>15</sup>

The question must arise that if Christians stand on the same fundamental principles of the Bible, why then is there such a great dilemma and division among them over seemingly minute circumstances? The issue is that Biblical regulations to Christians are not small at all; in fact, they believe that the laws of the Bible are the character of God himself (John 1:1 NIV). This

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<sup>12</sup> John D. Roth, 'History', <<http://history.mennonite.net/>> [accessed 3 January 2012]

<sup>13</sup> Charles W. Carter, 'A Wesleyan view of the Spirit's Gift of Tongues in the Book of Acts', <<http://www.davidcox.com.mx/library/C/Carter,%20Charles%20W%20-%20A%20Wesleyan%20View%20of%20the%20Spirits%20Gift%20of%20Tongues%20in%20the%20Book%20of%20Acts.pdf>> [accessed 3 January 2012]

<sup>14</sup> Mindy Starns Clark, *A Pocket Guide to Amish life* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2010), p. 69.

<sup>15</sup> Mike Vlach, 'How We Got Our Bible', <<http://www.biblebb.com/files/howbible.htm>> [accessed 4 January 2012]

belief alone is based off of one word (the Greek word *logos*) used in the New Testament proving that one written word has the power to cause society to shift.

John<sup>16</sup> used the Greek word *logos* in description of the Bible. This Greek word alone can hold the weight of the value for the split between Christians and Judeans. The reason this is true, is because the word *logos* does not just mean ‘wording’ but it means that the words are the actual story of Christ. John states, ‘The Word is God’ (John 1:1 NIV). If John states that the Bible is God, then it means that the Bible must be inerrant and infallible. Diarmaid MacCulloch adds:

*Logos* echoes with significances which give voice to the restlessness and tension embodied in the Christian message. It means not so much a single particle of speech, but the whole act of speech, or the thought behind the speech, and from there its meanings spill outwards into conversation, narrative, musing, meaning, reason, report, rumour, even pretense.<sup>17</sup>

Of course humanity will be prone to follow a text if the text *is* God. The Christian must follow the text, because it claims to be the highest authority.

The affects of the word *logos* brought about much more than just passion to follow the Bible; it shifted history. The influence of this one word spurred on the entire need for the 1517 European Reformation: besides Christians realizing it was their duty to succumb to each word of the Bible, corrupt church leaders were aware of that as well. The leaders recognized that if they confined the text of the Bible and allowed only themselves to read it, they would hold the power of the interpretation for the people. Sure enough rituals flowed from the idea of what was said to be in the text. One example of societies’ rituals flowing from text can be seen through the practice of selling and buying Papal Indulgences. The authority of the Catholic Church regulated the congregation to take part in the practice, because it was, according to them, Biblical. It wasn’t until 1517 when Martin Luther’s posted his Ninety Five Thesis that

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<sup>16</sup> John: know as a disciple of Christ and the author of four books in the New Testament: John, 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John.

<sup>17</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 2010), p. 19.

awareness was brought to this dilemma.<sup>18</sup> The people were then able to look to Scripture for themselves, and see what it actually said, and it was in 1567 that Pope Pius V cancelled all fiscal business surrounding indulges.<sup>19</sup>

Another controversial word which propelled schism amongst Christianity is the word predestine. This word ushered the great debate between Calvinist and Arminianism<sup>20</sup>. Romans 8: 30-39 says, 'Those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified...' (NIV). The massive disagreement is due to what the word predestine means. While Calvinists declare that it denotes God picking before creation those who will go to heaven and those who will go to hell, an Arminian believes it represents God's foreknowledge of the future while still allowing mankind to have free will<sup>21</sup>.

It's not only through the additions, translations, phrases, and words that we encounter proof of text shaping society. Translated punctuations also create another significant variable in the proven theory that text precedes the world. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, he spoke to the man to the right of him and stated, "'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'" (Luke 23:43 NIV). This verse brought confusion and division because the comma placement. William D. Mounce expands on the facts of New Testament punctuation in his book *The Basics of Biblical Greek*: 'When the New Testament was first written there were no punctuation marks. In fact, the words were run together one after another without any separation. Punctuation and versification entered the text of manuscripts at a much later period'.<sup>22</sup> Due to commas not being used, the translators cannot be sure about where the comma should have been placed. The translation could have been: 'I tell you today, you will be with me...' The changed placement would redirect the common held belief that one goes to heaven the day they die.<sup>23</sup> Many use this passage to prove immediate entry into heaven; but if

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<sup>18</sup> *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, ed. by Tim Dowley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 366.

<sup>19</sup> Robert H. Brom, 'Myths About Indulgences', *Catholic Answers*, 10 August 2004, <<http://www.catholic.com/tracts/myths-about-indulgences>> [accessed 12 January 2012]

<sup>20</sup> 'Supporters of freedom of humanities will to choose Christ' Frank S. Mead, Revised by Samuel S. Hill, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (9<sup>th</sup> edition) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p.275.

<sup>21</sup> 'Free Will: The power to choose between good and evil, without compulsion or necessity' *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>22</sup> William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> 'What is Death?', < <http://www.amazinghope.net/a-criminal-on-the-cross-is-already-in-heaven-or-when-the-second-coming/>> [accessed 7 January 2012]

the text were changed, the belief would be changed, and therefore practices within the Christian faith would be altered.

One other example of punctuation changing the text which affected belief systems is found in Romans 9:5 which reads, 'and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen' (NIV). A stop is placed at a point in the verse which indicates it is speaking of Christ as God in the New International Version of the Bible. However at one point in time, the punctuation caused the text to read only about God and not about Christ because the comma was after 'ancestry'. The reason for the major dilemma is because some believers had a hard time seeing Christ as God and not the same person. This change in punctuation brought out the concept that Christ and God are actually one person (Mounce 13).

The facts of how one manuscript can change an entire society leaves no room for doubt that text does indeed come prior to our societies. When a writer realizes the weighty affect that text has on the world, it ushers a massive shift to the way one chooses to write. Not only would one possibly look to change content as a whole, but the influence of text demands us to look at each declaration. We can find something beautiful among the rather intimidating influence of words—we can find the glory of *purposeful clarification*. If societies have been severed by merely one word, it creates a challenge for us as writers to ensure the position of our work is lucid, to labor with vigor over each paragraph, each sentence, each phrase... If we neglect to clarify, we ultimately abandon the affect we desired to have upon society; we end up tossing our conclusion of life into the interpretations of other's minds, which can cause division, conflicts, and confusion.

As one who writes Christian work, it can be a challenge to discover the meaning of the original text of Scripture. Undoubtedly, The Holy Bible has proven that text proceeds society. And the society must realize that they may be divulged in a language that is not correctly sculpting the essence of what the writer wanted to say. Research is vital. I look to the original. While many choose to let a single word shape their entire religious views, I find it critical to look to the speaker, his common voice, his familiar beliefs and the original Greek word and what it meant at the time it was written. Even then there can be some misunderstandings, but it lessens the ability to argue when you hold the original meaning in your hands. One must face

the fact that no interpretation will be 100% spot on, unless the author has written a side commentary to explain each word.

In conclusion, all written words have influence. Looking back we see how the Holy Bible demonstrated and confirmed the theory that passages proceeds culture. Historical events such as the split of the Jews, the Great East-West Schism, the Reformation, and the split between denominations demand us to take note of the authority of one word. We can see through additions to text, interpretations of text, and translations of text that it does affect and come before our culture, societies, and beliefs. We follow the words. The words become our reality. Incidents which have occurred as a result of misunderstandings and differing view points can serve to awaken our awareness of the negative or positive impact the written word has the power to usher. While the influence of text is inevitable, we can learn to be cautious with our words as we proceed in writing to a world that is waiting to be formed.

Word Count: 3118