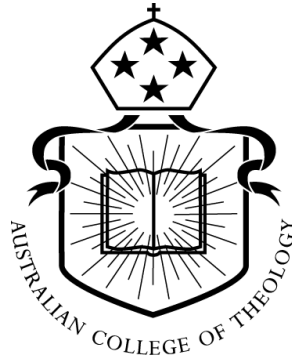


# THE AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY



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### THE CAMBRIDGE TRIUMVIRATE AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF NEW TESTAMENT HIGHER CRITICISM IN BRITAIN 1850-1900

by

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## THE CAMBRIDGE TRIUMVIRATE AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF NEW TESTAMENT HIGHER CRITICISM IN BRITAIN 1850-1900

Between 1850 and 1900 the higher criticism of the Bible achieved acceptance in Britain. Principally a product of the German Enlightenment, Higher Criticism dealt with the date, authorship, literary character and historical bearings of the Biblical writings. Around 1850 this phenomenological approach was generally regarded as dangerous neology. Certainly it was not considered a proper activity for churchmen, and it had no place in the curricula of the universities and theological colleges. By 1900 this had changed. While still a cause of consternation in the churches, clergymen were the leading proponents of higher criticism,<sup>1</sup> its methods and results were an established part of theological education, and the relation between this aspect of the intellectual Christianity of scholars and the more discursive Christianity of church and society was under active consideration.<sup>2</sup> This was a change of no small importance. It detracted from the sense that the Bible was of divine origin, and this in turn reduced the cultural authority of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> The acceptance of Biblical higher criticism was at once a contributor to and reflection of the rise of an increasingly secular point of view, one of the major intellectual and cultural shifts of Victorian England.

A leading role in the acceptance of New Testament higher criticism has long been assigned to the so-called Cambridge Triumvirate of B.F. Westcott (1825-1901), J.B. Lightfoot (1828-1889) and F.J.A. Hort (1828-1892). Professors of Divinity at Cambridge University and leading Churchmen for most of the second half of the nineteenth century, they are

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<sup>1</sup> Eg. From Oxford, *Contentio Veritatis. Essays in Constructive Theology by Six Oxford Tutors* (London: John Murray, 1902); and from Cambridge, H.B. Swete (ed.), *Essays on Some Theological Questions of the Day by Members of the University of Cambridge* (London: Macmillan, 1905), esp. essays 10 and 11, and H.B. Swete (ed.), *Essays on Some Biblical Questions of the Day by Members of the University of Cambridge* (London: Macmillan, 1909) esp. Essays 7, 9-16.

<sup>2</sup> Eg. Henry Wace, *The Bible and Modern Investigation* (London: S.P.C.K., 1903); G.S. Streatfeild, "A Parish Clergyman's Thoughts About the Higher Criticism," *Expositor* VI 6<sup>th</sup> series (1902) 401-424. W.N. Clarke, *Sixty Years With the Bible. A Record of Experience* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910) is an American Baptist evangelical liberal's personal account of gradual acceptance of the higher criticism over the course of his lifetime.

<sup>3</sup> For example, both Leslie Stephen and T.H. Huxley later in the century pointed to Tract 85, "Lectures on the Scripture Proof of the Doctrines of the Church," in which Newman emphasized the unsystematic character of the Bible, as providing arguments against Christianity as powerfully effective as those written by any unbeliever. See Frank M. Turner, *John Henry Newman. The Challenge to Evangelical Religion* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002) pp. 275- 83 (esp 279-81) & 678 n. 37. Also Bernard Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism. Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) pp. 114-15.

said to have laid down the lines of a new science of biblical study, founded upon love of truth, patient scholarship, use of historical method and the fearless welcoming of truth from every quarter.<sup>4</sup> An extension of this achievement was the alleged overthrow of the radical re-interpretation of Christian origins advanced by F.C. Baur and the other writers of the Tübingen School in Germany between about 1830 and 1860.<sup>5</sup> By this account Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort are reified into intellectual heroes whose scholarly attainments established the critical method in British New Testament study and tamed criticism for the churches. This view has been held by people of all denominations<sup>6</sup> and shades of churchmanship,<sup>7</sup> and has lasted for a century or more.<sup>8</sup> As one of the major legends of British New Testament study, the reputation of Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort is what has to be explained and assessed.

Their partnership has in fact received very little attention from scholars.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless the phenomenon of ‘believing criticism’, which they are said to have represented, is a real help to the attempt to go beyond the role of personalities to the processes that brought about the change in the status of New Testament criticism in Britain.<sup>10</sup> According to Frank Turner, in my

<sup>4</sup> F. Warre Cornish, *The English Church in the Nineteenth Century* (2 vols; London: Macmillan, 1910) II.209. Cf. “Westcott, Brooke Foss,” *D.N.B. Supplement 1901-1911*, 635-641 (esp. 641); “Hort, Fenton John Anthony,” *D.N.B.*, XXII Supplement, 868-872 (esp. 870); “Westcott, Brooke Foss,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.; Cambridge: University Press, 1911) XXVIII: 537-538. Also the views of the Principal of Lightfoot Hall, Birmingham, John Battersby Harford, quoted in Alan M.G. Stephenson, *The Rise and Decline of English Modernism* (Hulsean Lectures for 1979-1980; London: S.P.C.K., 1984) pp. 81-82. A further aspect was zeal to apply the truths thus ascertained to the pressing problems of industrial and social life, a feature clearest in the career of Westcott.

<sup>5</sup> “Lightfoot, Joseph Barber,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.; Cambridge: University Press, 1911) XVI: 626-7. W.F. Slater, ‘Hort’s Lectures on “Judaistic Christianity”’, *Expositor* II 5<sup>th</sup> series (1895) 128-140. A.C. Headlam, “Methods of Early Church History,” *English Historical Review* XIV.liv (January 1899) 1-31, esp. 21-2. Headlam gives Lightfoot much of the credit for the adoption of scientific methods in theological subjects and for definite advance in early church history.

<sup>6</sup> Eg. The Methodist J.H. Rigg, “Dr Hort and the Cambridge School,” *London Quarterly Review* LXXXVII.xxvii (October 1896) 53-76. More critically the Congregationalist A.M. Fairbairn, “Some Recent English Theologians: Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort, Jowett, Hatch,” *Contemporary Review* 71 (March 1897) 341-365.

<sup>7</sup> E.G. Selwyn, “The University Sermon,” *Cambridge Review* (11 November 1938) 89-90; R.G. Heard, “Cambridge Biblical Scholarship. Westcott, Lightfoot, and Hort,” *Cambridge Review* (15 February 1947) 321-322. Eg. the evangelicals Handley Moule and Henry Wace; the Anglo-Catholic W. Sparrow Simpson; and the liberal-modernist William Sanday.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (Oxford: University Press, 1964) esp. ch. II & III. C.L. Church, “Westcott, Brooke Foss, and Fenton John Anthony Hort,” & J.D.G. Dunn, “Lightfoot, Joseph Barber,” in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (D.K. McKim ed; Downers Grove, IL. & Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998) 389-394 & 336-340.

<sup>9</sup> The only account known to me is by L.E. Elliott-Binns, *Religion in the Victorian Era* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London: Lutterworth Press, 1946) 292-310. W.F. Howard presents three pen portraits in “The Cambridge Triumvirate,” *The Romance of New Testament Scholarship* (London: Epworth, 1949) ch. 3. They are also discussed extensively in Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*. And now see William Baird, *History of New Testament Research. Volume Two. From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) ch. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald Parsons, “Biblical Criticism in Victorian Britain: From Controversy to Acceptance?” in *Religion in Victorian Britain. Vol. II. Controversies* (G. Parsons ed.; Manchester University Press, 1988) 239-257, drawing on R.A. Riesen,

judgment the leading authority in the field, more analysis of this kind is what's needed in the cultural and intellectual history of Victorian Britain, which has been marred for too long by an anachronistic dichotomy of the secular and the religious, and thus a blindness to the possibility of religiously secular activities (such as Biblical higher criticism).<sup>11</sup> When there is due attention to what the Victorians themselves were thinking (as opposed to the existential concerns of students of the period), it is not so much the correctness or the truth content of ideas that makes them worthy of investigation and analysis but their capacity to have influenced people and assimilated themselves within the institutions of their own society.

Because of its insistence on the social setting of ideas, the interpretation of intellectual change proposed by Randall Collins facilitates this shift. His massive *Sociology of Philosophies* presents on the basis of an extensive induction from the history of philosophy a complex social theory of ideas that adds to the outer layers of causation familiar to historians the dynamics of networks as the first level of the social production of creativity.<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of this discussion I draw on three elements of Collins' theory.

First, intellectual creativity is concentrated in chains of personal contacts. Its structure is to be found in the groups and networks whose interactions generate: a) the symbols that provide the lenses through which members view the world; and, b) the emotional energy that charges members with enthusiasm towards symbolic goals (such as writing a book).

Second, creativity moves horizontally by oppositions and alliances — ie new ideas unfold by combining or negating the available points of view on a shared topic of argument — and vertically across the generations through exchange among teachers and pupils, whether in real or imagined contact with one another.

Third, creativity is subject to a law of small numbers whereby the number of creative schools successfully propagating ideas across generations is three to six. Expanding positions split into rival philosophies, but when there are too many positions two things tend to happen. On the one hand,

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*Criticism and Faith in Late Victorian Scotland.* A.B. Davidson, William Robertson Smith and George Adam Smith (Lanham, New York & London: University Press of America, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> Frank M. Turner, "The Religious and the Secular in Victorian Britain," ch. 1 in *Contesting Cultural Authority. Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993) 3-37.

<sup>12</sup> Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies. A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

sceptics criticize all positions (eg the fundamentalist assertion of an undifferentiated oracular view of the Bible). On the other hand, synthesizers (and popularizers at another level) construct systems that reduce the number (ie they restructure the field).

Because Theology as a discipline is very similar to Philosophy in its nature and claims, the theory adumbrated by Collins is readily transferrable to my subject. To correspond with the three elements of Collins' theory I have singled out, I now propose taking three trajectories through a larger work-in-progress with some account of, first, the development of the Cambridge Triumvirate as a group; second, the dynamics of their influence in the field of New Testament scholarship understood as an intellectual network; and, third and very briefly, the differentiation of the field in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century as the setting in which the legend emerged. By this method my intention is to move towards a properly historical explanation of the greatly renowned contribution of Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort to the acceptance of New Testament higher criticism in Britain.

## I

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRIUMVIRATE

The connection between Westcott, Lightfoot and Hort took shape at Trinity College, Cambridge, where all three were undergraduates in the latter 1840s. The principal antecedent was 'Arnoldism', an educational and cultural ideal embraced by Hort at Rugby (for a time from Thomas Arnold himself), and by Westcott and Lightfoot at King Edward VI Grammar School in Birmingham from James Prince Lee.<sup>13</sup> Its principal elements were the comprehensiveness of Christianity, the elevation of conduct over doctrine, and openness to German influence in Biblical interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Westcott, Lightfoot and Hort brought these impulses to the intensely ritualistic competition of the tripos and fellowship examinations at Cambridge. The centre of the incipient association was Westcott, who functioned as 'coach' to both Hort and Lightfoot as they prepared for their exams. All emerged from their formal education with the status of distinguished exponents of classical civilization.<sup>15</sup> This was crucial cultural

<sup>13</sup> The classic account is David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning. Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* (London: John Murray, 1961).

<sup>14</sup> See Sue Zemka, "Spiritual Authority and the Life of Thomas Arnold," *Victorian Studies* 38.3 (Spring 1995) 429-462.

<sup>15</sup> See Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed. Schools, Universities, and Society in England, 1830-1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), esp. Part I. Westcott was Senior Classic in 1848; Lightfoot in 1851. Hort was third in Classics in 1850.

capital that secured connection with the educated public and carried the cultural and social authority of the dominant form of knowledge. Equally important was their standing as Fellows of Trinity. For the College provided them with a material base, income, access to the establishment and identified them with a tradition of capturing modern knowledge for Christianity.<sup>16</sup>

As the three young scholars began their careers, the nature of their interaction changed as first Westcott, and then Hort, left the University. Frequent correspondence, occasional meetings, shared vacations, and work at common literary projects replaced regular face to face conversation. By means of their projects the three made their first bid for notice in the theological attention space. They recognised an opening in the synthesis of traditional verbal criticism with the new German ideal of *Altertumswissenschaft*, the medium for which was to be the new *Journal of Classical and Sacred Philology*, which they helped to found and edit.<sup>17</sup> In the process they were defining their own position by lineages and oppositions within the prevailing structure of opinion. Their broad approach to philology set them apart from the ‘safe’ biblical scholarship typified by the evangelical, C.J. Ellicott, while limited criticism of the controversial New Testament commentaries of the Oxford liberals, A.P. Stanley and Benjamin Jowett,<sup>18</sup> marked them as representatives of right wing liberal Anglicanism. Some recognition for this position came when Lightfoot was appointed Cambridge chaplain to Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria and Chancellor of the University,<sup>19</sup> and examining chaplain to A.C. Tait, the Bishop of London.<sup>20</sup> These widening contacts with centres in London and the Church gave access to the organizational base of theological scholarship. Invitations to write for Dr Smith’s Bible commentary and *Dictionary of the Bible* symbolized their acceptance as

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<sup>16</sup> The number and variety of their projects indicates how charged up they were by their heritage. See Geoffrey R. Treloar, *Lightfoot the Historian* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 103; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1998) pp. 43-4; A.F. Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort* (2 vols; London: Macmillan, 1896) I: ch. 4; A. Westcott, *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott ... Sometime Bishop of Durham* (2 vols; London: Macmillan, 1903) I: ch. 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> “The Journal of Classical and Sacred Philology” (Camb. Uni. Papers MR1, Cambridge University Library). The journal ran from 1854 to 1860 when the absence of a professional academic community caused its failure, as it had caused the failure of similar ventures previously. Stray, *Classics Transformed*, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Jowett, *The Epistles of St Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans: With Critical Notes and Dissertations* (2 vols; London: John Murray, 1855). A.P. Stanley, *The Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (2 vols; London: John Murray, 1855).

<sup>19</sup> Treloar, *Lightfoot the Historian*, 57-58.

<sup>20</sup> R.T. Davidson & W. Benham, *Life of Archibald Campbell Tait* (2 vols; London: Macmillan, 1891) I. 207-208.

emergent writers, while the Trinity connection with the Macmillan brothers provided a ready publisher for their writings.

In the following decade the *Essays and Reviews* crisis took their local association into the central network of English intellectual life.<sup>21</sup> In private Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort were appalled by the ecclesiastical reaction. They decided to produce *Revelation and History*, a volume of essays to advance a position, “between *Essays and Reviews* and Traditionalism”, and “equally removed from sceptical dogmatism and unbelief”.<sup>22</sup> Lightfoot scuttled the project when he decided that constructive work rather than polemical statement was the need of the day. His three commentaries on the Pauline Epistles published between 1865 and 1875 functioned in part as an answer to Benjamin Jowett’s ‘The Interpretation of Scripture’. More broadly they also responded to pressure for an historical account of Christian origins, and built in a reply to the Tübingen School, now beginning to attract attention in England. Westcott also produced a series of works culminating in two papers on Comtism in which, against Utilitarians and Positivists on the outside, and High Churchmen and Evangelicals inside the Church, he insisted on the continuity between Christianity and the world.<sup>23</sup> In the 1860s, aided by Hort’s counsel, Lightfoot and Westcott positioned themselves in a turbulent attention space with a mediating position opposed to the severance of Christianity from the life and culture of contemporary society by Churchmen and rationalists alike.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time Cambridge University was confirmed as their organizational base by Lightfoot’s election as Hulsean Professor of Divinity in 1861, in spite of some opposition on the grounds of his being

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<sup>21</sup> *Essays and Reviews* was a joint venture of seven writers who argued that Christianity should be re-shaped by its contact with modern thought. *Essays and Reviews. The 1860 Text and its Reading* (Victor Shea and William Whitla eds; Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 2000). See also I. Ellis, *Seven Against Christ. A Study of “Essays and Reviews”* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); and J.L. Altholz, *Anatomy of a Controversy. The Debate Over “Essays and Reviews”* (Aldershot: Scolar press, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Hort, *Life and Letters of Hort*, I: 434-9. Westcott, *Life and Letters of Westcott*, I: 213-15.

<sup>23</sup> B.F. Westcott, *The Bible in the Church. A Popular Account of the Collection and Reception of the Holy Scriptures in the Christian Churches* (London: Macmillan, 1864); *The Gospel of the Resurrection: Thoughts on its Relation to Reason and History* (London: Macmillan, 1866); *A General View of the History of the English Bible* (London: Macmillan, 1868); *Essays in the History of Religious Thought in the West* (London: Macmillan, 1891), essays I-IV; “Comte on the Philosophy of the History of Christianity,” *Contemporary Review* 6 (December 1867) 399-421; “Aspects of Positivism in Relation to Christianity,” *Contemporary Review* 8 (July 1868) 371-386.

<sup>24</sup> The assertion of the solidarity and continuity of Christianity with life was directed against Utilitarians and Positivists alike. For Westcott on Plato, see Frank Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1981) pp. 377-8; and in relation to Comte, Charles D. Cashdollar, *The Transformation of Theology, 1830-1890. Positivism and Protestant Thought in Britain and America* (Princeton: University Press, 1989) 430-435.

insufficiently ‘safe’. From this position Lightfoot emerged as the organizational leader of the group, involving himself in University administration and taking an increasing part in the wider arrangements for teaching theology in addition to his own teaching. On top of the projects they already had in hand, they envisaged creating a journal, before accepting the new *Contemporary Review* as sufficient for their purpose. They also initiated the Dictionary of Christian Biography and Antiquities, an undertaking that brought them into vital contact with the entire ecclesiastical network. Above all Lightfoot conspired to bring Hort, and especially Westcott, to the University as Professors. A ‘coalition of the mind’ should be a coalition in space as well as time, with corresponding opportunity to influence structures and students.

A third phase in the history of the network began when Lightfoot’s efforts to get Westcott back to Cambridge succeeded in 1871. Westcott’s election as Regius Professor of Divinity was followed soon after by Hort’s return as a Fellow of Emmanuel College. After almost twenty years the three scholars were together again at Cambridge. To their work on common projects was now added time spent together, both formally on University and Church business, and informally in Hall and on their daily walks. This intensification of network activity inaugurated the high point of their influence that lasted for about twenty years.

## II THE DYNAMICS OF NETWORK INFLUENCE

Fundamental to this influence was a determined strengthening of their organizational base at Cambridge. All three were supporters of the movement to promote research, and they sought to put Divinity in its vanguard.<sup>25</sup> In the process they transformed the ideal of a Divinity professorship, making it a post from which the production of critical knowledge by a professional researcher might be expected.<sup>26</sup> Of their numerous reforms the most important was the introduction of the Theology

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<sup>25</sup> See Christopher Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge. Vol. IV. 1870-1990* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), esp. ch. V.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Clayton, *Bishop Westcott* (London & Oxford: A.R. Mowbray, 1906) p. 62. The ideal was readily emulated by their successors. Eg. *Henry Barclay Swete. A Remembrance* (London: Macmillan, 1918) esp. Part II.

Tripes in 1871.<sup>27</sup> Its introduction of the higher critical knowledge of the Bible to English theological education gave Cambridge something of a first creation advantage.<sup>28</sup> For more than a decade Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort led the way in teaching higher critical knowledge of the New Testament.<sup>29</sup> Their influence was taken to the numerous theological colleges around the country by their creation of the Cambridge Preliminary Exam in Theology, partly to shore up the connection between the University and the Church in the wake of the abolition of religious tests in 1871.<sup>30</sup> Through the activity of Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort Cambridge University became the established centre of higher critical knowledge of the New Testament in England.

The new structures at Cambridge furnished a basis for intergenerational influence which Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort exploited by informal meetings with their students and small group tuition in addition to their lectures. On becoming Bishop of Durham in 1879 Lightfoot took the decisive step towards widening the intergenerational network when he created the Auckland Brotherhood, an in-house theological college for Oxbridge graduates seeking holy orders that Westcott continued when he succeeded to the bishopric in 1890.<sup>31</sup> In the appointment of clergy to key posts in the diocese Lightfoot also drew around him young men with scholarly reputations from Oxford and the other theological colleges.<sup>32</sup> From these connections came men who followed in their footsteps, as clergy and as biblical scholars.<sup>33</sup> This group also supplied many of those

<sup>27</sup> Others included raising standards for higher degrees in Divinity, introducing the inter-collegiate lecture scheme, and increasing the number of Divinity professors. On their reform of Divinity at Cambridge, see Treloar, *Lightfoot the Historian*, ch. 7.

<sup>28</sup> B.F. Westcott, "On Preparation For the Theological Examinations," *The Student's Guide to the University of Cambridge* (1874) pp. 298-338, esp. 311-12. "the study of the Bible will be the beginning and end of his studies, the most fruitful of all and the most inspiring (311) ... authorship, date, sources, place of composition, integrity, history, use and the like ... in vital connection with the external and spiritual circumstances of the age to which it belongs." (312)

<sup>29</sup> While Oxford had introduced the Honour School of Theology the year before, it remained in the hands of high church conservatives until the death of Pusey in 1882. On theology at Oxford, see Peter Hinchliff, *God and History. Aspects of British Theology 1875-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) pp. 99-104.

<sup>30</sup> By 1884 all but two of the bishops accepted the examination for ordination to the diaconate.

<sup>31</sup> As did his successor, Handley Moule, another member of the Cambridge connexion. G.R. Eden & F.C. MacDonald (eds), *Lightfoot of Durham* (Cambridge: University Press, 1932) pp. 21-54, 166-173. Also H.E. Savage, "Bishop Lightfoot's Influence: His Trust in Young Men." A Paper by the Very Rev. H.E. Savage (Dean of Lichfield, 1909-39), edited with an introductory note by B.S. Benediktz, *Durham University Journal* LXXVII.1 [n.s. XLVI.1] (December 1984) 1-6.

<sup>32</sup> Most notably William Sanday (from Hatfield Hall, Durham) and H.W. Watkins (from St Augustine's, Canterbury), both of whom wrote admiringly about Lightfoot, and became, with his assistance prior to his death, Bampton Lecturers in the 1890s. Much the same intergenerational effect was achieved by the creation of the Cambridge Clergy School, later to be known as Westcott House. See B.K. Cunningham, *The History of Westcott House* (Cambridge, 1932).

<sup>33</sup> Although they were inclined to feel overwhelmed, their students still felt there was a work for them to do. J. Armitage Robinson, "The Theological Influence of Bishop Lightfoot," in *Lightfoot of Durham*, p. 135. It was one of them who said of Lightfoot, "If he has not done all he intended, he has at least shown how it should be done."

who preserved and guarded the legend, and conveyed the influence of the Triumvirate to subsequent generations. Especially important in this respect is the case of the reticent Hort: J.O.F. Murray, who took a first in the Theology Tripos in 1883 before becoming Fellow and Dean of Emmanuel, Hort's latter college, edited his lectures and manuscripts for publication, and thereby perpetuated Hort's scholarly work.<sup>34</sup> The contribution of the Robinson brothers, Arthur and Joseph Armitage, is also instructive. Students at Cambridge in the late 1870s, they passed on the influence to their son and nephew, J.A.T. Robinson — notorious in the 1960s as the author of *Honest to God*, and in the 1970s for a conservative redating of the New Testament documents — who named Lightfoot as one of the 'roots of a radical'.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time as strengthening their organizational position, Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort developed a theological rationale for their standpoint. Out of a shared commitment to "truth in theology", they used the Johannine writings in the New Testament to work out a world affirming incarnational theology over against the forensic and ecclesiastical emphases of the low and high churchmen.<sup>36</sup> In its interest in new subject matters it was a theology of adjustment and accommodation that purportedly justified the place of theology at the heart of intellectual life, and particularly at the University.<sup>37</sup> It also promoted a view of the Bible as the record of revelation and the warrants for the critical study inherent in their own approach. Irrespective of whether it carried any conviction for outsiders, the effect in the Church was the creation of a new mode of discourse in which those who wanted to be critical and Christian engaged over the next two generations.<sup>38</sup>

This possibility was also exhibited in their own publications. In the process they established the critical commentary, complete with the apparatus of introduction, notes on a revised text, and discursive dissertations, as a new

<sup>34</sup> Murray went on to become Master of Selwyn College (1909-1928). J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses. Part II. From 1752 to 1900* (6 vols; Cambridge: University Press, 1940-54) IV: 503.

<sup>35</sup> J.A.T. Robinson, *The Roots of a Radical* (London: S.C.M., 1980) 155-161. Also J.A.T. Robinson, *Joseph Barber Lightfoot* (Durham Cathedral Lecture 1981; Dean and Chapter of Durham, 1981). Others included V.H. Stanton, Richard Appleton, H.E. Ryle, G.R. Eden, F.C. MacDonald, C.H. Boutflower.

<sup>36</sup> Treloar, *Lightfoot the Historian*, p. 77. Hort developed the theme on the eve of his return to Cambridge in the Hulsean Lectures published posthumously as *The Way the Truth and the Life*. See J. Burnaby, 'Revised Reviews: VII — F.J.A. Hort's "The Way, The Truth, The Life",' *Theology* LXIV.493 (July 1961) 281-5; & Graham Neville, "Science and Tradition: F.J.A. Hort and his Critics," *Journal of Theological Studies* 50.2 (October 1999) 560-582.

<sup>37</sup> Esp. B.F. Westcott, *On the Religious Office of the Universities* (London: Macmillan, 1873).

<sup>38</sup> This interest is traced theologically by A.M. Ramsey in *From Gore to Temple. The Development of Anglican Theology Between 'Lux Mundi' and the Second World War* (London: Longmans, 1960).

means of intellectual production in British New Testament study. In this they enjoyed a further benefit of first creation. The earlier efforts of Jowett and Stanley had been spurned by the churches, largely because they were vehicles for attacks on the dominant theological paradigm.<sup>39</sup> In the 1860s Lightfoot's *Galatians* and *Philippians* reversed this rejection, an achievement consolidated by Westcott's commentaries on Hebrews and the Johannine writings. At least four other schemes were mooted when the Lightfoot-Westcott-Hort commentary was conceived,<sup>40</sup> but only one, the non-critical Speaker's Commentary, eventuated. Significantly, towards the end of the century when the International Critical Commentary ventured a series of commentaries embracing critical biblical scholarship for the English speaking world, the editors followed the model created by Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort.<sup>41</sup> To them belongs the credit for creating a new instrument in British New Testament study, a new sacred object in fact.

The method and world view represented in their writings were a powerful stimulus to the efforts of their contemporaries. The effect is seen clearly in the work of F.W. Farrar, a Cambridge contemporary, colleague of Westcott's at Harrow, Headmaster of Marlborough College, Canon of Westminster and finally Dean of Canterbury. Farrar saw an opening in the harnessing of criticism to biography, a genre especially favoured by the Victorians. In the 70s and 80s a series of works using this method covered the whole ground of early Christianity. The books sold in their thousands. But before the experience of success Farrar recognized the value of the Cambridge connection when he asked Lightfoot to review the *Life of Jesus*.<sup>42</sup> His next work, *The Life of Paul*, invoked Lightfoot's name in the dedication,<sup>43</sup> and subsequent works avowedly built on his achievement. Other scholars too worked with the same paradigm and frequently

<sup>39</sup> For the reaction, see Peter Hinchliff, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) ch. 3. The principal cause of offence was Jowett's subjective and exemplarist view of the Atonement which was judged to be contrary to the teaching of the Thirty-Nine Articles. See now Andrew Atherstone, "Benjamin Jowett's Pauline Commentary: An Atonement Controversy," *Journal of Theological Studies* 54.1 (April 2003) 139-153.

<sup>40</sup> The schemes were Dr Smith's, Rivington's, Pusey's and the Speaker's.

<sup>41</sup> The contribution of Lightfoot and Westcott is acknowledged in the Editors' Preface. The only other British New Testament scholar mentioned is Ellicott whose commentaries are of a different sort. See William Sanday and A.C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895,) pp. i-ii. The editors of the series were S.R. Driver, Alfred Plummer and C.A. Briggs.

<sup>42</sup> F.W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (Popular edition; London, Paris & New York: Cassell, Potter, Galpin & Co., 1881 [first published in 1874]). Farrar to Lightfoot, 12 February 1874, Lightfoot Papers, Durham Cathedral. Farrar had also been a colleague of Westcott's at Harrow. See Reginald Farrar, *The Life of Frederic William Farrar Sometime Dean of Canterbury* (new & revised ed.; London: James Nisbet & Co., 1905) ch VI.

<sup>43</sup> F.W. Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul* (2 vols; London: Cassell, Peter Galpin, 1879).

acknowledged their debt to Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort.<sup>44</sup> But none claiming lineage boosted the combination of faith and criticism more successfully than Farrar.<sup>45</sup>

Their reputation as the leading representatives of critical thought in relation to the New Testament was also extended by the part they played in the wider public debate with unbelief. They were particularly energized by an anonymous work of 1874 entitled *Supernatural Religion*. The author saw an opening in the combination of the results of sceptical New Testament criticism from Europe with the traditional British rationalist arguments against Christianity.<sup>46</sup> Westcott responded to his criticism in the Preface to a new edition of his *History of the New Testament Canon*. Lightfoot had the additional stimulus of a personal attack against Westcott, and retaliated with a series of articles in the *Contemporary Review* which both impugned the pretensions of the author to being a serious critic and supplied an alternative perspective on the critical matters at stake.<sup>47</sup> Their reputation was boosted by a further opposition. Matthew Arnold recognized in the attention space opened by *Supernatural Religion* an opportunity to advance his case for a more liberal Christianity. Fortuitously his articles appeared in tandem with Lightfoot's in the *Contemporary*, and showed where an extreme latitudinarianism led.<sup>48</sup> By contrast Lightfoot and Westcott demonstrated that duly moderated critical thinking in relation to the New Testament supported conservative ends, an option with strong appeal in the theologically turbulent 1870s and 1880s.

What they stood for was not uncontested, for Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort were involved in their own controversy that challenged their standing in the Church. A long agitation against the inadequacies of the Authorized Version of 1611 culminated in 1871 in the formation of two companies to revise the translation of the Old and New Testaments. Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort were all invited to become members of the New Testament company, and all were diligent attenders of the meetings across the decade

<sup>44</sup> They include Alfred Edersheim, William Sanday, William Ramsay and J.E.B. Mayor.

<sup>45</sup> Farrar's *History of Interpretation* (Bampton Lectures for 1885; London: E.P. Dutton, 1886) is the defence and justification of this standpoint. His comment on p. 424 ("Our own day has given us comments on St. Paul's Epistles, and on the Gospel and Epistles of St. John, superior in some respects to any which have yet been produced in any age or any branch of the Church of Christ.") is clearly an allusion to the writings of Lightfoot and Westcott.

<sup>46</sup> It was in fact a demonstration of Hume's point that in the reporting of miracles there must be something amiss with the reporting.

<sup>47</sup> Separately published as *Essays on the Work Entitled Supernatural Religion* (London & New York: Macmillan, 1889).

<sup>48</sup> Separately published as *God and the Bible*. See *The Complete Prose Works of Mathew Arnold VII* (R.H. Super ed.; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970).

it took to complete the task.<sup>49</sup> Lightfoot declared their position against the opponents of revision in 1871,<sup>50</sup> and then spoke against tinkering when the company met. Hort and Westcott then persuaded the Company to use the revised text on which they had been working since 1853 as the basis of the translation, and thereafter contended vigorously for the changes they believed contemporary knowledge of the text and the language called for.<sup>51</sup> When the Revised Version was published, it became known that their influence had been decisive. This made them the focal point of the criticism, and attracted the invective of Dean Burgon of Chichester in particular. If nothing else the debate drew attention to what they stood for, but when the weakness of the conservative position was more widely understood the credentials of Westcott and Hort were enhanced. Their edition of the Greek text, and the underlying critical theory and method, came to be widely regarded as marking an epoch in the history of New Testament study, legitimating the ongoing quest for the apostolic originals.

Although occasionally controversial, this paradigm meant that Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort remained credible churchmen throughout their careers. At a time when many distrusted Biblical scholarship, none of their writings led to suggestions that they should resign as clergy.<sup>52</sup> On the contrary, these writings boosted their reputations and marked them out as worthy of preferment in the Church and the University, so that all came to occupy positions of eminence in which they impressed as critical scholars advancing the twin causes of Christianity and the Church. In this they differed from others with a claim to being regarded as the pioneers of New Testament higher criticism in Britain. The Congregationalist Samuel Davidson remained productive for many years, but as a Nonconformist he made little impact.<sup>53</sup> A more revealing contrast is that of Benjamin Jowett, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford.<sup>54</sup> In the face of the High Church reaction to *Essays and Reviews* he abandoned New Testament scholarship

<sup>49</sup> Particularly Hort, who is said to have attended 88% of the meetings.

<sup>50</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *On a Fresh Revision of the English New Testament* (London & New York: Macmillan, 1871).

<sup>51</sup> The extent of their influence is reflected in the claim that Hort spoke for three of the ten years during which the Company met.

<sup>52</sup> For the temper of the period, Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority*, 197-198. See Edwin Hatch to William Boyd Carpenter, 8 May 1887, p. 156 in H.A.D. Major, *The Life and Letters of William Boyd Carpenter* (London: John Murray, 1925), for an indication that lay people denied clergymen the right to hold liberal opinions.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel Davidson, *An Introduction to the Old Testament, critical, historical, and theological, containing a discussion of the most important questions belonging to the several books* (3 vols; London & Edinburgh, 1862); *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament, critical, exegetical, and theological* (2 vols; London, 1868). John Lea, "The Davidson Controversy, 1856-1857," *Durham University Journal* LXVIII.1 (December 1975) 15-32.

<sup>54</sup> Within Anglicanism, there is also the case of Colenso whose commentary on Romans (1863) brings him into the New Testament field.

for Greek philosophy as the domain in which to express his views about life and society.<sup>55</sup> His experience points to the social significance of ‘believing criticism’. In contrast with Jowett, as New Testament critics Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort managed not only to retain but actually to boost their cultural capital.

This bolstered cultural capital working through their network also helps to explain their influence, and thus the acceptance of New Testament higher criticism, throughout Greater Britain. Its operation is easily demonstrated in the experience of the Australian colonies. The critical paradigm and all that it represented was pressed into service in the defence of Christianity by Cambridge men, first by Bishop Moorhouse of Melbourne, and then by Bishop Barry in Sydney in the 1870s and 1880s. Barry’s successor at Sydney, William Saumarez Smith, another product of Cambridge, promoted criticism as he had done while Principal of St Aidan’s Theological College, Birkenhead.<sup>56</sup> The intergenerational connection of the Auckland Brotherhood was brought to Australia by Lightfoot’s literary executor, J.R. Harmer who, as third Bishop of Adelaide, was an active promoter of New Testament criticism in the Australian Church.<sup>57</sup> The same force operated in another guise in the Bush Brotherhoods of which Westcott was honoured as a founding father.<sup>58</sup> The dispersion of other members of the network, particularly members of the Auckland Brotherhood, to senior educational and ecclesiastical posts throughout the Empire had the same effect.

### III DIFFERENTIATION OF THE FIELD

The high water mark of the influence of the Triumvirate at Cambridge itself passed when Lightfoot moved to Durham in 1879. Over the next decade theology at Cambridge settled down along the lines established in the 1870s: for the first time the teaching of New Testament higher criticism

<sup>55</sup> Ellis, *Seven Against Christ*, 230-233 & 236-60. Turner, *Greek Heritage*, 414-432, esp. 416-417.

<sup>56</sup> See G.R. Treloar, “Smith, William Saumarez,” in *Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (B. Dickey ed.; Sydney: Evangelical History Association of Australia, 1994) pp. 345-347.

<sup>57</sup> Eg. “Present State of Historical Enquiry into New Testament Writings. Acts of the Apostles. By the Bishop of Adelaide,” in *Report of the Church Congress Held at Melbourne 19<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1906* (Melbourne, n.d.) pp. 140-147.

<sup>58</sup> With others such as A.F. Winnington-Ingram and Charles Gore. C.H.S. Matthews, *A Parson in the Australian Bush* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1973 [first published 1908]). R.M. Frappell, “The Australian Bush Brotherhoods and their English Origins,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 47.1 (January 1996) 82-97, esp 86-7.

was ‘routinized’. At the same time, in a great burst of creativity in British New Testament scholarship, increasing differentiation within the field began as each book, and each group of books, became a sub-specialization using the new critical methods.<sup>59</sup> New centres of critical New Testament study also emerged — at Oxford, Durham, Dublin and in the Scottish universities. There were, further, signs of serious splits in the field as the historical method was applied more radically, first to the circumstances of Christian origins by Edwin Hatch,<sup>60</sup> and then to doctrine itself — particularly Christology — with the publication of *Lux Mundi* in 1889. Thereafter, in the quarter of a century leading up to World War I, the field became much more radically differentiated and contested as higher critical methods were applied, in general to the Gospels and to their reports of miracles in particular.<sup>61</sup> By the end of the century the higher critical study of the New Testament had advanced well beyond the applications envisaged by Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort, and jeopardised the link between faith and thought they had proffered. But, amid great variety of opinion and occasionally acute controversy, there could be no question of denying higher criticism itself.<sup>62</sup> It was more a matter of adjusting to it and moderating its impact.<sup>63</sup>

The legend of Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort as the legitimators of New Testament higher criticism in Britain was born as the field entered this more radical phase. It reflects the aspirations of that troubled time — the need for professional, scholarly standards in Divinity in the Church and the University, and the desire for scholarship to support lives of Christian devotion and service. Social process as much as individual and combined scholarly achievement was at work when the Cambridge Triumvirs were brought forward as exemplars of this much touted believing criticism. Most obviously it was the product of intergenerational transmission. Underneath was the activity of Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort as the

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<sup>59</sup> This development is represented and summed up by George Salmon, *Introduction to the New Testament* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; London: John Murray, 1889).

<sup>60</sup> Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (Bampton Lectures for 1880; London & Oxford: Rivingtons, 1881); *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages Upon the Christian Church* (Hibbert Lectures for 1888; London: Williams & Norgate, 1890). Ellis, *Seven Against Christ*, 263-270.

<sup>61</sup> Eg. J.M. Thompson, *Miracles in the New Testament* (London, 1911).

<sup>62</sup> The very conservative Robert Brown could write: “I cannot associate myself with any general campaign against criticism. My quarrel with the Higher Criticism is not because it is *criticism*, but because, instead of being what it claims to be, it is criticism of a spurious type.” *The Bible and Modern Criticism* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1903)186. See David F. Wright, “Soundings in the Doctrine of Scripture in British Evangelicalism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1980) 87-106, esp. 88-91.

<sup>63</sup> The Bible as a basis of Christian faith was being re-evaluated at all levels. See T.A. Langford, *In Search of Foundations. English Theology 1900-1920* (Nashville & New York: Abingdon Press, 1969) esp ch IV.

intellectual, and to a large extent the organizational, core of the network concerned with the advanced study of the New Testament. To be sure, they had been greatly favoured by circumstances in the cultural, organizational and politico-economic settings in which they had operated — the vogue for history, the contrast with developments in Old Testament study, the intellectual challenges to Christianity, the renewal of the Church and the resurgence of the ministry as a profession, pressure to change the function of the university, and so on. But the believing criticism they represented was at the heart of the acceptance of New Testament higher criticism in Britain between 1850 and 1900. Whether it achieved the ends envisaged by the Cambridge Triumvirate for church and society is a matter for the book that will attempt an account of their careers and achievement.

