



## Bill Bryson: Emergence & Dominance of the English Language; Revival of the Literal-Historical-Grammatical Hermeneutic: Darby, Scofield, Chafer, Walvoord

In order to document this claim, I offer you some comments by:

**Bryson, Bill. *The Mother Tongue: English & How It Got That Way*. (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1990), 46-59 passim:**

In the country inns of a small corner of northern Germany, in the spur of land connecting Schleswig-Holstein \shlās' vik hal' shtīn\ to Denmark, you can sometimes hear people talking in what sound eerily like a lost dialect of English. The language is very close to the way people spoke in Britain more than 1,000 years ago. This area of Germany, called Angeln \āŋ' eln\, was once the seat of the Angles, one of the Germanic tribes that 1,500 years ago crossed the North Sea to Britain, where they displaced the native Celts and gave the world what would one day become its most prominent language.

Not far away, in the marshy headlands of northern Holland and western Germany lives a group of people whose dialect is even more closely related to English. These are the Frisians \friz' yan\, whose Germanic tongue has been so little altered by time that many of them can still read the medieval epic *Beowulf* almost at sight. (p. 46)

In about A.D. 450, following the withdrawal of Roman troops from Britain, these two groups of people and two other related groups, the Saxons and Jutes, began a long exodus to Britain. (pp. 46-47)

The early Anglo-Saxons left no account of these events for the simple reason that they were functionally illiterate. And yet for all their shortcomings, the Anglo-Saxons possessed a language that was rich in possibilities and once literacy was brought to them, it flourished with astonishing speed. The main bringer of literacy, and of Christianity, was St. Augustine, who traveled to Britain with forty missionaries in 597 and within a year had converted King Ethelbert of Kent at his small provincial capital, Canterbury. With that initial victory, Christianity spread over the island, towing literacy in its wake. In only a little over a hundred years England became a center of culture and learning as great as any in Europe. (pp. 47, 50)

No one, of course, can say at what point English became a separate language, distinct from Germanic dialects of mainland Europe. What is certain is that the language the invaders brought with them soon began to change. There was a great deal of subtlety and flexibility built into the language and once they learned to write, their literary outpouring was both immediate and astonishingly assured. (pp. 50, 51)

One final cataclysm awaited the English language: the Norman conquest of 1066. The Normans were Vikings who had settled in northern France 200 years before. They had given their name to a French province, Normandy. But they had abandoned their language and much of their culture and become French in manner and speech. (pp. 53-54)

The variety of French the Normans spoke was not the speech of Paris, but a rural dialect, and its divergence from standard French became even more pronounced when it took root in England. This had important consequences for the English language of today and may even have contributed to its survival.

Norman French, like the Germanic tongues before it, made a lasting impact on English vocabulary. Of the 10,000 words we adopted from Norman French, some three-quarters are still in use—among them *justice, jury, felony, traitor, prison, and parliament*.

Because English had no official status, for three centuries it drifted. Without a cultural pivot, some place to set a standard, differences in regional usage became more pronounced rather than less.

And yet it survived. If there is one uncanny thing about the English language, it is its incredible persistence. In retrospect it seems unthinkable to us now that it might have been otherwise, but we forget just how easily people forsake their tongues. And yet in Britain, despite the constant buffetings of history, English survived. It is a cherishable irony that a language that succeeded almost by stealth, treated for centuries as the inadequate and second-rate tongue of peasants, should one day become the most important and successful language in the world.



Its lowly position almost certainly helped English to become a similar, less inflected language. By making English the language mainly of uneducated people, the Norman conquest made it easier for grammatical changes to go forward unchecked.

Isolated from the rest of Europe by the English Channel, the Norman rulers gradually came to think of themselves not as displaced Frenchmen but as Englishmen. Intermarrying between Normans and British contributed to the sense of Englishness. The children of these unions learned French from their fathers, but English from their mothers. For a time, at least up until the age of Chaucer [c. 1350], the two [languages] coexisted.

The harsh, clacking, guttural Anglo-French had become a source of amusement to the people of Paris, and this provided perhaps the ultimate blow to the language in England. Norman aristocrats, rather than be mocked for persevering with an inferior dialect that many of them ill spoke anyway, began to take increasing pride in English. So total was this reversal of attitude that when Henry V was looking for troops to fight with him at Agincourt in 1415, he used the French threat to the English language as a rallying cry.

It is sometimes suggested that our vocabulary is vast because it was made to be, simply because of the various linguistic influences that swept over it. But in fact this love of variety of expression runs deeper than that. It was already evident in the early poetry of the Anglo-Saxons that they had an intuitive appreciation of words sufficient to ensure that even if England had never been invaded again her language would have been rich with synonyms.

It is true that English was immeasurably enriched by the successive linguistic waves that washed over the British Isles. But it is probably closer to the truth to say that the language we speak today is rich and expressive not so much because new words were imposed on it as because they were welcomed.

In summary, we have learned that because of the topography of Greece the ancient Greek language acquired quite a number of dialects. Out from these dialects it was the Attic dialect of old Ionic that emerged as dominant and became known as Classical Greek. It was the language of fifth-century B.C. Athens and the Age of Pericles. Due to various influences during the time of the Roman Republic a common language developed known as Koiné. This dialect, spoken by all Roman citizens, was the language chosen by the Holy Spirit for the New Testament canon. It was in this language that the people of the first century were evangelized and learned doctrine.

Unfortunately, it was the late 19<sup>th</sup> century before it was discovered that the New Testament was not written in some special “Holy Ghost” Greek or the classical Attic Greek but rather the Koiné.

It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that this knowledge began to have a marked influence on biblical analysis, exegesis, and scholarship. One of the theologians who picked up on this and began to develop a systematic theology based on Koiné exegesis was Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer. His protégé, Robert B. Thieme, Jr., exploited this discovery by becoming an expert in the Koiné and then endeavoring to bring into the English language an advanced theology based on a word-by-word analysis of the New Testament Scripture. He continued this effort for over 53 years as pastor of Berachah Church in Houston, Texas, and we are the beneficiaries of his scholarship and exposition.

The revival of the literal-historical-grammatical system of hermeneutics allowed the divine framework of human history to emerge in the theology of dispensationalism. Some of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars who refocused attention on this critical aspect of biblical analysis include the following:

**From: Couch, *Dictionary of Dispensational Theology*:**

**John Nelson Darby (1800-1882).** Acknowledged as the father of modern dispensational premillennialism. His order of end-time events is: (1) the rapture and first resurrection, (2) postrapture events in heaven, (3) postrapture events on earth, (4) the millennial kingdom, (5) postmillennial events, and (6) the eternal state. (pp. 83-84) [Floyd Elmore]



**Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843-1921).** Editor of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Born in 1843, his early history is sketchy. In 1865 he lived in St. Louis, Missouri, with his sister Emeline and her husband Sylvester Pappin of a French Family prominent in the world's fur market. Pappin was president of the St. Louis Board of Assessors. Scofield found employment in his brother-in-law's work and, advancing among the city's social elite, met Loentine Cerre who he married on September 21, 1866. Sometime later, Scofield, now a lawyer, moved to Atchison, Kansas, where he entered a career in politics and was elected in 1871 as a representative to the lower house of the Kansas legislature. In 1873 he was appointed by President Grant to the office of District Attorney for the District of Kansas, he resigned within six months under suspicion of misuse of his office for personal gain. Loentine gained a legal separation from her husband in 1877. Scofield returned to St. Louis leaving behind his children. He appears to have sunken into a life of thievery and drunkenness, never to practice law again.

Scofield experienced an evangelical conversion in 1879, apparently through the witness of Thomas McPhetters, who was a member of James Hall Brooks's Walnut Street Presbyterian Church.

**NOTE:** [Walnut Street Presbyterian Church](#) [located at 5th and Walnut] was organized in 1864 as a dissident offshoot of Second Presbyterian Church, then changed to Washington - Compton Avenue Presbyterian Church in the late 1870s after it moved to midtown. Rev. James H. Brookes was an early pastor. In 1926 the church moved to Skinker and Alexander Drive, and adopted the name Memorial Presbyterian Church.

Scofield was licensed to preach by the St. Louis Association of the Congregational Church shortly thereafter, and then organized and pastored the Hyde park Congregational Church in the city.

**NOTE:** [Hyde Park Congregational Church](#) was organized in 1881, this church at 1501 Bremen [at Blair Avenue] was completed in 1894.

In 1882 Scofield accepted a call to a mission church of the denomination in Dallas. In 1895, Scofield accepted an invitation from D. L. Moody to the Trinitarian Congregational Church of Northfield, Massachusetts, leaving a Dallas church that had reached a membership of over eight hundred.

In 1902, the idea of editing a reference Bible was first discussed. The Bible was published by Oxford University Press in 1909 and again with revisions in 1917.

After the publication of the *Reference Bible* in 1909, Scofield became evermore popular in the evangelical world. In 1914, Scofield, with William Pettingill and Lewis Sperry Chafer, established the Philadelphia School of the Bible with Scofield serving as president. (pp. 389-91) [John Hannah]

**Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952).** Son of Thomas Franklin Chafer, a Congregational Pastor and Lomira Sperry Chafer. Thomas Chafer's battle with tuberculosis was lost in 1882. Facing financial uncertainty, Lomira, a school teacher, moved the family to South Lyme, Ohio, where Lewis and his older brother Thomas entered the preparatory school, New Lyme Institute. Then the family moved to Oberlin, Ohio, where Lomira managed a boarding house so that the children could attend college. Lewis entered the Conservatory of Music of Oberlin College where he completed three semesters. Financial constraints prevented further study.

Beginning in 1889, he associated with A. T. Reed, an evangelist of the Congregationalist Church in Ohio, as a baritone soloist. In 1896, he married Ella Lorraine Case. (p. 67)

Chafer became increasingly well known in evangelistic circles and met an array of prominent evangelicals, among them G. Campbell Morgan, F. B. Meyer, Arno C. Gaebelein, James M. Gray, and W. H. Griffith Thomas.



By far, however, the most important contact was with Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, then pastor of the Trinitarian Congregational Church of Northfield, Massachusetts. Chafer found in Scofield a clear, biblically oriented teacher, and the two were thereafter bound together in ministry for two decades. Scofield led the younger Chafer into his particular understanding of the Scriptures, as well as into a change of careers. No longer as itinerant evangelist, Chafer progressively joined his mentor as a traveling Bible teacher, increasingly becoming a central participant.

Gradually, Chafer emerged in the early 1900s as a quiet, energetic leader of one segment of the emerging evangelical movement. His close identification with Scofield increased in the second decade of the century as Chafer moved to East Orange, New Jersey, to join the staff of the New York School of the Bible, an agency that distributed Scofield's increasingly popular Bible correspondence course. In 1913, he assisted Scofield in founding the Philadelphia School of the Bible, apparently writing the curriculum.

Moving to Dallas, Texas, in 1922, Chafer became pastor of the First Congregational Church, which had been founded by Scofield in 1882. Chafer pastored the church from 1922 to 1926. During this period, Chafer founded the Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924, serving as its president as well as professor of systematic theology from its inception until his death in 1952.

After the seminary acquired *Bibliotheca Sacra* in 1933, a journal with roots in the early nineteenth century, Chafer wrote numerous articles that, combined with portions of his books, were published as his largest work, *Systematic Theology* in 1984. (p. 68) [John Hanna]

**John F. Walvoord (1910-2002).** Born on May 1, 1910 in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, to John Garrett and Mary Walvoord. It was a difficult pregnancy and Mary's doctors advised an abortion; however, because of their conviction that the child was a gift from the Lord, they brought John to term. The child proved to be robust, and Mary lived to be 102.

During his high school years, John excelled in academics and athletics but continued to have only a nominal interest in Christianity. While attending a study of the book of Galatians, he became assured of God's mercy toward him. Three years later in 1928, he entered Wheaton College. Walvoord pursued a regular program of studies at Dallas Seminary and graduated in 1934. (p. 419)

Dr. Chafer's increasingly poor health in the 1940s made him determined to bring his protégé into a more prominent role in the school. Through continuing in the pastorate, teaching at the seminary, and being secretary of the faculty, Walvoord became an administrative assistant to the president.

After Chafer's death in 1952, Walvoord became the institution's second president and was promoted to fill Chafer's chair as professor of systematic theology in 1953. Walvoord led the seminary until his retirement in 1986.

Walvoord's tenure at Dallas Theological Seminary effected evangelicalism both nationally and internationally. Under his administration, the school emerged as a major evangelical seminary, sending out hundreds of graduates into pastorates, missions, and teaching posts throughout the world and becoming the largest independent seminary in the world. Whereas Chafer was a visionary and founder, Walvoord was concerned with establishing and stabilizing the school in academic and professional excellence.

In addition to directing an increasingly complex school, Walvoord emerged in the same decades as an eminent scholar in the realm of prophetic and eschatological studies and in defense of pretribulational premillennialism. His stature in the premillennial dispensational movement is evidenced by his service on the committee of scholars and churchmen who produced the *New Scofield Reference Bible* in 1967. (p. 420)



Walvoord made a significant contribution to the delineation and defense of dispensational premillennialism. A perusal of his writings makes it clear that his focus was not upon modern dispensationalism as a system, but upon its eschatological implications. He accepted the theological structure that dispensationalists placed upon the Bible (i.e., literal interpretation, progressive revelation, and a sharp contrast between Israel and the church in the economy of God (i.e., two peoples, two programs, two destinies).

Embracing the tenets of modern dispensationalism as derived from Chafer (who was influenced by Scofield) and cogently expressed later by Charles Ryrie, Walvoord delineated the prophetic details of that system. (p. 421) [John Hannah]