Recreating the New Testament: An Evaluation of Text Critical Views

By
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Introduction

The textual examination of the various manuscript witnesses to the New Testament, commonly referred to as "Textual Criticism," is, without doubt, of the most critical importance for the Christian church. For the non-Christian academic, the precise wording of the original Greek language texts is of scholarly interest, but nothing more. For the Christian, however, the text under examination is God's Word communicated through men to men. If these words are inspired by God, then it is of paramount importance that the Christian know exactly which words God intended the inspired authors to write. Indeed, the question of what the pastor is going to preach to his congregation in terms of the Biblical text should drive the Christian textual critic to pursue excellence in this field of study.

There are so many New Testament manuscripts that have been preserved throughout the world, whether entire Bibles, or small fragments, that there is almost unanimous certainty that within all of these manuscripts the exact wording of the original has been preserved. This is the work of the textual critic: to determine, out of all of these manuscripts, which contain the original words. Are they all contained in one manuscript, a family of related manuscripts, or perhaps a lot of extremely diverse manuscripts?

It is primarily this question that this paper intends to address. There are many different theories and approaches to the discipline, art, and science of textual criticism, and it is easy for the layperson to hear two or three and think either that they are all the same, or that they are all at odds. Moreover, these views are not often articulated clearly enough for most laypeople to understand them and to apply them whenever determining which Bible translation they prefer, or evaluating the opinions of commentators. This paper is intended to guide the layperson through the most common text critical positions, and provide some analysis of their weak and strong points.

Background

It is a well-established fact that the people of the Middle East and Mediterranean have always been extremely literate.[1] The first evidence of writing and alphabet come to us by means of the Phoenicians in the early second millennium B.C. Since that time, the canon of the Old Testament has come to us from the hands of Moses, Joshua, and other scribes. Even within the pages of the Old Testament, other works are cited for reference, indicating the existence of a wider library in the Middle East beyond their sacred works during the first millennium B.C. The treasure trove of manuscripts and papyrus fragments dating from 100 B.C. to the earliest days of Christianity found at Qumran bears

[1] "There can no longer be any doubt from archeological sources that writing was a feature of life in Syria and Palestine from the earliest occupational periods." R. K. Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids, Mi: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969; reprint, Peabody, Ma: Prince Press, 1999), p. 204.

further testimony to this. It should not be surprising, therefore, that people in the first century wanted to document the words and activities of Christ and His Apostles. Nor should it be a surprise that there would be exchanges of letters between church leaders and churches dating back to the earliest days of the church. What has been a great source of amazement among students and scholars of antiquity is that these writings have survived in such quantity for nearly two thousand years.

In this respect, the Bible, and particularly the New Testament, is unique among ancient works. There are over 5,000 manuscripts (in the form of near-complete codices, partial codices, and papyrus fragments) of the New Testament extant in Greek alone. This does not include the numerous copies in Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and other languages. Also, while the original manuscripts of the New Testament books have long since been lost, the extant copies date back to the second century A.D.—within 100-150 years of their original composition. These kinds of statistics are unknown in scholarly circles for other ancient works for which scholars are often relying upon a handful of versions copied over one thousand years after the original was composed.[2]

While this may give comfort to the Christian in terms of the antiquity of the Bible, it is important to note that out of all these extant manuscripts of Greek and other languages, no two manuscripts are completely identical. That is to say, they all differ from one another to a greater or lesser degree. This is understandable given that they were copied at a time before the printing press and, therefore, were made by hand and were subject to the circumstances of their composition and the frailties of their human transcribers. In order to appreciate the nature of these variations and how they came about, a brief discussion of the way ancient documents were written and transmitted is necessary.[3]

The majority of ancient biblical manuscripts were written on either papyrus or parchment. Papyrus was an early form of paper[4] made from the leaves of the papyrus plant that grows predominantly in Egypt and the Nile delta region. The leaves of this plant were arranged horizontally, and then a vertical arrangement of leaves placed on top. These were then moistened and pressed together to form the paper. When papyrus was first made, it was almost as strong as good-quality paper, so it was a very popular medium. Also, compared to parchment, it was relatively inexpensive. Parchment, or vellum as the higher-grade version is called, was made out of animal skins, usually either the young of goats, cattle, sheep, or antelope. The hair was scraped from the skins, and then the skins were washed and prepared for writing. Sometimes special dyes were applied to color the parchment, and such parchment was often used for "deluxe" versions of books. Due to the nature of the material, parchment manuscripts have lasted much

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[2] Bruce Metzger notes that, "Homer's *Illiad*… is preserved in 457 papyri, 2 uncial manuscripts, and 188 miniscule manuscripts. Among the tragedians the witnesses to Euripides are the most abundant; his extant works are preserved in 54 papyri and 276 parchment manuscripts, almost all the latter dating from the Byzantine period… [T]he *Annals* of the famous [Roman] historian Tacitus is extant, so far as the first six books are concerned, in but a single manuscript, dating from the ninth century." Bruce M. Metzger, The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration, 3d ed., (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992), 34.

[3] The presentation here is brief and cursory. This topic is treated in more depth by most books on textual criticism. The reader is referred to the works cited in this paper for further detail.

[4] Indeed, the English word "paper" is derived from "papyrus."

better than papyrus, although the dry sands of Egypt have proven a good atmosphere for the preservation of papyrus manuscripts.

While the scroll format was popular in ancient times, it appears from the archeological evidence that from the earliest times Christians adopted the codex, or book format, for their texts. This is clear from such manuscripts as Codex Vaticanus from the fifth century, and Codex Sinaiticus from the fourth century. It is also evident from the fact that earlier papyrus fragments have writing on both sides, suggesting that they were previously part of a larger codex, not a scroll,[5] thus dating the codex form to the earliest days of the Christian church.[6]

The Greek text of the New Testament was originally written in what is known as an "uncial" text where all the letters are upper case, and there are no punctuation marks or word divisions. By about the ninth century A.D., manuscripts written in "miniscules" began to appear. These texts were written with word divisions and punctuation, and the text itself was predominantly lower case and cursive. Not only did this style aid clarity, but it also helped to increase the speed with which one could copy a manuscript.

While most ancient manuscripts were copied by professional scribes, or, as in the case of the Old Testament, by religious leaders using meticulous checks and balances to ensure accuracy,[7] the circumstances under which the early church flourished precluded such luxury. As a result of persecution and oppression during the first few centuries of the church, the various books of the New Testament were usually hastily copied, either by tradesmen or by churches as they had opportunity. The rapid growth of the church also generated a great demand for copies of the Scriptures.[8]

As the church expanded its borders beyond Palestine, her Scriptures traveled with her. Wherever churches were planted and wherever Christian merchants traveled, copies of the various New Testament books made their way into different parts of the world. As the church expanded into non-Greek speaking areas, translations were made into the native languages of the people in those regions. In Africa it is evident that Latin versions of the New Testament were circulating as early as the second century—more than two hundred years before Jerome's famous translation.[9]

One must remember that to begin with, the New Testament books circulated as individual works. By the latter part of the first century, a corpus of Pauline epistles had

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[5] Scrolls were generally only written on one side. One possible reason for the adoption of the codex by the early Christians was pure economics. One can get more text into a codex using both sides of the papyrus than one can on a scroll using only one side. Thus it would require less papyrus to make a book. Also, while a complete codex of the Old and New Testaments would be large, it would not be as cumbersome as the numerous scrolls it would take to carry as much text.

[6] A good example of this is fragment p52, the earliest extant copy of any New Testament writing, dating from around A.D. 120.

[7] Although the Massoretes were not active in their work of preservation until around 500 B.C., Jewish scribes had been entrusted with the task of accurately transmitting the text of Scripture since about two centuries before Christ (see Harrison, pp. 211 ff.).

[8] Metzger, p.14. Metzger quotes Augustine who complained that in many cases the only qualifications necessary to translate the Scriptures from Greek to Latin were a Greek manuscript and the barest facility with the Latin language. This happened simply because the demand for copies of the Scriptures could not wait for more qualified people to make translations.

[9] Bruce M. Metzger, The Early Versions of the New Testament, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 289 ff., where Dr. Metzger also discusses the evidence for the existence of early, but non-extant, versions of the Latin New Testament in Rome.

already been established. The four Gospels were brought together sometime into the second century, and these had all been brought together into a collection (along with the Pastoral Epistles) by the end of the second century, as is evident from the famous Muratorian Canon.[10] Given that collections might be made up of copies of books from different places, one should not be surprised to find differing textual histories among the various books within a New Testament codex.

Due to the hasty nature by which the early New Testament manuscripts were transmitted, it is only to be expected that errors were introduced from the earliest time. Especially in the first two centuries A. D., when there was great pressure to make copies of the various New Testament books in a short period of time, it was easy for hurried scribes to introduce many typographical errors into the text that would perpetuate with subsequent copying. Even after the establishment of Christianity under Constantine, when reproduction of the Scriptures could be conducted under more peaceful and stable circumstances, scribes were prone to err. Most works on the subject of textual criticism explore the various ways in which New Testament manuscripts were corrupted. Some of the more important are as follows.

<u>Faulty Vision or Hearing</u>

Often errors crept into copies of the New Testament manuscripts simply as a result of human frailty. Where such errors occurred and were reproduced by subsequent scribes, it is clear that the words that resulted from the alteration of letters were legitimate words. This would present a problem for future copyists who, without having access to the original document, would be left wondering whether the word in question is what the author intended. For example, in Acts 15:40, did Paul *choose* Silas or *receive* Silas before leaving? Some uncial manuscripts have the Greek word ΕΠΙΛΕΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ while others have the Greek word ΕΠΙΔΕΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ. The former word means "having chosen" and the latter "having received." It is evident from a careful examination of these two words how a short-sighted scribe, who would not have had the modern aid of precise correction lenses, could confuse one word for the other—especially when either could fit the context of the sentence. The scribe's poor eyesight would not have been helped by the fact that the natural lines on the papyrus could affect the writing.

Students learning classical or *koine* (New Testament) Greek today are at a disadvantage with regard to pronunciation, since the native speakers of the language did not leave a written account of how their language is to be spoken. Most of the time, modern Greek instructors will present a pronunciation system that approximates the original and will also aid the student with learning vocabulary. For many, this is adequate since neither classical nor *koine* Greek function as a spoken language today. Manuscripts from the first few centuries of the church do give some indication of how *koine* Greek might have sounded by reasoning from some of the spelling variations. For example, the Greek words ‘HMIN (hēmin) and ‘YMIN (humin) often appear in different manuscripts in place of one another. This indicates that, at least in some regions if not generally, the Greek letters eta (H) and upsilon (Y) were pronounced the same way. Since it was a common practice, especially post-Constantine, for copies of the New

[10] Kurt and Barbara Aland, <u>The Text of the New Testament</u>, 2d ed., rev. and enl. (Grand Rapids, Mi: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 48-50.

Testament to be made by a group of scribes writing to dictation, a scribe lacking precise enough hearing to distinguish H and Y would be left making an educated guess.

Parablepsis and Homoeoteleuton

These two Greek terms refer to two similar scribal errors that are certainly not peculiar to ancient writers. Parablepsis, or "looking to the side," occurs when a scribe's eye falls on a group of words further down the page that resemble (or are identical) to the words he has just written, and continues copying from that point, skipping over the intervening line or lines. Homoeoteleuton ("similar ending") is a similar phenomenon where the scribe's eye alights on a word or a line whose ending is similar to, or the same as, the ending of the word or line he has just written and he continues writing from that point. Again, the result is the omission of any text in the middle of the two similar-ending lines. Many of the differences between manuscripts due to omission of words or phrases have been ascribed to parablepsis or homoeoteleuton.

Harmonization and Conflation

From a study of the ancient manuscripts, it is clear that scribes often felt at liberty to alter the text of the New Testament from which they were copying. Most of the time such alterations were made because the scribe sincerely felt that the scribe whose work he was copying had erred in his work. From this it can be deduced that most of these copyists were not reading these works for the first time. The fact of their familiarity with the New Testament text, along with the sense of freedom the scribe felt to "correct" the work of his predecessor, sheds light on the common practice of harmonization. Especially in the case of the Gospels, scribes would often feel at free (maybe even obliged) to bring accounts recorded in more than one of the Gospels into line with one other. Naturally, not all scribes would feel this compulsion, and even those who did would not necessarily harmonize in the same place and in the same way. This would, therefore, generate more variations between manuscripts.

If a scribe is working from more than one manuscript, he may come across a detail in one that appears to be missing in the other, or may be different in the other. Since the scribe would probably not know the original reading, he would face the dilemma of either including or changing the original word for something else, or leaving out the original wording. Often the resolution to the dilemma was to include both readings; this way he could be sure that he was preserving the original, even if he had no way of determining which one it is. This practice is known as conflation, or a conflation of readings.

There are many more examples of scribal errors, and the reader is referred to standard works on textual criticism for more details.

Once the process by which the New Testament books were written and disseminated throughout the world is understood, one is in a better position to understand the problem that faces anyone who wants to reconstruct the original New Testament text. The fact remains that the original manuscripts of the New Testament have long since perished, hence the modern textual scholar is left with thousands of manuscripts, some fragmentary, some nearly complete, in a variety of languages, from different ages of church history, and from different regions of the world from which to determine the original words of the Evangelists and the Apostles. The process by which the textual scholar assesses variant readings and manuscripts to produce an approximation to the original text is known as Textual Criticism.

One of the most important aspects of textual criticism, too often overlooked in past years, is the way that church history—and history as a whole—influenced the transmission of the New Testament. Scholars who study the various manuscripts identify trends and notice periods of time when certain types of manuscript dominated, and times they did not. Historical study can help the textual scholar figure out the reasons behind these trends, which in turn may better inform him with regard to the original form of the New Testament.

The first 250 years of church history were marked by fighting against early heresy (Gnosticism, Judaisers, Sabellianism, and Arianism), and fighting for existence under severe persecution. The extent to which heresy influenced the early copies of the New Testament is an oft-debated issue. Many of the earliest manuscripts extant today bear the textual hallmarks of originating in Alexandria. During the first few centuries of the church, Alexandria had the reputation of being an intellectual center. The library at Alexandria was legendary, and it was certainly a melting pot of ideas and philosophies. It is easy to see how scribes in Alexandria might be tempted to re-write passages of the New Testament to fit their particular theological persuasion, and it is possible that this happened. It should be noticed, however, that the church at this time was not completely without discernment. There were many Gnostic-tinged (and Gnostic-immersed) "Gospels" written around this time that were rejected outright by the church. It is hard to imagine that a church would reject on the one hand "The Gospel of Thomas," for example, and yet on the other hand receive versions of the canonical Gospels that had been altered to reflect the same essential message of the Gnostic Gospels.

The fact that the church underwent severe persecution during this time is very significant to the history of the text of the New Testament. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the demand for copies of the Scriptures under the threat of persecution resulted in many copies being made hurriedly under adverse conditions. Many texts produced in this way would be prone to spelling errors and the kinds of human error precipitated by speed. Secondly, during waves of intense persecution it was a common practice for copies of the Scriptures to be confiscated and burned. This left a paucity of copies of New Testament books in certain regions of the Roman Empire.

After Constantine became Emperor in A.D. 313, Christianity was no longer a persecuted religion but rather enjoyed the protection of the Roman Empire. As a result of this, scribes could more easily gather together and take more care over the reproduction and transmission of the New Testament text. It is impossible to say whether any kind of "official" text was produced under Constantine like the "official" text of the Old Testament created by the Massoretic scribes, but without the pressure of persecution it became much easier to copy and transmit the Scriptures with accuracy.

As Latin superceded Greek as the everyday language of the Roman Empire, demand increased for a Latin version of the Bible that would supercede the various Latin versions floating around at the time. Jerome was commissioned with this work of translation that he completed in A.D. 406. His Latin version of the Bible, known as the "Vulgate," became the official version of the Roman Empire and remained the official version of the Western church until the Reformation (and continued to be the official version of the Roman Catholic Church until relatively recently). The Eastern Church, however, did not succumb to Latin and continued to read the Scriptures and perform their liturgy in Greek. When the Muslims invaded much of the Roman Empire from the middle of the seventh century, while many places fell, the area around Byzantium held out against them. By the time of Byzantium's fall in 1453, the West was devoid of anyone with facility in the Greek language. The Byzantine scholars who fled to the West from Byzantium took with them their knowledge of Greek and their copies of classic works in Greek, including the New Testament. The exodus of Byzantine scholars to the West was an integral part of the rise of humanism and the Renaissance in Europe.

When around 1439 Johannes Gutenberg introduced printing by means of moveable type to the world, it revolutionized both the way people communicated, and enabled the mass production of books for a fraction of the cost of hand-copying. Naturally, the Latin Vulgate was the first book from Guttenberg's press, and many more were to follow. It was not until 1514, however, that the Greek New Testament was first published. Metzger suggests two reasons for this delay:[11] first, the fact that a new font had to be created, and type blocks had to be made to represent each individual letter and letter variation. Also, the Latin Vulgate enjoyed unchallenged authority as the official version of the Bible. While Greek was an unknown language to most people, and Greek New Testaments scarce in the West, the Vulgate's position was secure. However, once people could learn Greek grammar and obtain a Greek New Testament, they may be emboldened to challenge the official translation of the church, striking a blow at the church's authority.

The first printed Greek New Testament appeared as part of the Complutensian Polyglot, a multi-lingual, multi-volume work. Although it was planned as early as 1502, was complete by 1517, and received Papal sanction by 1520, it was not published until 1522. While the Polyglot was in the process of being finished and sanctioned, a Roman Catholic Dutch humanist scholar, Desiderius Erasmus, who, possibly with the encouragement of his publisher Johann Froben, produced an edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516. Erasmus' work was fraught with problems. It is possible that Froben knew of the impending publication of the Polyglot and hurried Erasmus to finish his work to beat it to publication.[12] As a result, the work contained many typographical errors. If this were not enough, Erasmus was unable to locate any single complete New Testament manuscript upon which to base his text; hence he had to compile his text from several manuscripts. All of his manuscripts were relatively late (from the tenth to the twelfth century), and the only manuscript he had of Revelation was missing its last page, leaving him no alternative than to translate these six verses from Latin into Greek. Given the fact that study of Greek was still relatively new in the West, and that Erasmus had no other text to work from, it is not surprising that this bold move generated a number of words that are unknown in any other *Greek* text, let alone New Testament manuscript.

Erasmus published five editions of his Greek New Testament, the second of which was used by Martin Luther for his German translation. For the fourth edition, in recognition of the superior text contained in the Complutensian Polyglot (which had been published by that time), Erasmus made corrections in about ninety passages.

Although Erasmus' text was flawed, the fact that it was the first on the market, and that it was relatively inexpensive, secured it's position as *the* text of the Greek New Testament for hundreds of years. While other editions followed at the hands of able

[11] Metzger, Text, pp. 95-96.

[12] Erasmus' later admitted that this work was "*praecipitatum verius quam editum*"—precipitated rather than edited. Metzger, Text, p. 99.

scholars (Robert Estienne, or Stephanus, Theodore Beza, the Elzevir brothers[13]), they all to some extent reproduce the work of Erasmus.

From the time of Stephanus' text (1550) until 1881, Erasmus' text was refined and corrected according to manuscript finds from museums and libraries, quotations from the early church Fathers, and different language versions as they were available. Scholars also began the practice of making note of places where the published text varies from other manuscripts. Over time, these footnotes containing "variant readings" would evolve into elaborate apparati by which the armchair textual critic could evaluate the chosen readings for himself without having to examine hundreds of manuscripts. While the majority of these manuscripts were late miniscules, there were some notable codices available at this time. Theodore Beza had in his collection what has come to be known as Codex Bezae, a fifth century codex of which there are 415 pages extant containing the Gospels, Acts, and the Catholic Epistles in Greek along with a Latin translation.[14] Also in Beza's possession was Codex Clarmontanus, of which 533 pages are extant. This is a sixth century codex containing the Pauline Epistles.[15] While the value of these manuscripts is a matter of controversy today, they were probably superior to many that were available to Beza. However, he chose not to make much use of them since they deviated too much from the standard text of the time.[16] A reference to a manuscript made available by the Pope to the editors of the Complutensian Polyglot suggests that the famous (or infamous, depending on one's perspective) Codex Vaticanus was also known at that time.

During this period, some brave scholars actually departed from the Textus Receptus in their editions of the Greek New Testament. As more manuscripts were discovered, texts were turning up from earlier periods that gave some scholars reason to question some of the previously accepted readings. These scholars were certainly a minority, and it took two events at the end of the nineteenth century to finally break the dominance of the Textus Receptus: the discovery of Codex Sinaiticus, and the publication of Westcott and Hort's Greek New Testament.

Such finds of early manuscripts led to the publication of Greek New Testaments by people such as Lachmann and Tregelles that were not dependent at all upon the Textus Receptus, but drew their evidence directly from these earlier manuscripts.[17] In 1881, an edition of the Greek New Testament appeared that was, by far, the most significant edition of the Greek New Testament to date: <u>The New Testament in the Original Greek</u>, by Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. Unlike their predecessors in the field, Westcott and Hort did not collate manuscripts for this text. They used existing manuscripts, but refined their predecessors' critical methodology. The most significant contribution, and the one that was to have the most lasting effect was that Westcott and

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[13] It was these who were responsible for coining the phrase "Textus Receptus," or "Received Text," in reference to their text as part of their advertising for the second edition of their work. It was not their intent to make grandiose claims for their work, but many even today take the phrase in such a way as to revere this text above all others.

[14] Aland, <u>Text</u>, p. 109.

[15] Ibid., p. 110.

[16] Metzger, <u>Text</u>, p. 105.

[17] Lachmann claimed that his intention was not to reproduce the original New Testament (which he considered an impossible task), but to reproduce the New Testament as it existed in the fourth century (Metzger, <u>Text</u>, p.125).

Hort gave scholarly, critical reasons for considering the so-called "Syrian" text (the text behind the Textus Receptus) a late and untrustworthy text. This position (and many of their arguments) has carried forward to this day, such that this is now the position of the majority of textual scholars. They also refined the identification of "text types."

Constantin von Tischendorf was an industrious and prolific textual scholar. He expended much energy hunting out manuscripts, publishing more than any other scholar had before him, along with a number of editions of the Greek New Testament. His total number of publications exceeds 150, most of which relate to Biblical criticism.[18] Tischendorf's life's ambition was to seek out the earliest Biblical manuscripts available and with them reconstruct the original text of the New Testament, something he regarded as a "sacred task."[19] Between the first and second editions of his New Testament text, while visiting the monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, he noticed some parchment leaves in a wastebasket. When he examined them he recognized the text as coming from the Greek Septuagint, written in an early uncial script. It was said that these parchment leaves were to be used for lighting the monastery oven.[20] Tischendorf warned the monks that the parchment was too valuable to use for kindling, a warning he was to regret issuing when he returned a few years later to find the monks cautious and unwilling to disclose anything further about their manuscripts. When Tischendorf made a third visit to the monastery in 1859, he presented the steward with a copy of the Septuagint he had recently published. The steward remarked that they had something similar and brought him a manuscript covered in a red cloth. When Tischendorf examined the manuscript, he discovered it to be that manuscript he had been longing to see all this time. It contained most of the Old Testament, the entirety of the New Testament, and a couple of other early Christian writings previously known only either in a different language or by title. He spent the entire night examining it, and eventually, after much negotiation and diplomacy, managed to procure the codex for the Czar of Russia. After the Russian revolutions, the codex was sold to the British government and it currently resides in the British Library in London. This codex, named Sinaiticus after the place where Tischendorf found it, is a fourth century codex and is the earliest complete New Testament extant today.

Griesbach had, at the end of the eighteenth century, divided the various New Testament manuscripts into five or six groups based on his study of the transmission of the New Testament text. He eventually reduced these groups to three, and named them according to what he believed to be their region of origin: Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine. Inasmuch as the manuscript in question contained readings similar to others in one of these groups, it was assigned to that group. Westcott and Hort broadly agreed with Griesbach's identifications except that they re-named the Byzantine group the "Syrian" text. They believed that the textual evidence demonstrated the Syrian text to be the latest of the text types, containing what they called a "mixed text." That is, the text

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[18] Ibid., p. 128.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Dr. Daniel Wallace suggests that there is reason to doubt that the monks at St. Catherine's were burning the pages of ancient manuscripts, and Tischendorf embellished this story to make his "rescue" of the manuscript appear more like heroism and less like theft. See Daniel Wallace, "Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism," article available online at http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/inspiration.htm, footnote 42.

often contained readings of other types conflated together to produce a "smooth" text. They considered this to be evidence of the work of a later editorial hand (or hands) on the text, sometime around the fourth century. In light of this, they were convinced that there were no Byzantine manuscripts prior to the fourth century, and the textual evidence at that time supported this claim. They dismissed the Syrian text as "more fitted for cursory perusal or recitation than for repeated and diligent study."[21]

Along with the Syrian text, Westcott and Hort recognized the Western text, which, while an ancient and popular form of text, was characterized by paraphrase and a dangerous fondness for assimilating similar passages to destroy any meaningful differences between them. They also identified the Alexandrian text, which they considered to be one that is polished in style and more precise in syntax—hallmarks of revision to the text. Despite this, the Alexandrian text was thought to be early and an important witness to the original manuscripts.

The best text type, according to Westcott and Hort, was by far what they called the "Neutral" text. This text was the most free from later stylization, harmonization, or any other kind of editorial corruption. Hence, this text type is, by their estimation, the closest to the original text of the New Testament. For Westcott and Hort, Codex Sinaiticus ("Aleph") and Codex Vaticanus ("B") are the best representatives of this text type. For Westcott and Hort, every reading of these codices was to be given weight and none rejected lightly.[22] When "Aleph" and "B" agree on a reading, especially when they agree against the other text types, unless there is very strong internal evidence to suggest otherwise, Westcott and Hort said that reading must be accepted as original.

While Westcott and Hort contributed greatly to turning the tide of opinion against the Textus Receptus, the so-called "traditional text" was not without its defenders. Among those defenders, the most notable of this time was probably John William Burgon, Dean of Chichester. Metzger characterizes Burgon as a "leading champion of lost causes and impossible beliefs,"[23] but it is wrong to dismiss Burgon lightly. He was certainly a scholar of the New Testament text and, unlike many who would take his position today, had a lot of first-hand experience examining the manuscripts in question. Burgon was not so much an advocate of the Textus Receptus as he was a critic of Westcott and Hort and a defender of their much-maligned "Syrian" text type. Burgon considered this the "traditional text" and was not prepared to let Westcott and Hort cast aspersions on the text which, as he believed, was the text used by the church from the beginning, without a fight. He is often criticized for the belligerent nature of his argumentation, however one must bear in mind that he believed he was fighting, against growing popular opinion in favor of his opponents, for the preservation of the word of God.[24] Along with Burgon opposing Westcott and Hort were F. H. A. Scrivener, who

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[21] Hort, quoted in Metzger, The Text of the New Testament, p. 132.

[22] There were occasions when they felt that "Aleph" and "B" contained a reading that was expanded. But they would still sooner put the reading in a footnote than excise the reading altogether.

[23] Metzger, Text, p.x

[24] It should also be noted that both Calvin and Luther did not hold back from aggressive argumentation for the sake of the gospel. The character of a man's scholarship and the weight of his arguments should not be lightly dismissed because of the emotive way in which he may feel obliged on occasion to express them. Burgon's work does not, to this writer, appear to be as full of this kind of pugnaciousness as some portray; there is a scholarship to his work that demands respect and attention, even by those who disagree with him most strongly.

also rejected their dismissal of the Syrian text, and George Salmon, who believed that more consideration should be given to the Western text type.

Westcott and Hort's "Neutral" text was absorbed into the Alexandrian text by later scholars, and their "Syrian" text became more commonly referred to as the "Byzantine" text. Aside from this, their approach was largely adopted by the scholarly community, and the vast majority of Greek New Testaments published since their time have been based on their work. Their attitude towards "Aleph" and "B" has been modified by later scholars to account for the numerous significant finds of early New Testament manuscripts. "Aleph" and "B" still have pride of place, but their readings are not always so readily accepted in the face of earlier and better readings now available. As will be noted later, the hallmark of the position taken by most modern textual scholars is not one that holds to a couple of manuscripts regardless of the evidence, but rather one that is constantly informed by the facts of the evidence, and does not allow tradition and theological speculation to cloud the task at hand: the recovery of the original text of the New Testament.[25]

When faced with the overwhelming task of evaluating the many New Testament manuscripts to determine the original reading of any passage, the textual critic must start with basic ground rules by which the various readings are considered. These rules have developed over the last two hundred years, and are, more or less, adopted by textual scholars across the board. They take into consideration both internal factors (context and style, for example), and external factors (text type, age, and agreement with other versions or with early church fathers, for example). Textual scholars differ over which "canons" of textual criticism they use, or which carry the most weight.

External Evidence

There are three main factors that should be considered when assessing the external evidence for a reading. First, there is the date of the reading, which is not necessarily the same as the date of the manuscript in which the reading is found. A manuscript might be relatively late, but contain a text that was copied from a very early manuscript. As Metzger notes, there are some late miniscule manuscripts that are now recognized as containing a text earlier than some of the later uncial texts.[26] While the age of a reading is only one of many evidences that would contribute to its final assessment, a reading that cannot be traced back into the early days of the manuscript tradition is unlikely to be original.[27]

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[25] The caricature of the modern textual scholar often painted by the more aggressive defenders of the "traditional text" is that he virtually worships codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. For that reason, many of them still argue against modern textual scholars using Burgon's attacks on these manuscripts. However, a cursory read of the writings of Aland, Metzger, Wallace, or even the introductions to the UBS and Nestle-Aland Greek New Testaments show that modern textual scholars are more considered in their evaluation of these manuscripts, especially in light of the many important parchment finds of the last 90 years.

[26] Metzger, The Text of the New Testament, p. 209.

[27] One must be careful here because, as Dr. Maurice Robinson correctly points out, where there are few manuscripts, one can only expect that there will be fewer attestations to original readings. Hence, a lack of evidence for a reading in the earliest centuries of the manuscript tradition may simply be due to the lack of witnesses in that period of time (Maurice Robinson, "The Case for Byzantine Priority," online paper available from http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol06/Robinson2001.html). However, there should be

Second, consideration should be given to the geographical spread of the manuscripts that agree with a given reading or variant. If manuscripts from distant and diverse locations support a particular variant, that variant may have a greater claim to authenticity, since it is unlikely that these manuscripts could have copied from one another. One must be sure, however, that the manuscripts in question do not share a common ancestor, since that would significantly diminish their claim to independent testimony.

Finally, the manuscript in question must be assessed in terms of its genealogy. Manuscripts that originate from the same source and maintain a close affinity to their sister documents need not be considered independently. The recognition of such family groupings can help the textual critic to reduce the number of manuscripts that need to be examined, and recognizing "family traits" in a manuscript can alert the critic to the nature of the text.[28]

Internal Evidence

Hort divided internal evidence into two main types, "transcriptional" and "intrinsic." "Transcriptional" evidence pertained to the habits of scribes—things scribes were prone to do in the course of transcribing manuscripts. This would also include the kind of scribal errors discussed earlier, as well as more the more deliberate acts of copyists. "Intrinsic" evidence refers to the consideration of the author's style and the context in which he wrote: of all the possible variants, which is the author most likely to have written given his character, his style, his environment, and his background, as far as these things can be ascertained? Numerous "rules" have been proposed and refined over the years based on these considerations. What follows is a brief presentation of some of the more significant of these "rules."

The chosen reading must be able to explain the existence of the variant readings.

There can hardly be any dispute that of all the "internal" principles, this one is of paramount importance. Variant readings did not appear out of nowhere; they all originated as a result of misreading, misunderstanding, or not liking the original word. The reading that can be shown to have given rise to all the variants is clearly the original reading.

Preference is given to the more difficult reading.

This principle is based on the assumption that a scribe would not normally substitute a common word for a rare word, or a clear reading for an obscure one. While this principle is usually true, and it is highly regarded amongst textual critics, it can be argued that the term "difficult" is often applied subjectively. For example, Acts 20:28 speaks of "the church of God, which He purchased through His own blood" (NASB). Many manuscripts however have "Lord" instead of God. One of the deciding factors between these two readings is the assumption that "God" is the more difficult reading

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witnesses to that reading at a reasonably early date—it should have a certain amount of history to be credible.

[28] Textual critics of different viewpoints apply this principle according to their particular persuasions. For example, the identification of a manuscript as "Byzantine" might indicate to a scholar who favors Byzantine manuscripts that this is one to trust. However, that same identification might make a scholar who does not share this view of the Byzantine text family very wary of the manuscript—indeed, some might dismiss the manuscript out-of-hand on this basis alone.

since this might imply that God (i.e., the Father) has blood. "Lord" would more readily imply Jesus who certainly did shed His own blood for the church. The problem of using the principle of the most difficult reading here is that it assumes that "God" was a difficult reading *for the original author*. However, for the person who understands Trinitarian doctrine and the way words are used by the New Testament authors as a whole, neither "God" nor "Lord" really presents any great theological difficulty. In the midst of the Christological debates of the third and fourth century, this passage may well have found itself thrust into the spotlight. Under these circumstances, the fact that this reading persisted, and that it did so in a variety of locations, would be of significance. But notice at this point that other factors are being brought to bear upon the reading (i.e., history and transmission) to test the theory. In other words, it is clear that this principle should not stand alone giving testimony to the veracity of a particular reading.[29]

Preference is given to the reading that fits the style of the author.

Each New Testament author exhibits a distinctive writing style that is evident from words or phrases they seem to favor. This principle simply states that of a given number of variants, the original is most likely to be the one that fits the author's style. Those variants that use words or phrases that the author has not used either in this work, or in other extant writings, are probably not original. There is some controversy over this principle since, once again, it is open to subjectivism, and it is also reliant upon incomplete sources. For example, it is clear that Mark uses the phrase καὶ εὐθὺς ("and immediately") very regularly. It is one of the stylistic traits of Mark's Gospel. However, this principle might appear to ignore the fact that Mark could well choose to vary his style. For some reason, he may want to deviate from using this phrase at a certain point, at it is just as possible that a later scribe changed the reading to καὶ εὐθὺς assuming that this should be the original reading. It can also be argued that, since Mark's Gospel is the only evidence of Mark's writing style extant, it is impossible to be certain of his writing style. Once again, this principle should not be the sole determining factor for the originality of a reading, but it should be one factor of many others that are considered.

Readings that are clear attempts at harmonization are to be rejected.

The emphasis here needs to be placed on *clear*. There is debate over the extent toward which scribes tended to harmonize passages. It is argued that harmonization occurred with such inconsistency that one should be careful when using this principle as a deciding factor. Some scholars may see the mere hint of a harmonization as a reason to discredit a reading. Such tendencies ought to be resisted, and only the most obvious harmonization should be rejected on the grounds of this principle.

Scribal habits must be considered when evaluating a reading.

This principle states that the textual critic needs to examine the scribe's style from the point of view of common scribal habits, such as transcriptional errors, harmonization, or expanding names out of piety. Included in this last category is the expansion of "Jesus" to "Jesus Christ," or "the Lord Jesus Christ."[30] If the manuscript in question

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[29] Robinson further qualifies this principle by recognizing that scribes often wrote nonsense, but other scribes rarely copied nonsense. Hence, a legitimate "difficult" reading would be copied into successive generations, but mere "nonsense" would not last beyond a few generations ("The Case for Byzantine Priority," online paper).

[30] See James R. White, The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?, (Minneapolis, Mn: Bethany House, 1995), pp. 42-46 for a discussion on this.

appears to reflect one or more of such phenomena regularly throughout the text, then it is possible that many, or all, of these readings are not original.

The Major Textual Positions

Textual scholars are unanimous in their agreement that textual criticism applied to the extant manuscripts is necessary if the original readings of the New Testament are ever to be fully recovered.[31] Precisely how textual criticism is to be applied, in particular with regard to the types of evidence discussed previously, and which manuscripts (if any) should form the basis of the reconstructed New Testament is a hotly disputed issue. There are two broad categories into which the diverging views can be placed: the Traditional Text views, and the Eclectic views. Within the Traditional Text views, one finds those who hold to a Majority Text position, those who hold to the Textus Receptus, those who hold to an Ecclesiastical Text, and those who hold to Byzantine Priority. All of these essentially look to the manuscripts of the Byzantine family as the basis for the New Testament text. Their differences are in both how they arrive at their final text, and the reasoning behind their choice of this particular family. Within the Eclectic views, one finds those who are "Thoroughgoing," and those who are "Reasoned." The difference here is in the degree to which the principles of Eclecticism are applied.

Traditional Text Positions

There are a variety of positions taken with regard to the Greek text behind the New Testament that can be identified by their common allegiance to the Byzantine text type. Of these positions, there are four that should be mentioned: the Textus Receptus position, the Majority Text position, the Ecclesiastical Text position, and the Byzantine-Priority position.

Textus Receptus

Since the term "Textus Receptus" has been applied to a variety of Greek New Testament texts over the years, it could be legitimately asked, "which Textus Receptus?" For those who hold this position, the text in mind is the text of Erasmus and the Elzevirs—the text that was eventually used by the King James Bible translators. While it is of the Byzantine text family, this edition of the Textus Receptus is not representative of the entire Byzantine text type. Indeed, many advocates for other Traditional Text views distance themselves from the Textus Receptus due to its many variations from the majority of other Byzantine texts. Given that it includes Erasmus' translation of the last six verses of Revelation from Latin into Greek, and for the rest is based on a relatively small collection of manuscripts, there are some quite unique readings in the Textus Receptus that are not found elsewhere, even among other Byzantine manuscripts.

It appears that the main motivation behind promoting the Textus Receptus as the true Greek text behind the New Testament is theological. Often its supporters refer to it as the "text of the Reformation," as if the integrity of the text is reliant upon the supposed use of the text by those great men of God who led the Protestant Reformation.[32] However, Dr. James White has clearly demonstrated that there is insufficient evidence

[31] Those who hold to the view that the King James Version of the Bible to be the normative text of the church cannot be considered among rational, textual scholars. This position is based more on tradition, misinformation, and conspiracy than on real scholarly textual research.

that the Reformers specifically promoted the use of the Textus Receptus over and above other streams from the Byzantine family.[33] Hence, while this is an interesting position, it is not one that is widely held, especially among the majority of textual scholars.

Ecclesiastical Text

The Ecclesiastical Text position could be considered, in essence, a variation on the Textus Receptus position described above. However, while both agree upon the resulting textual tradition that must be appealed to as the authoritative text, the Ecclesiastical Text position arrives at that point in a very different way.

The main proponent of this position today is Dr. Theodore P. Letis. Letis was a student of Dr. Edward F. Hills, also a staunch defender of the Textus Receptus, though on very different grounds from his protégé.[34]

Dr. Letis' starting point is with the doctrine of verbal inspiration. He argues that the concept of an inerrant autograph was unknown to the Protestant Reformers, and the later dogmaticians who wrote the great confessions of the church (e.g., the Westminster Confession of Faith). It is evident that these "Protestant Dogmaticians" favored a view of inspiration that placed inerrancy in the *apographa*, or the present, extant text, which for them would be the Textus Receptus.[35] While early Princeton dogmaticians like Archibald Alexander could suggest that the autographs of Scripture may contain error (scribal, not doctrinal), Benjamin Warfield, a later Princetonian, adopted German text critical methodologies and introduced the concept of the inerrant autograph.[36] Letis suggests that Warfield's reason for turning away from the concept of an authoritative apograph was due to the fact that textual critics of the time were attempting to use the vast quantity of variants in the New Testament to undermine its authority. Instead of appealing to the voice of sixteenth and seventeenth century theologians, Warfield placed inerrancy in the non-extant autographs. This enabled him to engage the critics and perform critical analysis of the variants without assaulting the inerrant, authoritative Scriptures.[37] However, Warfield's solution was, in Letis' view, inadequate, since it did not really address the issue of what the Scriptures originally said. And, indeed, as time progressed, those within text critical circles began to see that the pursuit of the original autograph might be in vain.[38] Those who held to the *apographa*, however, did not share Warfield's problem. For them, it did not matter what the original text said, since the true and authoritative text was the one currently in the hands of the church—the Textus Receptus.

It is upon this basis that Letis builds his position. He believes that by surrendering the Sacred Text to the world for examination as if it were any other piece of

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[32] James R. White, The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?, (Minneapolis, Mn: Bethany House, 1995), p. 69.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Hills' works include The King James Version Defended! in which he argues that God has providentially preserved His word in the Textus Receptus.

[35] Theodore Letis, The Ecclesiastical Text, (Philadelphia, Pa: The Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies, 1997), pp. 1-5.

[36] Ibid., pp. 6, 16.

[37] Ibid., pp. 1-3.

[38] Ibid., pp. 26-27.

literature, the church has forsaken her role as the guardian of the Holy Scriptures.[39] In Letis' words, the Bible "has been lifted from its legitimate matrix within the bosom of the Church and has served countless students as a cadaver in the operating theatres of the world within the alien context of the Academy."[40] The danger of this is that it desensitizes the student from appreciating the Bible as the Sacred word of God. The church alone provides the right context for the proper use of the Sacred Scriptures.

> Historically, the Church has always held as sacred every verbal unit of Scripture… one cannot abandon such a model in favour of some modern adjustment, whether Barthianism (the Bible only *contains* the Word of God), or Warfieldianism (inspiration is only ultimately to be found in the *autographa*).[41]

The church, argues Letis, has always recognized that it is the "localized and extant edition" of the Scriptures that is the infallible word, and it is this that should be retained at all costs.[42]

Given that there are no two copies of the Textus Receptus that are identical, Letis acknowledges that text critical principles still need to be applied to arrive at the text to be considered as the authoritative text. Note that for Letis it is irrelevant which readings are "original," or even what the inspired author originally wrote. What Letis is trying to recover is the text that represents the last *apographa*—i.e., the text of the Protestant Dogmaticians: the Textus Receptus. In order to achieve this, he applies principles enunciated by Brevard Childs under the name of the "Canonical Approach."[43]

As Letis and Childs explain it, the Canonical Approach appears relatively simple. There are two rules: first, the idea of an "original" text needs to be abandoned. Secondly, the reading that should be used is the one that became exegetically and hermeneutically sanctioned (i.e., canonized).[44] Again, the emphasis is put upon continuous, recognized witness from the earliest church, through the Fathers, the versions, and so forth. Only texts that can demonstrate that kind of heritage can be considered a part of the Ecclesiastical Text.

In order to help the reader better grasp the way in which this approach to textual criticism works practically, Letis provides an entire chapter dedicated to the investigation of the notorious variant in John 1:18, μονογενὴς θεός. This is the reading as it stands in the Nestle-Aland 27th edition of the Greek New Testament. However, there are two other prominent readings: ὁ μονογενὴς θεός, and ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός.[45] While μονογενὴς θεός and ὁ μονογενὴς θεός are both found in early "Egyptian" manuscripts, the latter is rejected on the basis of lack of patristic and versional support. The question then becomes which of θεός and υἱός is the correct reading. With regard to these two, Letis notes that both can trace their readings back to an early date, but while υἱός is found

[39] Ibid., pp. 81, 85.
[40] Ibid., p. 83.
[41] Ibid., p. 84.
[42] Ibid., pp. 84-85.
[43] Letis cites from Childs' The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction, (Philadelphia, Pa: Fortress Press, 1985).
[44] Letis, The Ecclesiastical Text, p. 128.
[45] NA^{27} does not list the last reading since it is found in predominantly Byzantine manuscripts.

among very early Syriac versions, the Latin, and other versions from a variety of places, θεός is found primarily in the writings of Valentinian Gnostics.

Letis goes on[46] to demonstrate how the reading μονογενὴς θεός would lend support to Gnostic interpretations of John's Prologue, and attempts to show that Gnostic Coptic manuscripts could have had influence upon the text of the extant Greek manuscripts of John from Egypt. In the end, he concludes that while μονογενὴς θεός certainly has the support of the earliest evidence, because this early evidence is from the hands of Valentinian Gnostics, there is good chance that they altered the text to suit their theological needs.[47] By the time of Nicea, he believes that the church in both her Eastern and Western expressions had rejected this reading to be sure that no Gnostic or Arian interpretations could be applied to this passage. According to the Canonical Approach, therefore, ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός would stand as the correct reading at this point since it is clearly the reading accepted by the church.

Proponents of other text critical positions tend to see the Ecclesiastical Text view as simply either the Textus Receptus position, or a Majority Text/Byzantine-Priority text position, hence it does not appear to get much specific attention in works addressing textual criticism. This means that those who oppose the Ecclesiastical Text position rarely address some of its specific nuances. For this reason, the present writer will offer some points for consideration.

First, from the perspective of the Christian scholar, there must be agreement with Dr. Letis that the text under review is nothing other than the sacred word of God. As such, it must deserve the respect of the critic. This fact does not necessarily change the practice of textual criticism, but it should most certainly keep the scholar focused on the goal of his work: restoring God's word in its fullness to His people.

Second, the question over the search for the *autographa* raises the issues of inspiration, authority, and one's doctrine of the church. Did God inspire the authors of Scripture, or did God inspire the church to produce His Word? Did God invest the original versions of the various books and letters that comprise the New Testament with divine authority, or did He invest that authority in whatever version of the Greek text the church of the Reformation decided was authoritative? Outside of a fiat ruling by the church based solely on tradition, upon what basis would the church determine that this one particular text is inspired? It is simply untrue to say that the original readings are not extant,[48] and on that basis determine that a search for them is a search in vain. Since the Lord has been gracious to preserve such a host of witnesses to the text of the New Testament, there is a wealth of evidence available, *and it is among the extant evidence that scholars can find the original readings.* Modern textual scholars can pick up a critical edition of the Greek New Testament and know for certain that between the text and the apparati, he is looking at the Word of God as He originally inspired it. The work of the textual critic is not to look outside of the text to see which readings the church has traditionally accepted. Rather, it is to use all the evidence the Lord has provided, both within history and within the manuscripts themselves, to determine which of the readings best reflects the text that God originally inspired. The fact that all manuscripts agree

[46] Letis, pp. 110-130.
[47] Ibid., pp. 130-131.
[48] Note, *readings*, not *manuscripts*.

somewhere between 80 – 90% of the time demonstrates that the Lord has already given a firm foundation. But to trust that even the godliest of men throughout church history have infallibly preserved the text of the New Testament is, in the opinion of this writer, optimistic to the extreme. This is not a low view of the church, but a Biblical view of man.

Majority Text

As the name suggests, the basis of the Majority Text position is that the key factor for determining the original text of the New Testament should be quantity of manuscripts. Since the Byzantine text type is by far the majority report, and has been since the ninth century, clearly the "Majority Text" is a Byzantine text.

While Dean Burgon could not strictly be classified as a Majority Text advocate, he clearly utilized similar argumentation when defending the Byzantine text against the Westcott and Hort text. He expressed amazement that out of 1,000 Greek manuscripts 995 copies of the New Testament that have been around for centuries would be considered untrustworthy, and the reliability of the text would be carried by a handful of manuscripts that were unknown to the church until relatively recently.[49] He questioned whether the truth of the text of Scripture would reside with a vast multitude of manuscripts that have a remarkable level of agreement, or with a handful of manuscripts that cannot agree with one another most of the time.[50] Burgon was also very skeptical of the popular text critical principle that witnesses should be weighed not counted. He wondered if it is possible to weight every codex, version, or church Father, or whether every critic is competent to perform such a task. Burgon insisted that "Number" is a vital criterion for determining the originality of a reading. If number would make a difference in a jury vote, he argues, why not when determining the original text of the New Testament, especially when the manuscripts in question cover a broad range of geographical regions.[51]

Modern advocates of the Majority Text position also use stemmatics, or a genealogical method of tracing a reading's textual history, to determine the antiquity of a particular text. Zane Hodges, the main proponent of this method, describes it as a method whereby "a valid stemma [has] the power to explain the descent of the readings in a natural way."[52] The higher up the stemma a reading appears, the more likely it is to be original. Also, each stemma should be demonstrably the father of multiple readings, which appear only below the stemma.

Finally, proponents of the Majority Text position are apt to view their particular line of textual transmission as the only "pure" and, therefore, correct line. All other lines are considered unorthodox or heretical. Arguments based on a doctrine of divine preservation are often articulated to defend the idea that God has preserved this particular

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[49] Dean John William Burgon, The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels, Volume I, (London, UK: George Bell and Sons, 1896; reprint, Collingswood, NJ: The Dean Burgon Society, 1998), p. 12.

[50] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[51] Ibid., pp. 43-49.

[52] Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, (Nashville, Tn: Thomas Nelson, 1982), p. xxv, quoted in Daniel Wallace, "Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text," available on-line at http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/89c3.htm.

stream of the text, and this is evidenced by the vast quantity that still exists to this day.[53]

Byzantine-Priority

The Byzantine-Priority position is often considered simply a further variant of the Majority Text position, especially by those who object to its conclusions.[54] Proponents of the Byzantine-Priority view, however, distinguish themselves from the Textus Receptus, Majority Text, and Ecclesiastical Text positions, often agreeing with the Eclectic Text advocates' critiques on these views.

The Byzantine-Priority view rejects appeals to simple "nose-counting" to establish the "best text." It also rejects the stemmatic approach of Hodges, and even, to some extent, the argument from divine preservation. The strength of the Byzantine-Priority position is its appeal to both rational principles of textual criticism, and to the need for a logical, reasonable, and factually defensible history of the transmission of the New Testament text.

The foremost proponent of the Byzantine-Priority view is Dr. Maurice Robinson. In a variety of papers, as well as in his published edition of the Greek New Testament (along with Dr. William Pierpont),[55] he has articulated what is, in this writer's opinion, the best challenge to date to the standard position of the Eclectic school.

Robinson sets the Byzantine-Priority position apart from the Majority Text position by pointing out a number of weaknesses. Firstly, he notes that while there is great similarity between manuscripts of the Byzantine family, there is by no means anything approaching a uniform text. No two Byzantine manuscripts are identical, as is true with all the New Testament manuscripts of all text types. The Majority Text position appeals to the uniformity of the Byzantine text as evidence of divine preservation, a position that the evidence contradicts.[56]

Robinson is also not comfortable with the idea of a single, "orthodox" line of transmission. [57] This discomfort makes sense since he acknowledges the variations between the Byzantine manuscripts; that is to say, since no two Byzantine manuscripts are the same, if God had intended to preserve a perfect copy of the Greek New Testament in the Byzantine text type, one could only conclude that He failed to do so since no one

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[53] See, for example, the comments by Wilbur Pickering in his book, The Identity of the New Testament Text, as quoted by Daniel Wallace, "The Majority Text and the Original Text: Are They Identical?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (April 1991): 152-158. This paper is also available online at http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/91B2.htm.

[54] Daniel Wallace, an advocate of the "Reasoned Eclectic" approach, frequently cites both Majority Text and Byzantine-Priority proponents together as "Majority Text advocates." This is evident even in the essays of his cited in this paper.

[55] Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, The New Testament in the Original Greek according to the Byzantine/Majority Textform, (Atlanta, Ga: Original Word, 1991). The introduction to this work (available on-line at http://www.skypoint.com/~waltzmn/RobPier.html) has been utilized in the follow summation of the position. Also of use was Dr. Robinson's essay, "The Case for Byzantine Priority," in Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism, (Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Academic, 2002), pp. 125-139. This essay is an abbreviated version of a more complete paper available on-line at http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol06/Robinson2001.html.

[56] Robinson and Pierpont, on-line text.

[57] Ibid.

can point to a single Byzantine manuscript and identify it as the preserved original.[58] Also, while Robinson is very cautious over his use of internal evidence, he would not reject it completely as the Majority Text advocates are wont to do. Finally, he rejects Hodges' "stemmatics" saying that this approach violates other accepted principles of textual criticism.[59]

Robinson does not dismiss the large number of extant Byzantine manuscripts as meaningless: he simply sees their value in a slightly different way.[60] Rather than regarding these manuscripts as a proof of his position in and of itself, he regards them as a phenomenon that *must* be explained adequately by any theory of textual transmission. It is here that Robinson identifies what he considers to be the Achilles' heel of the Eclectic position: it fails to adequately account for the transmission of the New Testament text as is evident by the extant manuscripts. Robinson argues that there is a reason why there are only hints of Byzantine readings prior to the fourth century, and then an explosion of Byzantine texts after the ninth. He rejects the idea that there was some kind of official "standardization" of the text after Constantine brought peace to the church on the basis that there is not a shred of historical evidence to support such an idea. According to Robinson, not all of the earliest manuscripts are of the Alexandrian family favored by modern Eclectics. Indeed, most display a mixed text with no clear text type throughout.[61] In light of this, it seems reasonable to suggest that in a very short space of time, the autographs were copied and, unintentionally, corrupted. Robinson points out that the "corruption" of the original was less likely as a result of heretical influence[62] and more likely a result of hurried copies being disseminated around local communities. Each region would make its own errors and attempts to correct perceived errors of previous copyists, and as a result develop its own regional text type. While many regional copies would have been lost in the first couple of centuries as a result of

[58] Indeed, the very existence of Hodges and Farstad's The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text, (Nashville, Tn: Thomas Nelson, 1982) demonstrates the need for a unified text that represents the Majority Text. If God had preserved this single text, one can only wonder why Hodges and Farstad had to reconstruct the Majority Text and did not just reproduce *the* manuscript containing the "Preserved Word."

[59] Robinson and Pierpont. Ironically, as Wallace points out, Hodges' stemmatic approach falls short of vindicating the principle that the majority of manuscripts must be correct. Firstly, he only applied the method to John 7:53-8:11 and Revelation, so it is not being tested against the entirety of the New Testament. Further, when the results of this method against these sections are examined, it turns out that 15 of the readings that they adopted as a result are supported by a *minority* of manuscripts. "In other words for the *pericope adulterae* [John 7:53-8:11], the *Majority* Text, in half its readings, is a minority text." See Daniel Wallace, "Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text," available on-line at http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/89c3.htm.

[60] Much of Robinson's argumentation at this point is derived from Robinson and Pierpont, unless otherwise noted.

[61] Robinson notes that the textual situation in Egypt was a little more complex than in the Greek-speaking East. Most of the manuscripts there display a mixed text type, although there is evidence of distinctively Alexandrian texts (p75) and some distinctively Byzantine texts. The vast majority of the manuscripts, however, seem to be a Western-Alexandrian mix. With such a preponderance of mixed texts, reasons Robinson, it is unlikely that a "general" text could emerge from the Egyptian sands.

[62] Robinson insightfully notes that most of the information available today about early heretical groups comes via contemporary critiques from Christians. This indicates that heretical writings were identified as such by the church early on and dealt with, making widespread corruption of the Scriptures by heretics virtually impossible.

persecution, the situation changed in the fourth century and onwards after Constantine established Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Now Christian communities could freely interact with each other and share their copies of the Scriptures. As they did so, over a number of centuries of copying, comparison, and correction, a consensus text emerged that reflected the archetypal text from which these regional variations had all been born centuries before: the so-called Byzantine text form. As Robinson puts it:

> The result inevitably arrived at would be a continually-improving, self-consistent Textform, refined and restored, preserved (as would be expected) in an increasing number of manuscripts which slowly would overcome the influence of "local texts" and finally become the dominant text of the Greek-speaking world. This explains both the origin and dominance of the Byzantine/Majority Textform.[63]

Since it became the dominant text of the Greek-speaking world, it is only natural that the vast majority of manuscripts preserved to this day are from the Greek-speaking Eastern Church. It was this branch of Christendom in the Byzantine East that held out against the Muslim invaders until 1453. When Byzantium fell, the scholars fled into Europe taking their manuscripts with them. It only makes sense that these Byzantine texts became the basis for the earliest editions of the Greek New Testament, since these were the most readily available.

This historical reconstruction presents a possible chain of events that explains the evidence and in turn vindicates the Byzantine text type. It is such a historical reconstruction that explains the phenomena of the various extant text types the like of which Robinson believes modern Eclectics have, thus far, been unable to provide.

Furthermore, Robinson believes that the inability of the Eclectic school to produce a text that resembles anything within the stream of transmission is also detrimental to their position.[64] While the Eclectic scholar may be able to provide a strong case for the acceptance of a particular Alexandrian variant within a reading, the resulting reading is found to be little, if at all, attested by the extant manuscripts. As Robinson points out, given that no two manuscripts are identical, one could overlook this if it occurred periodically in a text. The problem is that the Eclectic approach *repeatedly* produces readings that have no manuscript support.[65] Robinson believes that the transmissional history that the Eclectic critics would have to propose to support such readings "is not even remotely *probable* to have occurred under any normal circumstances."[66]

Robinson is very critical of Hort's text critical methodology. In short, he accuses Hort of simply applying criteria that would eliminate the "problem" of the Byzantine text.

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[63] Robinson and Pierpont.

[64] Robinson, The Case for Byzantine Priority, on-line text.

[65] For example, Robinson points out that in Matthew 20:23, there are seven variants. Of these seven variants, the Nestle-Aland text (27th edition) follows Aleph, B, and other Alexandrian or non-Byzantine readings over Byzantine readings in three places (the first, second, and sixth variants). The resulting passage (i.e., the chosen readings along with the rest of the verse) has no manuscript support, according to Robinson. In other words, the effort expended to determine the correct reading of a couple of variants has all been for the purpose of supporting a non-existent (let alone non-extant) text.

[66] Ibid.

For example, Hort's genealogical argument suggested that all manuscripts of a particular text type are descended from a single ancestor; hence only one form of each type need be compared. Clearly this undercuts the Byzantine family's "majority" status. Hort also dismissed the Byzantine text on the grounds that it shows evidence of later conflation, regardless of the fact that Alexandrian and Western manuscripts also show evidence of conflation. The lack of "distinctively" Byzantine readings in either the early manuscripts or the Fathers was also cited by Hort. Robinson claims that there are over 150 "distinctively Byzantine" readings dating from before 350 A.D.[67] Also, he notes that if it were not for p75, there would be no evidence for distinctively Alexandrian texts prior to B and Aleph. With regard to quotations of Byzantine readings by the Fathers, Robinson points out that the early Fathers would have used local texts that would not have had a consistent text type. They would have also paraphrased, quoted from memory, and even altered the wording of passages to fit their purpose. Robinson argues that later scribes would not have modified readings to make them more familiar (i.e., Byzantine), as is often claimed. He proposes that if such a practice were widespread, there would not be as many passages left untouched as there are.

The proposed transmission history put forward to support the Byzantine-Priority view would seem to explain the existence of variant readings and the rise of the Byzantine text type. However, the demise of the other text forms, and the growth in popularity of the miniscule text need to be explained. Many of the Byzantine manuscripts are written in miniscule script from after the ninth century. This in itself has been posited as a weakness in the Byzantine-Priority position since these are clearly late manuscripts. Robinson argues, however, that "early" does not always mean "best." Indeed, if his hypothesis is correct, the earliest copies of the autographs would be, by and large, altered local copies and not direct verbatim copies of the original. In fact, his theory of transmission would certainly lend credence to the idea that the further along the transmission line the text is, the more likely it is to have been compared and conformed to other manuscripts. As noted earlier, Robinson sees this process as one of purification, returning these texts to the original (Byzantine) readings. From this perspective, a ninth century manuscript could be a lot closer to the original than a fourth century manuscript. Also, recognizing that a miniscule could have been copied from an early uncial manuscript no longer extant, there is a re-examination underway of the value of miniscule manuscripts. Even Kurt Aland admitted that this much maligned class of witnesses is in need of re-evaluation in light of some of the discoveries being made, in particular the discovery of miniscule manuscript 33, known as the "Queen of the miniscules" due to the quality of the text.[68]

Robinson explains the disappearance of the uncial texts by appeal to "copying revolutions." He states that there is evidence for two such revolutions: the first occurred when parchment became popular, and the second when miniscule writing came into vogue. When both of these happened, many scribes would make copies of the old form into the new form and destroy the old. Hence, many early uncial texts were copied into miniscule script and the uncials then destroyed.[69]

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[67] Robinson and Pierpont.

[68] Kurt and Barbara Aland, The Text of the New Testament, pp. 128-129.

[69] Robinson and Pierpont. The kind of evidence suggested by Robinson includes the "mute" testimony of palimpsests, which bear testimony to the fact that older, presumably valuable uncial

In light of this, proponents of the Byzantine-Priority position would not necessarily advocate the use of text critical methods that "tip the scales" in favor of Byzantine readings. Rather, they would insist that textual critics stop "tipping the scales" against Byzantine readings, and simply allow the evidence to speak. While they do not dismiss completely the value of internal evidence, they are a lot more suspicious of it than those of the Eclectic position. On this point, Byzantine-Priority advocates appeal for a return to a more thorough use of external evidence according to Burgon's principles.

Eclectic Text Positions

As the name suggests, the Eclectic school differs from the various defenders of the Byzantine text in that it does not, at least in general, favor any one particular text type. Rather, the Eclectics select the readings that fit their accepted criteria for determining the original wording of a particular passage, regardless (for the most part) of the reading's textual family.

There are essentially two opinions that differ from one another with regard to Eclectic methodology: Thoroughgoing, or Rational Eclecticism, and Reasoned Eclecticism. Both are of the opinion that the original readings of the New Testament can be determined from the extant manuscripts, and that reading is found scattered among the various extant manuscripts. They differ on their approach to the manuscripts.

Thoroughgoing Eclecticism

This position, also known as "Rational Eclecticism" and "Radical Eclecticism" is by no means a widely held position. One of its main proponents is J. K. Elliott, whose article on the subject forms the basis for this presentation,[70] believes that while those who explicitly take this view may be few, many unknowingly adopt its practice in the course of commentary on the New Testament text.[71] It is of interest to this study, however, since it is a viewpoint radically different from the various Byzantine text positions (the historical-documentary approach) and also distinct from the more popular "Reasoned Eclectic" viewpoint ("the cult of the best manuscript" approach, according to Elliott[72]).

The main distinguishing feature of the Thoroughgoing Eclectic position is that it strongly favors the use of internal evidence to assess the value of any given reading. This is not to say that it disregards external evidence, such as the age of the manuscripts, or their geographical location, but it considers these to be secondary considerations. There is no pre-determined view of the manuscript traditions; there are no "favored" manuscripts or text types. When faced with a collection of textual variants, the Thoroughgoing Eclectic will want to determine which best fits the style and theology of the author, not which comes from the best quality manuscripts, or which follows a particular textual tradition.

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manuscripts were considered fit to be erased and re-used for other literary purposes. He also notes Kirsopp Lake's comments regarding the "genealogically-unrelated" manuscripts he discovered at Sinai, Patmos, and Jerusalem. Lake concluded that the scribes must have destroyed their exemplars (i.e., the texts from which they copied).

[70] J. K. Elliott, "The Case for Thoroughgoing Eclecticism," in David Alan Black (ed.), Rethinking New Testament Criticism, (Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Academic, 2002), pp. 102-125.

[71] Ibid., pp. 101-103.

[72] Ibid., p. 108.

> A definition of the movement I defend here is that we do indeed seek to achieve a knowledge of readings over and above a knowledge of documents. We start our work from a full *apparatus criticus*… and we pay attention not only to the reading but at a later stage to the attestation as well.[73]

The principles of textual criticism applied by Elliott and those who share this view agree to a great extent with those of most, if not all, Eclectic textual critics, at least in terms of internal evidence. Such principles include the famous *difficilior lecto potior*, or the principle that the most difficult reading is to be preferred, the recognition of a scribal tendency to conflate readings and assimilate parallel passages, the effects of scribal frailty ("paleographical considerations") such as homoeoteleuton, and the effect of church controversy upon the transmission of the text. Where Elliott believes that his "Reasoned Eclectic" brethren err is not that they fail to apply these principles, but they fail to apply them *consistently*. He laments the fact that while they will faithfully apply the principles to one reading in one case, in another case they will jettison them when the better reading disagrees with one of the "favored manuscripts" (principally B and Aleph).[74]

The Thoroughgoing Eclectic applies these principles to every variant reading in every case, regardless of manuscript tradition. Elliott illustrates this extensively by applying the principles to a number of passages and describing the process by which the Thoroughgoing Eclectic determines the correct reading, or at least showing how one can better achieve a determination by applying this methodology.[75] Some of his treatments of textual issues are worthy of note. For example, there is a variant in Mark 1:4 where the reading could be either ᾽Ιωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων or ᾽Ιωάννης βαπτίζων. Does Mark introduce John as "the Baptizer," or does he simply indicate that John came "baptizing"? The Nestle-Aland and UBS texts put the definite article (ὁ) in square brackets, indicating that the committee is undecided.[76] For Elliott, though, the matter is relatively simple. The title βαπτιστής was used by later writers, and so, assuming Marcan priority,[77] the verbal form with the definite article is probably correct. Also, since this is at the beginning of Mark's Gospel, it is likely that he would introduce John by name, "the Baptizer."[78]

[73] Ibid., p. 104. When Elliot says that at a later stage they "pay attention… to the attestation as well" he means that while Thoroughgoing Eclectic critics do not care too greatly about external evidence, they will, if necessary, consider manuscript support for a reading. However, such considerations occur only after all of the internal evidence has been thoroughly examined. He is trying to underscore the fact that while the emphasis of this viewpoint is upon internal considerations, this is not to the absolute exclusion of external evidence.

[74] Elliott cites Mark 3:32; 6:23, 41; and 7:4 as examples of this kind of behavior. In each of these passages, the readings adopted in the Nestle-Aland text are those of manuscripts other than B or Aleph. However, in each case they have put the B-Aleph reading in the main body of the text in square brackets, as if to say that while this reading may not be original, it ought to stand in the text on the merit of the manuscripts alone. In Elliott's view, this is a classic example of "the cult of the best manuscripts." See pp. 108-109.

[75] Elliott, pp. 110-119.

[76] Elliott correctly notes that B and Aleph are split on this particular variant.

[77] Which, interestingly, Elliott does without qualification.

[78] Elliott, pp. 110-111.

Another good example is Elliott's treatment of Mark 10:1. Here, Mark's use of ὄχλοι is in question. According to Elliott, manuscripts D and Θ have the reading ὄχλος,[79] which he believes to be more in line with Marcan style. Out of 40 instances of this word meaning "crowd," this is the only place where the modern critical editions have the word in its plural form in Mark's Gospel. While the singular form of the word is not well attested, Elliott accepts it on this basis, suggesting that the plural form was a scribal change to harmonize this passage with Matthew 19:1.[80]

In Hebrew 2:9, the writer speaks of Jesus' humiliation on the cross where "by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone" (NASB). There is a variant reading at this point where some manuscripts read "apart from God" (χωρὶς θεοῦ) in place of "by the grace of God" (χάριτι θεοῦ). Since the reading "apart from God" is not as well attested as "by the grace of God," it is presumed that the former came about as a result of either a scribe misreading the word, or the accidental inclusion of a marginal gloss.[81] Elliott notes that while the former reading seems to lack support, Origen notes that is was in many manuscripts of his day. Also, since this is the more difficult reading, it ought to be given due consideration. Finally, he contends that, from the point of view of doctrinal history, this reading fits first century views of Christ's separation with God on the cross. He presumes the text was changed as a result of fifth century Christological disputes where it could be used to imply that Christ's divine nature did not suffer.[82]

From these it should be clear that the Thoroughgoing Eclectic view is far more interested in issues of style, context, and theology than it is in issues of text types and dates. While Elliott is firm in his conviction that the readings are more important than the documents, he will admit that his methodology can be used to suggest manuscripts that ought to be treated with some suspicion. He suggests that if a certain manuscript consistently produces readings that run contrary to the recognized style and theology of the author, that manuscript will be considered less trustworthy.[83] On the other hand, if a solid reading comes up[84] that appears to contradict the recognized style and theology of the author, one must be prepared to accept this as an exception to the rule and explain its existence.[85]

In response to the criticism that this approach does not account for the history of the text and does not provide for any continuity in the textual tradition, Elliott responds that the Thoroughgoing Eclectic approach is alert to the historical context of the passage in question, both in terms of church history, and the development of Christian doctrine. This perspective also accounts for theological disputes occurring in the church at the time that the various manuscripts would have been produced, as well as popular literary

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[79] It should be noted that this variant is not indicated in NA[27].

[80] Elliott, p. 112.

[81] Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 3d ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1975), p. 664.

[82] Elliot, pp. 112-113. It should be pointed out that this is, of course, Elliott's interpretation of first century views, and even if these *were* first century views, he would be hard-pressed to demonstrate that the New Testament writers shared such views. A good case can be made for Jesus' cry of dereliction on the cross being simply a means of drawing attention to the fulfillment of Psalm 22 in the events of Calvary.

[83] Elliott, pp. 122-123.

[84] By "solid" one presumes Elliott means that the reading in question fulfills the criteria for internal evidence at least within the passage in question.

[85] Elliott, pp. 120-121.

movements that may have affected the text, such as the Atticism of the second century.[86]

Thoroughgoing Eclecticism, therefore, is an approach to textual criticism that is eclectic in that it does not start with a particular manuscript or textual family, but it presumes that the original readings are to be found within the broad spectrum of manuscripts and variants. It is thoroughgoing in that, at least in the opinion of those who hold this position, it applies the standard by which readings are evaluated consistently with each and every reading, regardless of text type, and regardless of other external factors.

Reasoned Eclecticism

If the various Byzantine positions represent the extreme documentary approach to textual criticism, relying mainly on external evidence, and the Thoroughgoing Eclectic position represents the extreme evidential approach with regard to the text contained within those manuscripts, relying mainly on internal evidence, then the Reasoned Eclectic position, at least as it claims, sits somewhere in the middle. This position, while having a distinct bias toward internal evidence, does acknowledge the importance of external evidence to determine a particular reading.

As with Thoroughgoing Eclecticism, Reasoned Eclecticism has its roots in the work of Westcott and Hort. However, many of those who hold to Reasoned Eclecticism have departed from some of Westcott and Hort's views, or have modified them to accommodate more recent evidence. For example, Westcott and Hort placed a lot of faith in codices B and Aleph, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. For them, those were the manuscripts that were closest to the autographs, and were the standard by which all other readings were judged. This is why these manuscripts were the main targets of Burgon's attacks in the late nineteenth century, and why those who still cling to Burgon's views[87] spend their time attacking these same two manuscripts. Modern Eclectic scholars, however, recognize that at the time Westcott and Hort wrote, these manuscripts were the best they had. Apart from these and one papyrus fragment, the rest of their manuscript evidence was relatively late. While recognizing the importance of B and Aleph to the textual tradition, modern Eclectic scholars weigh the evidence from across the entire spectrum of manuscripts, including both Byzantine text types, and miniscules.

One of the major differences between the Reasoned Eclectic position and the Byzantine Priority position with regards to the history of the text is that the Reasoned Eclectic position does not start with the presumption that the original text was of a particular text family. Granted, they will say that they believe the Alexandrian type to be closest to the original, but, for the most part, they do not claim that the original was an Alexandrian manuscript.[88] There is agreement, though, that the various text-types were

[86] Elliott, pp. 122-123.

[87] For the most part, those who represent the Majority Text and Ecclesiastical Text positions.

[88] For example, in his book The King James Only Controversy, Dr. James White states, "Most scholars today… would see the Alexandrian text-type as representing an earlier, and hence more accurate form of text than the Byzantine text-type" (p. 43). Also, note the words of Dr. Bruce Metzger: "Though most scholars have abandoned Hort's optimistic view that codex Vaticanus (B) contains the original text almost unchanged except for slips of the pen, they are still inclined to regard the Alexandrian text as on the whole the best ancient recension and the one most nearly approximating the original" (Text of the New Testament, p. 216).

generated from the work of the many (mostly non-professional) scribes that copied the various books of the New Testament over the first two hundred years of the church. According to the Reasoned Eclectics, the Alexandrian text type represents the earliest and most accurate form of the text, noted by its conciseness, while the Byzantine text type is a later creation due to scribal conflation of readings into one text. In other words, there is a greater tendency within the Byzantine text type to include textual evidence rather than to exclude, and to harmonize rather than support a single reading. It must be noted that these are *tendencies*. The Reasoned Eclectic position is often criticized for claiming that the Byzantine text contains conflations while the Alexandrian does not. Such critics go on to posit examples of conflation within the Alexandrian text type. However, modern Reasoned Eclectics will not deny that such scribal tendencies exist within the Alexandrian tradition. However, while these kinds of phenomena exist in the Alexandrian text, they are not the overall tendency of this text type.

Aland sees the difference in the Alexandrian and Byzantine text types as stemming from the churches in which they flourished. In his view, a more uniform church structure within a diocese will produce a more uniform text type as the various New Testament books are copied from church to church. While the churches of Egypt were very loose-knit, the churches of the Byzantium region were more united. Over time, this more homogenous text would exert its influence over the texts of Egypt to become a standard text.[89]

The various forms of the text were stabilized within the first five centuries of the church. There is evidence that, contrary to the claims of the Byzantine text proponents,[90] shows that the early Alexandrian texts were used, possibly moreso than many of their Byzantine counterparts. One example of this is the fact that a number of extant manuscripts—including codex Sinaiticus (Aleph)—have scribal emendations written upon the text by later hands. If, as Byzantine text supporters like to suppose, Byzantine texts wore out from use in the first three centuries of the church, why do many extant Byzantine texts fail to show the same kind of scribal activity and, instead, show clean, unchallenged pages?[91] Rather, the texts of the first few centuries of the church were generally undisciplined and, while some were distinctly Alexandrian in text type, they displayed a mixture of text types and readings.[92]

As much as widespread persecution of the church influenced the means by which copies of the New Testament was made, in the view of the Reasoned Eclectics, this same

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From this perspective, one can understand how Robinson's objection that Eclectics produce readings unknown in the textual tradition causes no problem to the Eclectic viewpoint. They acknowledge that the original is not extant, and they also acknowledge that not one text type is in itself totally representative of the autographs. It is only reasonable to expect, therefore, that the autograph will not look precisely like anything in the extant textual tradition, given agreed upon assumptions about the early corruption of the text and the small amount of manuscript evidence from the earliest days of the church.

[89] Aland, Text of the New Testament, pp. 55-56.

[90] i.e., whether Textus Receptus, Ecclesiastical Text, Majority Text, or Byzantine Priority.

[91] Daniel Wallace, "Majority Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (June 1994): 206. In the same place Wallace also capitalizes on the lack of evidence for the Byzantine text type in the first few centuries of the church by asking the question, "Are we to suppose that every single 'good' NT somehow wasted away—that no historical accident could have preserved even one for the first 350 years?"

[92] Michael W. Holmes, "The Case for Reasoned Eclecticism" in Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism, p. 93-94.

persecution, along with other events and factors of church history, influenced which manuscripts survived the first five centuries of the church and became dominant. Holmes notes that Diocletian's first edict contained specific instructions regarding the confiscation and burning of copies of the Scriptures.[93] This would help to account for the relative lack of manuscripts from this period, and the general paucity of Alexandrian manuscripts.

After Constantine's rise to power and the legalization of Christianity, the various text types were copied more carefully and propagated more extensively. The "solidifying" of the text types could be said to begin here. However, the Islamic invasions of the seventh century brought Islam into Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, North Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia. These places either succumbed to conquest and the Christians were forced to live under Muslim rule, or the Christian communities disappeared completely.[94] This situation would at the very least curtail the transmission of New Testament texts, and, inasmuch as the Muslims destroyed Christian literature,[95] would prove devastating for the survival of biblical manuscripts. It is of great interest, then, that the only region where Christendom held firm against the Muslims for close to 1,000 years was the region around Byzantium. Greek-speaking Christians in this area managed to fend off the invaders and preserve their churches, their language, and their Scriptures until the fall of Byzantium in 1453.

For the Reasoned Eclectic, the foregoing briefly but adequately explains why only a few manuscripts of distinctly Alexandrian text type remain, why there are no manuscripts of distinctly Byzantine text type until the fourth century, and why the Byzantine text type became so dominant later.

As mentioned earlier, the Reasoned Eclectic viewpoint is one that, while acknowledging a bias toward internal evidence, does pay close regard to external evidence. In light of this, the approach to a variant reading taken by such a scholar would be to first evaluate the various possible readings presented by the critical text (i.e., either NA^{27} or UBS^4) in light of external evidence: geographical spread, age, and text types. While the use of versions and early church fathers has been of great influence to the Byzantine school, these are only of secondary (if that) importance to the Reasoned Eclectic. Sufficient evidence should be found within the Greek manuscript tradition.[96] After this, the scholar can begin the examination of the text in terms of internal evidence: difficult readings, influence of contemporary church or theological issues, harmonization, and the author's style.[97] Internal evidence, however, can never be solely determinative.

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[93] Ibid., p. 95, n. 51.

[94] Ibid.

[95] While this is a disputed point, Holmes does note that the 30,000 volume library in Caesarea was destroyed by the Muslims in 638 B.C. This would at least make such activity possible.

[96] Aland, p. 280. Arguments against the use of the fathers and versions include the fact that, unless the father is commenting on a passage of Scripture, they can rarely be trusted to quote a passage verbatim such that the Greek text known to him can be determined. Also, since the extant writings of the fathers are themselves copies, one cannot know for certain how much scribal activity has entered into the reproduction of the father's text. At best, the fathers are good for ascertaining whether a particular passage was known to them at that time. There is still no evidence that any church father used a Byzantine text type in his quotation of Scripture. Daniel Wallace makes clear the difference between a *reading* and a *text type* in "The Majority Text Theory: History, Method And Critique," p. 209, note 141.

In other words, the correct reading will have the support of both internal *and* external evidence.[98]

Concluding Thoughts

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the analysis of these views has been brief and cursory. There is much more that could have been said on behalf of each, and the interested reader is encouraged to read at least the works cited for further information. It is hoped, however, that each view has been described sufficiently for the reader to understand its basic premises and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses.

Since the debate over text critical methodologies, while very important, is not one that separates between Christian brethren and non-Christians, it is not important for any one particular view to be defended in this paper. The purpose of this paper has been to present the various views along with relevant critiques, with sufficient information for the layperson to draw his own conclusions. Nothing further need be said, except to encourage the reader to think carefully and be informed about this issue. There are many people, both inside and outside of the church, that use a little knowledge with a lot of ignorance to cause dissention, and this subject is one that is often used by such people in that way. It is only by understanding the issues, both in terms of church history and the manuscript evidence, that sanity and clear thinking can be maintained on this subject.

[97] For a more detailed analysis of this process with illustrative passages, see Metzger, The Text of the New Testament, pp. 216-246. See also Aland, The Text of the New Testament, pp. 280-316.

[98] Aland, p. 280.