

MODERN TEXTUAL CRITICISM AND THE REVIVAL OF THE *TEXTUS RECEPTUS*

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New Testament scholarship and the working pastor are generally agreed on one point: The task of NT textual criticism is virtually completed. What remains is basically a "mopping-up" operation on some disputed readings. Thus a noted NT scholar like Joachim Jeremias has suggested: "One can say, without exaggeration, that this chapter in research is essentially concluded and that we today have attained the best possible Greek text of the New Testament."¹ Similarly, most pastors gladly make use of the various tools that evidence this attitude toward the text.

To be sure, not all share this "ease in Zion." For example, those scholars engaged in the "mopping up" realize how large the task of collecting, collating and evaluating the material still is. Nonetheless there is among these scholars a *methodological* consensus, namely that both internal evidence (matters of author's style and scribal habits) and external evidence (value placed on the MSS that support a variant) must be given full consideration in making textual choices. As B. M. Metzger recently put it: "Textual criticism is an art as well as a science, and demands that each set of variants be evaluated in the light of the fullest consideration of both external evidence and internal probabilities."²

In recent years, however, unrest over this consensus has resulted in two diametrically opposite alternatives. On the one hand, there has been the methodological proposal of G. D. Kilpatrick and J. K. Elliott that all textual choices be made on the basis of internal probabilities alone. In a recent article in the Kilpatrick *Festschrift* I have tried to point out the various weaknesses of this option and, in the words of J. Duplacy, argued "the cause of history, and in the name of history the cause of the documents."³

The other alternative is that all textual choices should be made on the basis of external evidence alone—and in this case on the basis of the Byzantine MSS (or majority text). What this amounts to is the elimination of "textual choices" altogether and the wholesale adoption of the *Textus Receptus* (TR). This position has been advanced especially

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¹J. Jeremias, *The Lord's Prayer* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964) 7.

²B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London/New York: United Bible Societies, 1971) xxxi.

³G. D. Fee, "Rigorous or Reasoned Eclecticism—Which?," in *Studies in New Testament Language and Text: Essays in Honour of George D. Kilpatrick on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. J. K. Elliott; Leiden: Brill, 1976) 174-197.

at the popular level through a variety of pamphlets and independently published paperbacks. The argument in these materials is basically theological and is usually filled with vituperation against Westcott and Hort (and others who subscribe to their methodology and view of the text) plus a warning call to evangelicals who have strayed from the one true Bible—an English translation of the TR.⁴

This view is especially true in a trilogy of books edited by David Otis Fuller.⁵ When the first of these appeared in 1970, W. Ward Gasque called it a “hodge-podge of articles” which “the overwhelming majority of evangelical Bible scholars . . . would agree in regarding . . . as basically wrong-headed in its approach and typical of a misguided apologetic.”⁶ The single exception he noted was the chapter by Zane Hodges,⁷ which Gasque calls “the most plausible essay in the book.”

In a subsequent letter to the editor Fuller responded that his book “sets forth in nearly 300 pages clear, concise proof that the King James Version is [the version nearest to the original text]. If there are those who can produce *more* proof, *better* proof that there is *another* version nearer to the originals, we *welcome* it; but we are convinced they cannot produce it.”⁸ Despite that final sentence, which seems to subvert the intent of the invitation, it would seem that the time has come to take up the gauntlet that Fuller has thrown down. But first it must be noted that Gasque is right. The book offers anything but “clear, concise proof.” “Proof” must come in the form of working with the textual *data*, showing how the use and interpretation of the data is right or wrong. Unfortunately, the only article in the book that does this is the one by Hodges; all the others traffic in guilt by association.⁹

The purpose of the present paper is to discuss the textual data, especially as it has been handled in the article by Hodges. At the same time I hope to show why the working pastor may continue to have confidence in a Greek text like the *UBSGNT* (=Nestle-Aland²⁶) and an English translation like the *NIV*.

⁴Among the many that exist, I have the following at my disposal: “The Divine Original,” published by the Trinitarian Bible Society, 217 Kingston Road, London, S. W. 19; D. T. Clarke, “Should You Choose the Bible of Your Choice?”, published by Bible Truth Institute, Box 411, Sunburn, Pennsylvania; G. H. Coy, *The Inside Story of the Anglo American Revised New Testament* (1973), published by the author, Dallas, Oregon; D. O. Fuller, “Is the King James Version Nearest to the Original Autographs?”, published by Which Bible? Society, Grand Rapids, Michigan; W. N. Pickering, “The Identity of the New Testament Text,” in *Fellowship for Reformation and Pastoral Studies* 4/3 (mimeographed copy, November 10, 1975).

⁵D. O. Fuller, *Which Bible?* (1970); *True or False?* (1973); *Counterfeit or Genuine?—Mark 16? John 3?* (1975); all published by Grand Rapids International Publications, a Division of Kregel, Inc.

⁶W. W. Gasque in *Christianity Today* (February 18, 1972) 12 [442].

⁷Z. Hodges, “The Greek Text of the King James Version,” in D. O. Fuller, *Which Bible?*, pp. 9-22. This article is a reprint from *BSac* 125 (1968) 334-345. The reprint is cited in the present paper. Also important is a second article by Hodges, “Rationalism and Contemporary New Testament Criticism,” in *BSac* 128 (1971) 27-35.

⁸D. O. Fuller in *Christianity Today* (April 14, 1972) 19-20 [655-656].

⁹Westcott and Hort are variously called rationalists, Origenists, papists and Arians; on the other hand, B. G. Wilkinson in *Which Bible?* canonizes Erasmus!

It must be noted at the outset, however, that the basic concern in all these studies is theological, not historical, and that the theological conclusions have preceded any judgments of the data. That is, if one decides *a priori* what one *must* believe about the preservation of the Word of God and that someone "cannot produce" better evidence, then the historical data must fit that conclusion no matter what it says to the contrary. Therefore it seems necessary to speak first to the theological question.

I. THE PROBLEM OF THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Discussing the theological *a priori* of both Fuller and Hodges presents considerable difficulties, partly because there are several significant *non sequiturs* and partly because there seems to be a shifting of ground at crucial points. Hodges, for example, inveighs strongly against modern textual criticism as having a rationalistic framework, especially because textual criticism approaches the NT as it would the text of any other ancient document. There is a "logic of faith," Hodges argues, which demands that the Word of God be treated in categories apart from the ordinary and that the believing critic "examine the textual question from the vantage point of faith."¹⁰

Hodges, however, belies this argument with his own presentation of the data. Mere *ad hominem* will not do; what Hodges must show is that the textual history of the NT is more providential than that for other books. His "logic of faith" seems to demand a *supernatural*, not a *normal*, history of transmission. But at this point Hodges reverts to the very rationalism (= normal process of transmission) he has denounced in Hort. He argues that his case rests "on factual data which can be objectively verified."¹¹ The single factual datum he presents (*viz.*, the dominance of the "received text" in history) is based on the following statement (which as a matter of fact, as will be shown, is not historically true at all): "The manuscript tradition of an ancient book will, under any but the most exceptional conditions, multiply in a reasonably regular fashion with the result that the copies nearest the autograph will normally have the largest number of descendants."¹² In other words, the only argument in favor of the TR is that it alone fits Hodges' understanding of what will happen to books normally in history.

What begins to surface, therefore, is a hidden agenda, which is the common denominator of all modern advocates of the TR—namely, that Westcott and Hort's Greek text is suspect because their orthodoxy with regard to Scripture is suspect, especially in contrast to the "learned men of 1611" and Westcott-Hort's doughty antagonist, J. W. Burgon. But that is an entirely different matter—and a dubious one at that—which argues that a man's view of inspiration is going to make him a

¹⁰Z. Hodges, "Rationalism," pp. 29-30.

¹¹Z. Hodges, "Greek Text," p. 21; "Rationalism," p. 27.

¹²Z. Hodges, "Greek Text," p. 21.

better or worse historian. And it certainly lacks historical perspicacity; for, after all, the humanist Erasmus (!) is responsible for editing the Greek text that lies behind the TR, and the work and methodology of Westcott and Hort was fully anticipated by the text of S. G. Tregelles (published from 1857 to 1872) and fully ratified by B. B. Warfield's handbook on textual criticism (1886), both of whose orthodoxy is unassailable. Surely, therefore, this whole line of argument is irrelevant and eventuates in the absurdity of finding out which side has more "saints" or "sinners."

The other theological problem is a *non sequitur*, repeated in a variety of ways by Fuller. The argument goes like this: Those who "accept the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God in the original manuscripts . . . must believe that this Sovereign God has providentially preserved his Book all through the ages."¹³ This does not differ greatly from Article VIII in the Westminster Confession.¹⁴ The difficulty, however, lies not in the statement itself (although in a purely theological argument, one may be reticent to accede to what a theologian says God *must* do); rather, the problems arise in the further implications.

Fuller goes on to argue (correctly): "There is one question left—which version is nearest to the original autographs?"¹⁵ This is exactly the way B. B. Warfield¹⁶ and others—including myself—who also believe in Biblical infallibility frame the question. The point of difference has to do with *where* and *how* that original text has been preserved. What we are not told explicitly by Hodges or Fuller is *why* this theological presupposition demands that the TR best represents that divinely-inspired original.

The implicit reason is abundantly clear. It is to be found in Fuller's phrase "all through the ages" and represents an enamorment with majority rule. It is a refusal to believe that so many people over so many years could be so wrong. But this is precisely the *non sequitur*. It simply does not follow, as Warfield has clearly shown,¹⁷ that belief in God's providential care in the transmission of the text necessitates belief that that care was extended equally to *all* MSS or even to the *majority* of MSS. In fact, this position suffers from both a historical and a logical fallacy.

The historical fallacy has to do with majority rule. Those who argue for it are also Protestants, and therefore the argument is often narrowed historically to the Protestant era. It is unthinkable that the Reformation,

¹³D. O. Fuller in letter to *Christianity Today*, p. 19.

¹⁴"The Old Testament in Hebrew . . . and the New Testament in Greek . . . , being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic." "

¹⁵D. O. Fuller in letter to *Christianity Today*, p. 19.

¹⁶B. B. Warfield, *The Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889); see also *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931) 236-242.

¹⁷B. B. Warfield, *Assembly*, pp. 236-242.

which restored Scripture to a place of primacy in the Church, could have been wrong as to the Scripture it restored or that the Protestant Church for over three hundred years could have been using other than the original text. But that is to play loose with the implications of majority rule. For here the Latin Vulgate has the better of it, both in number of MSS and in length of service in the Church; and the majority text in Greek is the product not of the ancient Church but of medieval Greek Orthodoxy. At this point Fuller has simply not thought through the implications of his presuppositions.¹⁸

The logical fallacy is even more crucial. The logical consequence of the position that God's providential care is to be found in the majority of MSS, because they *are* the majority, is that the majority should all be identical and as free from error as the autographs. In lieu of that, Fuller's theology logically demands that at least one MS be identifiable as *the* divinely-preserved and therefore errorless MS against which all others can be checked.

The proponents of the TR, however, are quick to deny that this is their intent—and for good reasons. They also know that no two of the 5340-plus Greek MSS of the NT are exactly alike. In fact the closest relationships between any two MSS in existence—even among the majority—average from six to ten variants per chapter. It is obvious therefore that no MS has escaped corruption. We are reassured, however, that these variations are “superficial,”¹⁹ which turns out to be no argument at all. For “superficial” or otherwise, errors exist in the majority text. Yet the theological presupposition demands errorlessness. If the text has merely fewer errors, then the whole theological argument of divine inspiration demanding divine preservation by the majority is a theological ploy. For wherever error exists in the MS tradition (whether “more” or “less”) we are at that point thrown back on historical questions, unless there is also a divine revelation as to which reading was contained in the autograph.

Furthermore, the proponents of the TR seem to want to have their cake and eat it too. Are they really arguing for the text of the TR because it reflects the majority text, or because of its long tradition in the Protestant Church? If they really mean majority rule, are they ready to give up the TR at such non-superficial variants as Acts 8:37 and 1 John 5:7-8 (where a weak minority of Greek MSS supports the TR)? Hodges and Fuller do not speak to this point; but the pamphleteers do, and they unveil the real hidden agenda.²⁰ The TR and *KJV*

¹⁸But E. F. Hills has. At this point the Greek Church, for all its other errors from his perspective, is the one the Holy Spirit guided. On what grounds? Not its orthodoxy, but because it spoke Greek! See *Which Bible?*, pp. 50-53.

¹⁹B. G. Wilkinson, in *Which Bible?*, p. 137, n. 18.

²⁰See especially “The Divine Original.” But this also lurks close to the surface in Hodges by his charge of “rationalism” and reassurances to “Bible-believing Christians” (which means, of course, “*KJV*-believing Christians”).

are seen to be *theologically superior* to modern Greek texts and English translations. Critical Greek texts leave out such passages as Acts 8:37, 1 John 5:7-8 and many others; they do not have the name of Jesus so often; they are Christologically inferior because in John 6:69 Jesus is merely "the Holy One of God" (!) rather than "the Christ, the Son of the Living God." The list could go on. Almost certainly this is the real point. It just so happens that the TR usually (not always; cf. John 1:18, for example) preserves the theologically fuller text; but the argument of divine preservation by the majority is thereby incidental. Absolutely basic to this whole mentality is the presupposition that only heretics made errors or corrupted texts. What they refuse to acknowledge is the possibility that an orthodox scribe, often because of the existence of heresies, would alter a text in favor of orthodox theology, that he would make an obscure text more theologically precise. But the latter is surely the more probable. After all, if heretics are responsible for the NT both in its ancient and modern form, then they did themselves no great favors by leaving it so totally orthodox.

The question, then, as to which text is nearest the autographs simply cannot be answered by a theological *a priori*. It is an historical question, pure and simple, and in Warfield's wise judgment good historical work is a part "of God's singular care and providence in preserving His inspired Word pure."²¹ Thus we turn to Hodges' explanation of the historical data.

Hodges' preference for the TR ultimately revolves around two foci: (1) that a text much like the TR is to be found in the vast majority of Greek MSS and (2) that the ultimate argument of those who reject the majority text is allegedly subjective and circular. He suggests therefore that his position alone is based on "*objectively verifiable data.*" No one will argue with the data itself (i. e., that the TR is represented by the majority). The problems are: (1) that his interpretation of the data is not as objectively verifiable as the data itself and (2) that the arguments for another text are not so subjective as he suggests.

II. THE TRANSMISSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

Hodges' argument for the majority text has two sides, based on both the quantity and general uniformity of the extant MSS which support this text-type. On the one hand he argues that modern textual criticism, while "denying to the Majority text any claim to represent the actual form of the original text, . . . is nevertheless unable to explain its rise, its comparative uniformity, and its dominance in any satisfactory manner."²² On the other hand he argues that this uniformity and dominance "can be rationally accounted for, . . . if the Majority text represents simply the continuous transmission of the original text from the very first."²³ He is faced with the problem, however, that

²¹B. B. Warfield, *Assembly*, p. 39.

²²Z. Hodges, "The Greek Text," p. 18.

²³*Ibid.*

this text form is completely unknown by any of the evidence up to A. D. 350, the earliest evidence being found in some Church fathers, then later in the fifth century in portions of Codices W and A.²⁴ He counteracts this problem in a twofold way: (1) by arguing that "all of our most ancient MSS derive basically from Egypt," thus suggesting that they represent "a local text of Egypt"²⁵ and are "merely divergent offshoots of the broad stream of transmission [=the Majority text] whose source is the autographs themselves";²⁶ and (2) by affirming his "truism" noted above, that "the manuscript tradition of an ancient book will, under any but the most exceptional conditions, multiply in a reasonably regular fashion with the result that the copies nearest the autograph will normally have the largest number of descendants."²⁷

The one objection to this theory of textual transmission to which Hodges does not speak had apparently been answered for him by his predecessors, J. W. Burgon²⁸ and E. F. Hills.²⁹ The question: If the TR represents the "broad stream" that issues from the autographs, then why have only "offshoots" been found in the first three hundred years? Why are there no MSS even partly representing the majority text until the fifth century and no full-scale representatives until the eighth? The answer: "They were read so constantly and copied so frequently that finally they wore out and perished"; and conversely the "offshoots" survived "because they were rejected by the Greek Church as faulty and so not used."³⁰

1. It should be noted first that Hodges' "truism" is simply *not* true—either theoretically or actually. Theoretically, for example, let us suppose that the autograph of John's gospel were copied five different times. Let us suppose further that Copy 2 was the best (meaning it had fewer copying mistakes, since we must assume all of them would have had some degree of error) and Copy 5 the worst. The only possible way for Hodges' "truism" to hold is either (1) that the "broad stream" were to issue from Copy 2, and subsequently from its best copy, and so on, or (2) that the copies were checked against one another and then against the autograph so as to assure reasonable exactness.

But what if Copy 2 was made at a different time from the others and was made for Christians who immediately carried it to another geographical area? Will Copy 2 produce the more offspring because it has a *text* "closer to the autograph," or will Copy 5 because it is

²⁴It must be emphasized that many Byzantine readings existed earlier than this, but no text exhibiting the full text-type.

²⁵Z. Hodges, "The Greek Text," pp. 12-13.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁸J. W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (London, 1883) 319.

²⁹E. F. Hills, *Which Bible?*, p. 42.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 7.

geographically closer? Or will those copies geographically closer automatically also be textually closer? The latter is Hodges' assumption, but nothing inherently demands that we believe it. The point is that theoretically there is not a reason in the world to believe that copies "nearest the autograph" will normally have the largest number of descendants.

Furthermore, unless one supposes that subsequent copies were regularly checked against known earlier copies, one must also reasonably assume that whatever errors are made in any of the copies will also be transmitted to their offspring as copies become exemplars. What one may reasonably assume, therefore, is the precise opposite of Hodges' presumption. More copies mean more errors, unless there were to be a systematic attempt to correct subsequent copies against earlier ones. But this is precisely *not* what one would expect in the earliest period, when (a) copies would not have been made by trained scribes in scriptoria, (b) such copies were being made for pragmatic reasons, not necessarily with a sense of copying Scripture, and (c) the earliest copies were probably very early carried away from their place of origin (or first destination). Therefore the proliferation of copies with numerous differences from the autographs will continue until certain factors would converge to stop the process of proliferation and diversity. And when such a check occurred it would freeze the form of text then current—but a text that would most likely be far removed from the original.

When one turns to a variety of historical evidence, including the NT, he finds this to be exactly the case. In fact, what amazes one is that Hodges would call a "truism" what is not known to exist anywhere in antiquity. He uses the Latin Vulgate, for example, as an illustration to support his view of transmission. The enormous diversity and cross-contamination of the over 8,000 Vulgate MSS amply demonstrates, Hodges argues, the inability of an "official" edition to arise out of diversity and uniformly claim the field.³¹ But this is a poor choice of illustration, for what the MSS of the Vulgate do demonstrate is that Hodges' view of transmission does not work out. If it is true that the later hundreds of medieval copies of the Vulgate lack the uniformity one finds in the Greek world, it is also true that they are *far more like one another than they are like Jerome's original*. This is precisely as with the Greek NT, except for greater uniformity of the latter, which has another explanation.

The texts of the early Church fathers are also evidence against Hodges' view of things, but in a slightly different way. Over the past eight years I have been collecting the Greek patristic evidence for Luke and John for the International Greek New Testament Project. In all of this material I have found one invariable: A good critical edition of a father's text, or the discovery of early MSS, *always* moves the father's text of the NT *away from* the TR and *closer to* the text

³¹Z. Hodges, "The Greek Text," p. 18.

of our modern critical editions.³² This is especially true of a father such as Chrysostom, whose texts were copied hundreds of times throughout the Greek Church.³³ It is lucidly illustrated by the discovery at Tura (1941) and the recent publication of several OT commentaries of Didymus the Blind.³⁴ The NT text in these sixth-century papyri (copied within one hundred fifty years of the autographs), when compared with that in *de Trinitate* (PG 39), shows how much the later medieval copies of a father's Biblical text are conformed to the prevailing ecclesiastical text (the so-called majority text).³⁵ It becomes abundantly clear that once the works of Didymus (or Athanasius, or Chrysostom, and so forth) make the "broad stream" his text is no longer a good representation of the autographs.

2. In contrast to this theoretical (and unrealistic) view of the transmission of the NT proposed by Hodges, the actual historical data shows an enormous fluidity in the earliest period, which disappears in later decades.³⁶ Both Hodges' contention that *all* the early evidence derives basically from Egypt and Burgon's and Hill's contention that only rejected (because they were corrupt) texts survived are gross misrepresentations of the facts. What we theorized above about the earliest copies (not made by trained scribes, made for practical reasons, and each book transmitted independently over a widely scattered geography) seems in fact to have been the case.

From A. D. 150-225 we have firm data from all over the ancient world that a variety of text forms were in use, but in all this material there is not a single illustration of the later majority (=Byzantine) text as a text form. The evidence from Egypt is indeed basically singular. The earliest Greek MSS (P⁶⁶, P⁷⁵, P⁴⁶, P⁷²; ca. 175-250), the citations of Clement (ca. 190-215) and Origen (ca. 215-245), and the earliest translations (Sahidic and Bohairic Coptic) all bear witness to a single text-type. There are indeed some scattered readings in Clement and P⁶⁶ from the so-called Western tradition and a few readings in P⁶⁶ where it now has the earliest evidence for Byzantine readings, but these are so few as to alter the basic text only slightly.

The point is that the Byzantine text simply did not exist in Egypt.

³²J. W. Burgon is often praised by his followers for his monumental index of patristic citations, deposited in the British Museum. But many of these as they appear in his *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (London, 1896) are useless because they reflect not the fathers' texts but the conformation of that text to the ecclesiastical text of the Middle Ages.

³³Cf. F. T. Gignac, "The Text of Acts in Chrysostom's Homilies," in *Traditio* 26 (1970) 308-315, esp. p. 310.

³⁴Included are commentaries on the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Job and Zechariah.

³⁵It might be argued that these are "rejected offshoots" of the genuine Didymus. But such an argument will scarcely prevail here, since even in Migne's edition there is sufficient evidence that Didymus used an Egyptian text, just as one would expect. What the Tura papyri reveal is how thoroughly Egyptian his text in fact was.

³⁶For the best recent attempt to write a history of the text see J. N. Birdsall, "The New Testament Text," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge, 1970), 1. 308-376.

P⁷⁵ is therefore not a reject; it represents the only "broad stream" that existed there. This is further evidenced by Origen, who apparently used several different Bibles, and P⁶⁶, which was corrected against a second MS: In none of these does one find evidence for the existence of the Byzantine text.

The same is true elsewhere in the Christian world in the second and third centuries. The other type of text that existed in the second century is commonly called "Western" because variants peculiar to it are firmly established in texts found in North Africa (Tertullian, Cyprian, some Old Latin), Italy (Novatian, some Old Latin) and southern France (Irenaeus). "Western," however, is something of a misnomer, for many of its peculiar variants are also found in the east (Tatian and the Old Syriac) and occasionally in Egypt (some quotations in Clement, John 6-7 in P⁶⁶, and so forth).

But despite this early and wide attestation these various witnesses lack the homogeneity found in Egypt and in the later Byzantine text. The textual relationships are not consistently sustained over large portions of text; rather, "Western" describes a group of witnesses, obviously related by hundreds of unusual readings, sometimes found in one or several, sometimes in others, but apparently reflecting an uncontrolled, sometimes "wild" tradition of copying and translating. Again, however, in none of these areas does one find a single witness to the majority text as a text form, but only sporadic attestation to the existence of some of the Byzantine readings.

One might argue, of course, that *all* the early translations (Latin, Syriac, Coptic) and early fathers (Justin, Irenaeus, Tatian, Clement, Tertullian, and so forth) had the misfortune to use only the "rejected, offshoot" MS. But if so, who represents the "broad stream" that "wore out" the copies more like the autographs? The obvious answer is that the Byzantine text form simply did not exist in the second and third centuries, although many of the variants that were to be found in it had already come into existence.

The majority text as a full-fledged form of text, distinguishable from the Egyptian and "Western," does not appear in history until about A. D. 350. NT citations that are closer to the TR than to the Egyptian and "Western" texts first appear in a group of writers associated with the Church of Antioch: Asterius the Sophist, the Cappadocians, Chrysostom, Theodoret of Cyrus. But even so, these fathers had a NT only about ninety per cent along the way to the full Byzantine text of the later Middle Ages. The earliest Greek MS to reflect this text is from Alexandria (Codex W, ca. 400—Luke 8:14-24:53 only) and is only about eighty-five per cent Byzantine, while the earliest full witnesses to it are uncials from the eighth and ninth centuries (Codices E F G H M Omega)—and even these reflect a slightly earlier stage of the text finally found in the TR.³⁷ The fact is that even this text, as generally

³⁷For the full display of the data demonstrating these judgments see my articles, "The Text of John in Origen and Cyril of Alexandria: A Contribution to Methodology in the Recovery and Analysis of Patristic Citations," in *Bib* 52 (1971) 357-394, and "P⁷⁵, P⁶⁶, and Origen: The Myth of Early Textual Recension in Alexandria," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* (eds. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 19-45.

homogeneous as it is from 400 to 1500, has clearly evolved from an earlier form, where the kinds of readings peculiar to it become more thoroughgoing at a later stage.

This is the historical data. It is "objectively verifiable" and incontrovertible. It is true that the actual origins of the Byzantine text as a text-type are shrouded in mystery, but that is scarcely an argument in its favor. If it were indeed closer to the autographs, the same "mystery" would prevail for the origin of the Egyptian text. In either case one has to argue for recensional activity at its beginning. But this has been demonstrated not to be true of the Egyptian text,³⁸ whereas the Byzantine text has all the earmarks of a recension, of a kind for which there is firm evidence of its existence.³⁹

The idea that the majority text of the Middle Ages reflected the "broad stream" of the transmission of the text going back to the autographs is simply a myth. But the question still must be answered: How does one account for its dominance and general uniformity?

3. It was suggested above that one would expect a proliferation and diversity among copied texts until certain factors would combine to stop that process. But that would not at the same time guarantee that one of these texts should emerge as dominant and thereby become the uniform text of all Christendom. Such in fact did nevertheless happen—but *only* with regard to the Greek text. The Latin, Armenian and Syrian churches, among others, developed their own dominant and generally uniform text, and rarely did it coincide with the Greek text. But our interest is with the Greek. How did the Byzantine text become dominant? The answer lies in a combination of several factors that converge between the fourth and seventh centuries.

(a) By the fourth century all of the factors that led to diversity had been superseded by their opposites. First, instead of untrained scribes who copied the Bible for pragmatic purposes there had emerged the trained Christian scribe, whose work was being produced in scriptoria. This began early in Alexandria, as the Egyptian MSS bear abundant witness, and probably was thoroughgoing after Constantine.

Second, the concept of canon brought in an ecclesiastical concern over the wording *per se*, which did not exist among the copyists of the second century as the NT citations in all the Church fathers of this century bear ample witness. The origins of the Latin Vulgate are to be explained precisely for this reason.⁴⁰ This will not guarantee uniformity, of course, but it will surely lessen the amount of "new variation" and, conversely, will add to the process of cross-checking and "correcting" existing MSS (note the several times this happened to Codex Sinaiticus, always away from its Egyptian standard and in greater conformity to the Byzantine).

³⁸G. D. Fee, "P⁷⁵, P⁶⁶, and Origen."

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

⁴⁰Damasus of Rome asked Jerome to make a new translation because of the great diversities that existed in the Latin Bibles.

Third, instead of copies being made to be carried off to some other center copies were now being made to remain where they were, for study purposes. Herein lies one of the most significant factors both for "dominance" and uniformity. After all, it is not by accident that the vast majority of extant Greek MSS were found in large quantities in monastery or university libraries!

(b) One can scarcely underestimate the influence of Chrysostom in the history of the Greek Church. As Quasten notes: "None of the Eastern writers has won the admiration and love of posterity to such a degree as he."⁴¹ Prime evidence of this influence is both the abundant quantity of extant MSS of his own writings (by far greater than for any other Greek father) and the great number of extant spurious writings attributed to him, whose authors sought immortality for their writings under the prestige of Chrysostom's name. It is almost inevitable that the text form Chrysostom used first at Antioch and then later carried to Constantinople should become the predominant text of the Greek Church.

(c) The most important factor for the dominance and general uniformity of the Byzantine text is directly related to (b) above. By the end of the seventh century the Greek NT was being transmitted in a very narrow sector of the Church—viz., the Greek Orthodox Church with its dominant patriarchate in Constantinople. By the time of Chalcedon Greek is almost unknown in the west, and after Chalcedon the decline of Alexandria and the subsequent rise of Islam narrow Greek-speaking Christendom still further.

All of these factors together ensure both the dominance and general uniformity of a text form properly called Byzantine.

III. MANUSCRIPTS AND THE CONCEPT OF "BEST TEXT"

The final accusation by Hodges against contemporary textual criticism is that its preference for the earlier MSS is not really because they are earlier but because they have been judged to contain the better readings. Thus he argues, "in the last analysis a manuscript is attested by its readings rather than the reverse."⁴² He further insists that such argumentation is circular, so that finally "the whole problem of textual criticism is reduced to a series of arguments about the relative merits of this reading over against that reading, . . . where personal opinion—and even personal bias—can easily determine one's decision."⁴³ Almost certainly it is with this in mind that Hodges has also labelled modern textual criticism as "rationalistic." But this is a misunderstanding both of rationalism *and* of modern textual criticism.

If Hodges were right—that in the final analysis modern textual

⁴¹Quasten, *Patrology* (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1960), 3. 429.

⁴²Z. Hodges, "The Greek Text," p. 19.

⁴³Ibid.

criticism is only subjective and derives its apparent objectivity only by a circular argument—then in a certain sense things really are up for grabs. Do we follow the Egyptian or “Western” texts because they are demonstrably earlier (if so, how do we decide between them?), or do we follow the Byzantine text simply because it won out in the history of the Greek Church? But in either case, it would be incumbent on us as good historians to suggest how *all* the variants came into existence.

As a matter of fact, however, the subjectivity is more apparent than real. There are, to be sure, some textual critics to whom this charge would seem to apply. It is precisely for such reasons that one must distinguish between “rigorous” and “rational” eclecticism as the proper methodology for textual criticism. The “rigorous” application of internal principles, without a proper use of the MSS themselves, does lead, as I have shown elsewhere, either to a very rigid application of certain principles to the exclusion of others or to a very whimsical application of principles as the individual critic may feel led.⁴⁴ But modern textual criticism has not followed Kilpatrick and Elliott because there is a more certain course.

It is true, as Hodges points out, that the internal principles often can be played off against each other so that a stalemate results. But it is precisely at such times that one must finally choose on the basis of the better MSS. How then are some MSS adjudged as better than others without returning to circular reasoning? At this point two significant data need to be noted.

1. When one collates twenty MSS of the gospels, having selected them carefully so that the leading witnesses to each major text-type are represented as well as a few known to be “mixed,” and then analyzes the variants at those places where two or more agree against the rest, a general pattern of variation emerges. There will be some places where triple (or more) variation occurs, each variant basically supported by the MSS of the three text-types; there will be far more cases of double variation, where two text-types agree against the other; and finally there will be several cases of double variation where the evidence is hopelessly mixed. But what one will also find is that certain *kinds* of variants, far more often than otherwise, are supported by one or two of the text-types. That is, *the text-types have a general consistency, or uniformity, with regard to certain kinds of variation in the text.* Thus when the several principles have been spelled out, especially in terms of known scribal tendencies, the MSS do *not* line up helter-skelter; they follow clear patterns of variation.

2. If we can find certain kinds of variations that can be judged to be clearly secondary, and if one group of MSS regularly supports these secondary readings while another group regularly supports the primary readings, then surely the latter group can be judged to be better than the others. Such indeed is precisely the case.

Let us begin with matters of orthography and the use of the *nu*-

⁴⁴G. D. Fee, “Rigorous or Reasoned Eclecticism—Which?”, pp. 177, 192-194.

movable. For example, of the *nu*-movable W. F. Howard says: "Modern use, by which *nu* is inserted before vowels only, is known to be wrong even for classical writers, and in Hellenistic it is altogether to be set aside."⁴⁵ Yet in almost every case the majority text reflects "modern use," while the earlier MSS, especially the Egyptians, reflect first-century usage. Someone at this point may say, "Foul!", for matters of orthography are not terribly significant and one can expect scribes to spell according to current usage.

But that is precisely the point one must also make in all kinds of other matters. We know from firm evidence (citations in the fathers, scribal tendencies where they can be checked by various controls) that the tendency to harmonize passages in the synoptic gospels, or even within a single gospel, is a secondary procedure. The clearest evidence of this is with additions to the text, where a fuller text in one gospel is added to the text of another. For example, Matt 24:15 speaks of the desolating sacrilege as "spoken of through the prophet Daniel." There is not a single extant MS of Matthew that does not have these words. In the parallel in Mark 13:14, however, these words are missing in the Egyptian, early Latin and early Syriac MSS. There is simply no way to account for the early, widespread and independent "omission" of these words in only one gospel, whereas the addition in the later MSS is a perfectly explicable harmonization.

What needs to be noted here is that this example can be multiplied hundreds of times, and the variation almost always goes in the same direction. In a recent study I assessed all such possible variants in Luke 10 and 11.⁴⁶ There were eighty-five in all, although many of these were less likely to be assimilations than to reflect other scribal errors or idiosyncrasies. But once all the variables were taken into account, clear tendencies emerged. The Western and Byzantine traditions had a profusion of such readings. In fact, all but one of the harmonizations judged to be major (large additions, significant wording, and so on) belonged to MSS of these two text-types. Even among those judged to be minor (e. g., add/omit a pronoun in the evangelist's narrative), P⁷⁵ and B (the leading representatives of the Egyptian text) were seldom guilty.

In that same study I also checked the manuscripts against some grammatical and stylistic features in the gospel of John where the controls seemed even more sure. Certain features of Johannine style (e. g., *asyndeton*, *anarthrous* personal names, "vernacular possessives") were chosen because they were *both* Johannine peculiarities in the NT *and* generally unidiomatic Greek, and thus on both counts they came under the canon of the "more difficult reading." That is, precisely because John's grammar is uncommon at these points one may be sure that variation would tend to update his grammar (just

⁴⁵W. F. Howard in J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1929), 2. 113.

⁴⁶G. D. Fee, "P⁷⁵, P⁶⁶, and Origen," pp. 40-45.

as later scribes updated orthography). In each case the results were the same: P⁷⁵ and B scored at the highest level; Codex D fluctuated, scoring high in some (anarthrous personal names) and low in others (asyndeton); and the Byzantine tradition came out very badly at all points. It is for these reasons that the wholesale adoption of the majority text is simply not an option.

Three final points need to be made: First, these are not subjective or circular arguments. Orthography can in fact be dated; harmonization is a clearly secondary tendency; the lack of the definite article with certain constructions and the abundance of asyndetic sentences are indisputable Johannine features. And in every case the majority text almost always supports the secondary reading.

Second, if such judgments are true where the MSS can be checked, then Hort was probably right in arguing that the better ones should generally be followed where the internal principles collide.⁴⁷ In these instances the Byzantines do indeed suffer from guilt by association.

Third, a caveat. Despite these general patterns one cannot, as Westcott and Hort tended to do with the Egyptians and Hodges with the Byzantine, follow certain MSS wherever they lead. For no MS or group of MSS has escaped some degree of corruption. It is for this reason that the work of textual criticism must go on. And it must be acknowledged that in many cases textual critics will not always agree (witness Metzger's *Commentary* on the *UBSGNT*). But the work must go on under the guidance of sound historical methodology and not brought to a stop by misguided theology or unrealistic theories.

In this regard we may thank the UBS and the editors of its Greek text, not only for the translator's edition, but also for the forthcoming twenty-sixth edition of Nestle-Aland, which will reflect the same text as well as restore a more adequate apparatus of textual variation. They are also to be thanked for the textual *Commentary*, edited by Metzger, which enables the exegete to become involved in the process of textual decision.⁴⁸ And, finally, the working pastor may be especially grateful for the *NIV*, where the translators not only made the textual choices well but translated into excellent idiomatic English with full sensitivity to modern linguistics and the need for the translator to make exegetical choices. The pastor-scholar who uses these tools well will be a faithful minister of the Word of God.

⁴⁷See *The New Testament in the Original Greek, Introduction Appendix* (2nd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1896), 2. 32.

⁴⁸See n. 2 above.