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FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

THE WHY AND HOW OF “TEXTUAL CRITICISM”

David P. Brown

INTRODUCTION

Before we can study the “why” and “how” of “Textual Criticism” we must first learn the meaning of “Textual Criticism.” In the process of defining our subject, the difference in “Textual Criticism” and “Higher Criticism” will be established.

In general, to *criticize* is to pass judgment on something or someone. *Krisis* is the Greek word that is translated “criticism” and simply means “a judgment.” In general, to “criticize” the Bible is to pass judgment (scholarly judgment) on the books of the Bible.

Biblical criticism that pertains to the genuineness of the Biblical text is called “higher” or “historical” criticism. This includes “questions of authorship, date of composition, destination, literary style and structure, and historicity (also called “Historical Criticism”).¹ On this matter George Eldon Ladd writes:

“Criticism,” as we would define the term, does not mean sitting in judgment on the Bible as the Word of God. Criticism means making intelligent judgments about historical, literary, textual, and philological questions which one must face in dealing with the

Bible, in the light of all of the available evidence, when one recognizes that the Word of God has come to men through the Words of men in given historical situations.²

Proper questions in the aforementioned areas would be: Is Matthew, the apostle of Christ, the author of the book that bears his name? When, where, and why was the book written? Why are Matthew, Mark, and Luke similar to each other and John different in style, substance, and content? Anyone who attempts to answer the aforementioned questions and others like them is a critic. Hence, to be a *critic* as the word is herein employed is simply to pose questions about the authorship, date, place, sources, purpose, etc. It should be clearly understood that such criticism is not only true of the Bible, but of any ancient work.

“Higher Criticism” in its radical form became known as “Destructive Criticism” because of the influence of German rationalism and skepticism on it. Ladd states that “... the ‘historical-critical method’ *by definition* assumes a theological stance that regards the Bible exclusively as the words of men; in other words, as a purely human, historical product.”³ Such criticism attacks the truthfulness of the Bible. Higher critics:

... have adopted a view of the Bible which says that the biblical texts reveal gross errors on the part of the Bible’s writers and editors. The critics refer to the

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Bible as a myth-filled book. These classroom skeptics and their intellectual predecessors have labored for over a century to remove Christians' confidence in the accuracy of the Bible ... that nothing in the canon of the Bible is what it appears to be, that the Creator God did not directly or uniquely inspire any of it, and that the scribes who assembled its component parts centuries after the fact were pathetic louts who were unable to follow the logic of any argument, or keep names straight for three consecutive pages, or even imitate the style of the previous lout who first made up some imaginary story and included in it an earlier manuscript.⁴

Of necessity the attack of the destructive critics was and is composed of various theories and methodologies that are designed to obliterate the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible and thereby the authority of the Scriptures. While such criticism is palpably false, and we stand categorically opposed to it, it is not the purpose of this piece to engage in the further study of it.

OUR PRIMARY CONCERN

This article is concerned with the study of "Textual" or "Lower Criticism." The textual critic begins **with the full acceptance of the fundamental proposition that the Bible is the humanly attainable, inspired, infallible, inerrant, all sufficient, objective, and final revelation of God to man.** L. Rush Bush has written:

One who believes the doctrine of biblical inerrancy believes that the Bible is completely truthful in all of its actual affirmations and contextual teachings. Properly understood, the doctrine of inerrancy does not deny the value of textual criticism. Comparative textual study is essential since inerrancy applies only to the authentic text. Any accurate copy or any accurate translation of the original text is considered to be authentic.⁵

Hence, "Textual Criticism" concerns itself with the application of learned judgment relating to the establishment of the authenticity of the Biblical text. The textual critic, therefore, is concerned with the form of Scripture. **His goal is to reproduce as nearly as possible the original text of the Bible.** Thus, he studies the **word forms** and **document structure** of the Bible. Because certain destructive critics have studied and misused "Textual Criticism" in their attempt to destroy the Bible as God's

inspired authoritative revelation to man, does not mean that all textual critics are of the same mold. With these points in mind let us continue our study.

WHY THE NEED FOR “TEXTUAL CRITICISM”?

Again, let it be emphasized that “Textual Criticism” is not peculiar to the Bible. “Textual criticism is the study of copies of any written work of which the autograph (the original) is unknown, with the purpose of ascertaining the original text.”⁶

“Textual Criticism” deals with material written before the printing press. This is the case because every copy of a document before the printing press had to be hand-copied. Hence, no two copies were exactly alike. The more lengthy the document the greater the possibility of error. After the printing press this problem was for the most part eliminated.

No need for “Textual Criticism” exists where the autograph is extant (in existence and available). However, there are none of the ancient autographs (Biblical autographs included) available. Copies were made from the autographs (the original apostolic writings). Then copies were made from copies and so on. Regardless of the professionalism of the copyists, mistakes were made. Therefore, with each copy there were scribal errors and variations in the text. The errors fall into two categories:

(1) **Real** errors which were made when the manuscripts were copied (scribal), translated, or printed (interpretational errors) and;

(2) **Apparent** errors which were made from a lack of knowledge of the **languages** of the original text, or **culture**, or **historical background** of it—including “recited errors” (e.g., Gen. 3:4; 2 Kin. 5:22).

Errors and variations in the copies are both called **variants**. The variants of the parent copy along with the personal mistakes of the scribe(s) who copied from it were transmitted from subsequent copies. Usually, the more copies removed from the parent copy the greater the chance for variants.

As a **general rule**, it is **assumed** that a copy in the tenth century will contain more variants than one made in the fifth century. However, this is not always the case. A manuscript (henceforth we shall use the abbreviations **ms** for the singular and **mss** for the

plural) copied in the tenth century could be five copies removed from the first-century original and a ms from the fifth century could be nine copies removed from the original. Therefore, the problem is to determine how many copies exist between the ms being studied and the autograph. Such is generally impossible to do. Hence, the age of the ms is taken into consideration as a **strong indicator** of whether there are more or fewer copies between it and the original copy. This judgment is then compared and contrasted with other evidence derived from a study of the ms. Only then is a final decision reached regarding the accuracy of the ms.

Two factors weigh heavily in determining the **probability** of a ms preserving the original text.

1. It is **more likely** that the shorter the interval of time between the original and the earliest available ms(s) the greater the probability that the original text has been accurately preserved.

2. The more mss available the **greater probability** that the original text has been preserved among them. However, along with the great number of mss available come more variants and with them greater problems in determining the true text from among the variant readings.

Many copies were made of the New Testament (henceforth N.T. will be used), but only a few are extant. Hence, the original must be reached by a more indirect channel. Of course, there are other entangling elements that make the indirect means more complicated.

If, after examining the available mss, the critic cannot determine what the original text of a word or phrase is, he may make a **conjectural emendation** (an “educated guess”). This is usually done because there are only a few extant mss. **Because there are so many mss of the N.T. available, such is rarely if ever essential.**⁷ Frederic Kenyon declared of such conjectural emendations “that it is a process precarious in the extreme, and seldom allowing any one but the guesser to feel confident in the truth of its results.”⁸

Regarding variants, it should be emphasized that they do not necessarily nor usually involve doctrinal problems. Most of the 200,000 variants (some scholars estimate as high as 300,000) are the result of

word or letter omissions, transposition of letters, confusions of spelling, judgment, writing, repetitions, etc.⁹

Of these variants Kenyon has stated:

No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading. ... It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain. ... The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries.¹⁰

RESTORING THE TEXT OF THE BIBLE

The rabid reverence for the **Old Testament** (henceforth, O.T.) that the Jews demonstrated in the guidelines and efforts of their scribes has accomplished much in guaranteeing their accuracy in transmitting the O.T. text. Because of their fervent zeal for the accuracy of the text, “laws of transmission” were developed. These laws demanded that the scrolls must be written on the skin of “clean” animals which a Jew had prepared. The columns were either 48 or 60 lines. Each line was 30 letters long. It was imperative that the ink be black. The skin had to be lined first. The skin was “worthless” if three words were written without a line. All letters and words were counted and none written from memory. If the book of Moses did not conclude on a certain line it had to be redone.¹¹ If one mistake was found, the ms was to be destroyed. Hence, only a few manuscripts, in contrast to the many made, are extant.¹²

The Jewish scholars (**Sopherim: scribes**) were the custodians of the O.T. text between the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. They were responsible for the standardization and preservation of the text. In the second and first centuries B.C. came the **Zugoth (couplets of textual scholars)**. Following the Zugoths were the **Tannaim (teachers)** whose work continued until A.D. 200. Between A.D. 500 and 950 the **Masorettes** were very influential in the preservation of the text. Their name comes from the **Masora (tradition)**. From them came the standard text (the Ben Asher text) for the Hebrew Bible today.¹³ Suffice it to say that there are tens of thousands of extant Hebrew manuscript fragments.¹⁴

The **Samaritan Pentateuch** branched off the pre-

Masoretic text in the second century B.C. It is a manuscript of the Hebrew itself and is composed of the five books of Moses. The oldest extant ms of the Samaritan Pentateuch dates from the eleventh century A.D.¹⁵

The discovery of the **Dead Sea Scrolls** allowed for mss one thousand years earlier than the Masoretic Text mss. They included the complete text of Isaiah and fragments of all the O.T. books except Esther. They date from about 100 B.C. It is word for word identical with the standard Hebrew text in more than 95% of the text.¹⁶

The first documents employed to reconstruct the originals are early **manuscripts and the ancient versions**. The earliest Old Testament version is the **Septuagint (LXX)**. This is a Greek translation by Jewish scholars. It was begun in Alexandria, Egypt in the third century B.C.

Although the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch, together with the Masoretic Text, form three separate textual traditions, when critically evaluated, they provide overwhelming support for the integrity of the Old Testament text. In fact, the two former texts provide some of the closest links to the autographs available to textual scholars, even closer than many Hebrew manuscript copies.¹⁷

The earliest translations of the **New Testament** are the **Syriac** and **Latin**. These reach back to the beginning of the second century.

After the ancient versions come the Scripture quotations from the writings of the **“church Fathers.”** These quotations are from the first few centuries A.D. They total some 36,000 and include almost every verse of the New Testament. Some of these quotations are as early as the first century. They have not been broken in transmission from that time to the present.

Next comes the **ms copies**. These are fragments of manuscripts written in Greek dating nearly to the first century. Completed copies exist from the third and fourth centuries. The earliest of these copies were known as **uncials** because they were written solely in capital letters. **Minuscules** (later manuscripts) were so called because they are written in lower case letters or cursively. Some of these are scrolls and others are books (**codex form**—from which the term **codices** comes).

Regarding the N.T., there are by far more available mss of it than any other work of ancient literature. Furthermore, the earliest mss of the N.T. are much nearer to the autographs than about any other ancient literature. At the beginning of the twentieth century Kenyon wrote that:

... the extant materials are incomparably more plentiful in number, and more varied in kind, than in any other instance. The difference in this respect between it and any other ancient book can be made plain by a few examples. The plays of Aeschylus are preserved in perhaps fifty manuscripts, none of which is complete. Sophocles is represented by about a hundred manuscripts, of which only seven have any appreciable independent value. The Greek Anthology has survived in one solitary copy. The same is the case with a considerable part of Tacitus' Annals. Of the poems of Catullus there are only three independent manuscripts, all of which were derived from an archetype which was itself written no earlier than the beginning of the fourteenth century. Some of the classical authors, such as Euripides, Cicero, Ovid, and especially Virgil, are, no doubt, in a far more favourable position than those who have just been named. In their cases the extant copies of their works, or of portions of them, may be numbered by hundreds. Yet even these do not approach the number of witnesses for the text of the New Testament. The number of manuscripts of it, or of parts of it, in the original Greek, is over three thousand; and to these have to be added a yet greater number of witnesses of a kind to which the classical authors offer no parallel. It is seldom that ancient translations of the classical authors into other languages exist, and still more seldom that they are of any value for textual purposes; but in the case the New Testament translations are both numerous and important. It is estimated that there are at least eight thousand copies extant of the Latin Vulgate translation alone; and a thousand would be a moderate estimate for the extant manuscripts of the other early versions, in Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, gothic, and the rest. It is therefore probably within the mark to say that there are now in existence twelve thousand manuscript copies of the New Testament, of which no two are precisely alike.¹⁸

It is interesting to note the following remarks by Geisler and Nix concerning the early age of N.T. mss as well as their abundance in contrast to other ancient literature.

It is sufficient to remember at this point that whereas there are only 643 manuscripts by which the *Iliad* is reconstructed, 9 or 10 good ones for Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, 20 manuscripts of note for Titus Livy's *History of Rome*, and only 2 by which Tacitus is known to the modern world, yet there are 5,366 Greek manuscript witnesses that attest to part or all of the New Testament text.

Furthermore, the time lapse between the original composition and the earliest manuscript copy is very significant. The oldest manuscript for the *Gallic Wars* is some nine hundred years later than Caesar's day. The two manuscripts of Tacitus are eight and ten centuries later, respectively, than the original. In the case of Thucydides and Herodotus, the earliest manuscript is some thirteen hundred years after their autographs. But with the New Testament it is very different. In addition to the complete manuscripts only three hundred years later ... most of the New Testament is preserved in manuscripts less than two hundred years from the original ... some books of the New Testament dating from little over one hundred years after their composition ... and one fragment ... comes within a generation of the first century ... no book from the ancient world comes to us with more abundant evidence for its integrity than does the New Testament.¹⁹

Furthermore, Kenyon concludes that:

The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.²⁰

THE FOLLOWING APPROACH TO TEXTUAL CRITICISM IS BASED UPON THE "GENEALOGICAL METHOD" DEvised BY WESTCOTT AND HORT

Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and **Fenton John Anthony Hort** (1828-1892) invented the "genealogical theory." It divided the textual materials into four text-types: the Syrian, Western, Neutral, and Alexandrian. Among most scholars their Greek text virtually did away with the *Textus Receptus* as a reliable text which text Hort had labeled as "villainous."²¹

Two types of evidence are available for the

textual critic: external and internal. **External** composed of three kinds of evidence: **Chronological, Geographical, and Genealogical.**

1. Chronological evidence attempts to establish the date of the text-type. Usually, the earlier text-types are favored over later ones.

2. Geographical evidence seeks support of variants from a wide variety of concurring autonomous testimonies rather than those who share a more intimate proximity.

3. Genealogical evidence tries to determine the importance of the evidence of each witness by the same criteria that apply to the ms families as well as individual mss.

a. There are four major textual families: **Alexandrian, Caesarean, Western and Byzantine.** While many scholars consider the Alexandrian to be the most reliable text, two or more text-types are desired over only one text. Many scholars consider the Byzantine text-type to be the least reliable of the three families. However, all scholars do not share this view.

b. The individual mss are found within the textual families. Sometimes the mss are divided in their support of a variant. When this is the case the correct reading is sought in the following manner: (1) the mss that are overall the most true to their own text-type, (2) the most difficult reading that has good ms support within the textual family, and (3) the text that is most characteristic is scrutinized. Finally, family readings are compared with each other. This consideration takes into account the date and disposition, family order, and the substance comprising the unity of any reading within a family.

Internal Evidence is divided into two categories: transcriptional and intrinsic. *Transcriptional evidence* (“transcriptional probability”) takes into account the habits of the scribes. These practices are:

1. The reading that is harder and sensible is chosen over less difficult readings that make less sense because it is thought that such scribes tended to poorer quality work in reproducing the meaning of the text.

2. In general the more brief reading is selected. It is thought that a scribe was more apt to add to the text in an effort to clarify it than to omit material from the

text. The exception to the rule is if the shorter reading was accidentally caused by the omission of lines due to the likeness in the line endings.

3. The more verbally discordant readings of analogous passages, whether they refer to O.T. quotations or divergent readings of the same events (such as the gospel accounts), are preferred. Scribes tended to attempt a harmony of different accounts of the same subject.

4. Preference is shown for a less-polished grammatical construction, expression, word, etc., because scribes attempted to even out the harsh grammar and improve the expression of Scripture.

Intrinsic evidence is the methodology of textual criticism that is the most subjective. It centers on the probability of what the author is more apt to have written. The effort to determine such is done by seeking to establish the author’s style in the book, the immediate context of the material being studied, how harmonious the material is with other doctrine set out by the author as well as other Scripture teaching on the subject, and the cultural and societal influences. It must be emphasized that because external evidence is more objective than internal evidence it is of more importance. However, both are important in a careful evaluation of the text.²² Nevertheless, by the very nature of truth, objective evidence should bear the great weight in the process of determining the text.

MANUSCRIPT FAMILIES

When a ms or fragment is discovered it is **catalogued**. Cataloguing started with the invention of printing.²³ It was J. J. Wettstein who began modern cataloguing. He knew of only about 125 mss. In 1836, Scholz catalogued 616 new ones, and in 1894 Scrivener noted 3,000.²⁴ Incidentally, these discoveries are stated to be the cause for the *English Revised* and *American Standard* versions of the Bible. The text is then compared to a well-known printed text to discover the variants. This is called **collation**. By this examination the “family” of the discovered text may be ascertained.

The family groupings consist of (1) the **Western** that originated in the east but was more than likely taken to Rome, (2) the **Neutral**, the text of Westcott and Hort with omissions (Papyrus 75 contains the omissions of the Westcott and Hort text), the

Caesarean (thought to be Egyptian), and the **Alexandrian** (Eastern).

As to which of the “families” is oldest has been argued for many years.²⁵ Alexandrian (Eastern) texts are thought to be the oldest of the families and derive from Sahidic and Coptic versions. However, there is no proof for the position that all “true” readings are in the earlier (Eastern) texts.²⁶ It is important to note that Westcott and Hort **assumed** that the Western text was *overly influenced* by the patristic writers.²⁷ But, a number of ‘eastern patricians or fathers’ quoted from the Western text.

During the Arian controversy over Christ’s Deity, many apologetic works removed those parts of the text indicating Christ to be God. However, these portions are in the Western text.²⁸ For example, Westcott and Hort thought that Luke 22:43-44 was a “Western addition.”²⁹ We now know from a preponderance of ms evidence that Luke 22:43-44 is the **original** behind both the Western and Eastern families, Westcott and Hort *et al.* notwithstanding.³⁰ Again, it is now known that papyri omitting references to the Deity of Christ had such passages purposely removed. The phrase “only begotten” is found in *Aleph* and *Papyrus 75* as well as the early Latin manuscripts before Jerome’s *Vulgate*.³¹ It is interesting to note that John Burgon pointed out that Valentinus in *Excerpts from Theodotus* may have very well invented the Eastern text at John 1:18.³²

Around sixty-five years ago Tenney wrote:

The most recent venture in the field of textual criticism, the creation of a larger critical text of the New Testament based on the Textus Receptus and including collations of all the major manuscripts, will doubtless show that the WH (Westcott and Hort; DPB) text was not infallible, although it was undeniably the best up to its time.³³

“ECLECTIC”

In recent years, the Westcott-Hort text has come under criticism. M. C. Tenney wrote:

In the first place, the whole genealogical method has been called in question. One might almost as well attempt to reconstruct the features of his great-grandfather by adding together the features of his descendants as to reproduce exactly the original text from the faulty copies which have descended from it.³⁴

Of course, this has given rise to what is called the

“**eclectic**” approach (“reasoned eclectism”) to textual criticism. These critics think that the “original” is to be determined by investigating each variant while using their critical judgment but without regarding any ms or text-type as necessarily preserving the original document. This is the method that has been employed in producing several newer versions of the Bible. The more radical eclectics depend more on subjective judgments regarding internal material. They have a low regard for objective textual material.³⁵

THE DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM

Different texts have been developed from the different mss families. The “Westcott-Hort” and “Critical” texts lean toward the “Alexandrian” family, the “Majority” and “Received” texts tend toward the “Byzantine” family, and the “Eclectic” text examines each variant individually.

Geisler and Nix wrote:

Although they move from different starting points on that continuum (Textus Receptus, Majority Text on the one hand and Westcott/Critical Text on the other), they tend to converge on the original textual reading of the New Testament as they apply the principles of textual criticism to the individual textual variants. This suggests that the original reading of the New Testament may be recovered by the proper application of the canons of textual criticism as previously outlined. Their application to several New Testament examples will make the process evident.³⁶

Hence, there are three fundamental textual traditions into which the textual critic is placed: the “**Textus Receptus**” (TR), the “**Critical Text**”—“**Nestle-Aland Text**”—(NU-Text) or “**Nestle-United Bible Societies**” text (UBS), and the “**Majority Text**” (M-Text) tradition.³⁷ Today the **Textus Receptus/Majority Text** and the **Nestle-Aland Text (Critical Text)** are the two basic texts to which scholars give serious attention and with which they are aligned.

The position of the **Textus Receptus/Majority Text** scholars is set forth in the following quote from Zane C. Hodges:

The recent significant accessions of papyrus manuscripts have virtually destroyed confidence in all previous reconstructions of textual history. Virtually

every major dictum of the last generation of textual critics is now open to question and debate. In this context, those who use modern critical editions must admit the possibility that a future *consensus of scholars* could radically alter the text which they now read.

By contrast, those who read the Textus Receptus are reading the text resting upon a consensus of manuscripts. ... It remains to add only one point. When the history of the New Testament text is interpreted in this way, the widespread uniformity of the manuscripts at once becomes a potent tribute to the providence of God in preserving His Word. There is no interpretation of textual history that can make this claim without serious reservations. For if the mass of witnesses is corrupt, 80% of tradition is corrupt. And no one is quite sure how to use the remaining 20%.

True, this argument will no doubt appeal only to men of faith. But to what better kind of man could appeal be made.³⁸

Their basic approach in determining the identity of the Biblical text is centered on John Burgon's seven "Notes of Truth." For a reading to receive serious consideration for the original, it should possess the following characteristics.

1. It should be **primitive** (before A.D. 400). Age is not only determined by an early witness, but also by independent witnesses of a later date.
2. A **majority** of independent witnesses should attest to the reading.
3. A **wide variety** (many geographical areas and different kinds of witnesses) of witnesses should attest to it. Variety helps measure how independent the witnesses are.
4. The passage should possess **continuity** as it is transmitted through the years. If a reading is used only until the fourth or fifth centuries, history has ruled against the usage of the reading. If a reading has no witnesses before the twelfth century, it is considered a late invention.
5. A witness must be a **credible witness**. When separate copies are continually wrong, their character is to be considered low.
6. The **conduct** of a given witness must be

closely considered. If a scribe has omitted a multitude of words in the context contrary to many other scribes, he should not be considered a credible witness.

7. This guideline is rarely employed. It has to do with readings that are logically, grammatically, geographically, or scientifically impossible.

So, then, how are we to identify the original wording? First, we must gather the available evidence—this will include Greek MSS (including Lectionaries), Fathers, and Versions. Then we must evaluate the evidence to ascertain which form of the text enjoys the earliest, the fullest, the widest, the most respectable, the most varied attestation. It must be emphasized that the strength of the "notes of truth" lies in their cooperation. They must all be considered and taken together because the very fact of competing variants means that some of the notes, at least, cannot be satisfied in full measure. But by applying all of them we will be able to form an intelligent judgment as to the independence and credibility of the several witnesses. The independent, credible witnesses must then be polled. I submit that due process requires us to receive as original that form of the text which is supported by the majority of those witnesses; to reject their testimony in favor of our own imagination as to what the reading ought to be is manifestly untenable.³⁹

THE VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE AND TEXTUAL TRADITIONS

The following list gives some of the more prominent versions and from what textual tradition they were derived. The *King James Version* (KJV) of 1611 and the *New King James Version* (NKJV) of 1979 and 1982 belong to the TR/M-Text tradition. The *English Revised Version* (ERV)—1881, 1885, the *American Standard Version* (ASV)—1901, the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV)—1946, 1952, the *New English Bible* (NEB)—1963, 1970 the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB)—1963, 1972, the *New American Bible* (NAB)—1970, and the *New International Version* (NIV)—1973, 1978 are based on the *Nestle-Aland Text* tradition (the "eclectic" approach).

THE ATTITUDE, EDUCATION, AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE SCHOLAR

Graduate (sometimes undergraduate) history students are required to take a course(s) in the area **historiography**. This area of study is deemed most

important because one not only studies the great historians, their works, and their methods of doing research, but also their personal backgrounds that could and have influenced their view of history. I know that other disciplines have similar courses of study.

The following is a brief and elementary definition of what we mean by the historian's "view" of history. It is the historian's perspective (colored glasses) through which one sees or understands the persons and events of past time and space. This perspective or view of the historian is developed by education (formal and informal), philosophical concept(s), theology, and last but not least, one's own **personal** agenda. Hence, one is able to know **why** and **how** the historian reasons and concludes certain things regarding different historical personages and events.

What is true concerning our learning of what and who influences the historian's "view" of the past is very important as we learn about the critic of the Bible. We seem to understand the importance of "German Rationalism's" influence on "Higher Criticism," but to a great extent have ignored any kind of influence that could bias the **lower critics** in their important work. **However, when we are dealing with as important a matter as determining the text of the Bible we must know about the educational, theological, philosophical, and personal background of the Biblical critic.** What kind of view or attitude does the Biblical critic have and hold toward the Bible? To be as candid and frank about this as possible, we have not seen this area emphasized to any great degree in the materials researched over the years of our study in this area.

In order to help us better understand the importance of how one's attitude toward the Bible leads us to use or abuse the Bible, let us examine the following O.T. account. Before the study re-read Paul's inspired words of Romans 15:4 relative to the proper use of the O.T. by the Christian.

JEHOIAKIM'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BIBLE

Most of us are familiar with the O.T. account of king Jehoiakim's effort to do away with a portion of the Scripture that he did not like. Taking his penknife the wicked king simply cut the Scriptures out and

burned them in the fireplace (Jer. 36:21-23). Of course, there is more than one way to "penknife" God's Word.

The point from this O.T. record that has a direct and very important bearing on our study is that a textual critic's (or a king's, or a president's, or a desperate debater's) philosophy, attitude, and/or theological views can, does, and has influence(d) one's approach in developing a Bible text. **If we do not take into account the things that a textual critic believes that could influence (bias) his work, we are not employing one of the most needful and important scholarly guidelines in determining who the best textual critics have been, are, and should be. Furthermore, we are rejecting the truth of Romans 15:4 regarding the lessons to be drawn by all of us from such O.T. passages as Jeremiah 36:23.** Hence, we are willfully blind to a fundamental principle that is tremendously important in understanding many things, especially persons who seek to construct the text of God's Word.

"TEXTUAL CRITICISM" AND THE WARREN-BALLARD DEBATE

At this point in our study it is worthy of note how "Textual Criticism" entered into the *Warren-Ballard Debate*. From this debate we may learn more about the importance of **integrity** in the textual critic.

The debate was between Thomas B. Warren (Christian) and L. S. Ballard (Baptist). The disputants discussed at what point a person is saved. Of course, among the passages discussed was Mark 16:16. In fact, the publishers in their introduction to the debate book wrote that: "this discussion contains valuable material concerning the inspiration and reliability of the much disputed passage, Mark 16:9-20."⁴⁰ **Revealed in this debate is the fact that while one must have the correct information, it is not enough to possess all the correct information, one must also be honest and reason correctly with the information in his possession in order to arrive at the correct conclusion.**

Warren had asked Ballard to explain why he (Ballard) believed that Mark 16:9-20 was not inspired. In answer to Warren's question Ballard stated that "the scholars" said it was not inspired. After noting the material with which the critic must

work in determining the original text, Warren then cited the ancient writings that contained Mark 16:9-20.

The documents Warren specified were: the *Peshitto Syriac Version*, the *Curetonian*, the *Coptic*, the *Sahidic*, and Tatian's *Diatessaron*. All of these date from the second century. Furthermore, Warren pointed out that certain "church fathers," namely, Irenaeus, Papias, and Justin Martyr, quoted from Mark 16:9-20. Warren noted that in the third century Hippolytus and Celsus (an unbeliever) quoted from the passage. The *Latin Vulgate*, *Gothic*, and the *Ethiopic* versions of the fourth century have the passage in them. Warren then pointed out that the oldest extant mss date from the fourth century, i.e., the *Vatican*, the *Sinaitican*, and the *Washington*. He indicated that the first two mss (4th century) did not have Mark 16:9-20 in them, but the *Washington* (4th century) did have the passage in it. At this point in the discussion Warren asked Ballard if he would stand by a statement he (Ballard) had made in the *Ballard-Smith Debate*, i.e., "that the *Vatican* and the *Sinaitican* mss are the perfect, the old, the original mss."⁴¹ Warren later read from **Tischendorf**, the man who discovered the *Sinaitican ms*, that the *Vatican*, *Sinaitican*, and *Washington* mss were from the 4th century.⁴²

Warren's position places him categorically in opposition to numerous scholars today relative to the genuineness of Mark 16:9-20.⁴³ But, the ground on which Warren's evidence stands and his valid reasoning is impeccable.

Ballard's response to this material was that Warren would have to give up the *American Standard Version* (1901) since it indicated that the two oldest mss as well as other authorities did not have Mark 16:9-20 in them. Warren responded by pointing out that the *Beatty papyri* and the *Washington* ms along with other items were unknown to Westcott and Hort, and that, therefore, the new discovery simply "verifies the fact that that passage belongs in there."⁴⁴

In his attempt to show that Mark 16:16 was not inspired, Ballard appealed to the *Concordant Version* and *Emphatic Diaglott*. Warren effectively countered Ballard's efforts by citing a host of scholars, many of

them from the Baptist church, who rejected both documents as unreliable.⁴⁵ Warren then pointed out that Ballard in his desperation to find support for his false position that Mark 16:16 was not inspired had chosen documents that did not support many things that he (Ballard) and other Baptist's believe.⁴⁶ Warren very effectively pressed these points along with others throughout the debate. He asked Ballard why he **recognized** the inspiration of Mark 16:9-20 when using Mark 16:15 against Primitive Baptists (on limited atonement) in their belief that the gospel should not be preached to everybody, but now **denied** it. A good question involving the characteristic of human **integrity!** Sometimes men have the evidence, but refuse to deal honestly with it.

PLEASE CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. If King Jehoiakim and Ballard would go to such lengths in their attempts to do away with and seek to discredit the Scriptures, why do we think that men of high scholarship who claim to be friends of God and His Word, are immune as textual critics and translators of the Scriptures from "penknifing" God's Word in their own way and in their respective fields of work?
2. If the Roman Catholics and persons like Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, Oral Roberts, *et al.*, claim that they have received revelations from God, have worked miracles, and produced their "inspired" books, why are some so gullible as to think that highly-educated textual critics with strong philosophical and/or theological biases have not, because of their biases, altered the text of the Scriptures?
3. When we know that in the second and third centuries false teachers wrote many spurious documents or willfully altered the Scriptures in their attempts to propagate their false doctrines,⁴⁷ why do we think that men of scholarship today will not use their academic training in an attempt to propagate their philosophical or theological views in constructing the Biblical text or the translating of it?

CONCLUSION

The men who produced the *Textus Receptus* Greek text and the men who translated the *King James Version* were not inspired by the Holy Spirit in their work as was the apostle Paul. On the other hand, the theories behind the Greek texts of the last 150 years do not render null and void the *Textus Receptus* nor the *King James Version*. In fact, in a telephone conversation in October, 1994, with brother Roy C. Deaver, it was pointed out by him that the *Textus Receptus* is held in higher regard today than it has been for many years. Brother Deaver did virtually all of his training under the influence of Westcott-Hort tradition. But such discoveries as the Chester Beatty and Washington (Bodmer) papyrus raised new questions regarding the WH text.⁴⁸ We see no reason to repudiate either the *KJV* or the *ASV* (1901). But as Keith A. Mosher, Sr. has written, the "... modern versions carry too much theological baggage. ..."⁴⁹

We have long known that the faithful child of God who knows how to ascertain Bible authority will benefit from a denominational scholar's work more than the denominational scholar himself. We believe the same is true regarding the work of denominational textual critics. We think that brother Warren's work in the Warren-Ballard debate is a good example of such.

Even if one is not personally involved in the day-to-day work of the textual critic, since all of us use translations of the Bible, one can clearly see the need of and our dependence on the honest textual critic. Without fear of contradiction we may affirm that the O.T. and NT. documents are reliable. With equal confidence we may also affirm the historicity of the facts recorded therein. Hence, as promised by our Lord, God's Word is extant today and will remain so until the end of this world (Psa. 119:89).

ENDNOTES

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⁴*Op. cit.*, Hightower quoting Gary North, p. 51.

⁵L. Rush Bush, *A Handbook For Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan publishing House, 1991), p. 267.

⁶J. Harold Greenhee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 11.

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¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 348,349.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 380.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 371.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 357, 358.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp.368, 369.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 367.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 505.

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²⁵See Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1980).

²⁶See R. K. Harrison, B. K. Waltke, D. Guthrie, and G. D. Fee, *Biblical Criticism: Historical Literal and Textual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), pp. 127ff.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 31-96.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 50,51.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (Des Moines, IA: The Christian Research Press, 1973), p. 134.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Merrill C. Tenney, "Reversals of New Testament Criticism," *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Book House, 1958), p. 366.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 365, 366.

³⁵*Op. cit.*, Geisler and Nix, p. 462.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 483.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 479.

³⁸Zane C. Hodges, "A Defense of the Majority-Text," p. 10. As quoted by Geisler and Nix, p. 462.

³⁹*Op. cit.*, Pickering, Chapter 7.

⁴⁰Thomas B. Warren and L. S. Ballard, *Warren-Ballard Debate* (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, Inc., 1965), Preface. [Cf. Stanley N. Helton's "Churches of Christ and Mark 16:9-20" in *Restoration Quarterly* (Vol. 36, No. 1: First Qtr. 1994), pp. 33-52, which severely criticizes Warren-EDITOR]

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 90, 103-106.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴³*Op. cit.*, Geisler and Nix, pp. 486-488.

⁴⁴*Op. cit.*, *Warren-Ballard*, p. 184.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 47-49.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 50.

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⁴⁸*Ibid.*, Seep. 459.

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PRAYING ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL (1 John 5:13-15)

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We can be assured that our prayers come within the area of His will when we ask for those things which He has specifically said He will give us, i.e., food, clothing, shelter, comfort in trial, wisdom to direct our steps, deliverance from the evil one and all the many other rich blessings His inspired Word promises. Spiritual blessings He bestows by means of His Word; temporal blessings He gives us through the operation of His natural laws. He expects us to live within the sphere of His will, and we have no right nor reason to suppose that He will circumvent either. It is idle, for example, to ask God to send us *down from heaven* a loaf of bread baked and wrapped; and yet, He does indeed give us our “daily bread,” through the medium of the soil, the sunshine and shower, the sower, the mill, and the baker. Not by miracle, but by the usual operations of His natural laws does He bless us in the bestowal of material things (Mat. 7:11).

He also gives us the things which He sees are best for us, and we should always make our wills subservient to His in our petitions. Because of our weaknesses, our ignorance, oftentimes our stupidity, we are exceedingly poor judges of what is best for us; frequently, we ask for things which would not be conducive to our well-being to grant; and we should always be willing to acquiesce in His judgment in such matters. We should not desire to ask for things He does not want to grant. Many people, instead of petitioning God, order Him to grant specific requests; and, when such requests are not immediately forthcoming, their faith in prayer fails them.

Prayer, properly engaged in, is a humble request to God for blessings which we desire Him to bestow if such bestowal is in harmony with His will. *We ought not to want Him to give us something which is not within the sphere of His will; and He will not, anyway.*

We have no right to expect God to answer our prayers, if we do not comply with those conditions on which He grants requests. God has ordained that men must work for their “daily bread;” it is therefore useless for a lazy, shiftless man to ask God to give him a bountiful harvest without work. Neither will He give men salvation short of compliance with the conditions on which salvation is bestowed. He will as readily send us bread, by-passing the seed, the sower, the harvest, the mill and the baker, as He will save men while they continue in rebellion to His will. To ask according to His will is to ask only for the things which He has promised, and to expect them in the way which He has willed to provide them (Jam. 4:2, 3).

How may we know when we should no longer continue to ask God for specific requests which we include in our prayers? *When He does not grant them!* Inasmuch as He has promised to answer our prayers when uttered in harmony with His will, it must follow that if, in any instance, the petition is not granted, it is because it is not the Lord's will that this particular thing should be given at this particular time. We must learn to accept, without question, God's will in all such matters, knowing that He does all things best (Jam. 1:5-7).
—Deceased