

Has God Indeed Said?

THE PRESERVATION OF
THE TEXT OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT

by PHILLIP KAYSER, Ph.D.
& WILBUR PICKERING, Ph.D.



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On the Cover:

The first page of Galatians in P46. Dated about 200 AD, this is one of several papyri that refute the idea that Byzantine readings are late. Though it is a corrupt Egyptian text, it shows that Hort's theory of transmission is absolutely false.

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1 – The Challenge to the Biblical Text: "Has God Indeed Said?"

Introduction

Ever since Genesis 3:1, Satan has sought to place doubts into the minds of God's people about what God has revealed. Satan's question, "Has God indeed said...?" has been repeated in many creative ways, but the end result is always the same: a loss of confidence.

When versions of the Bible disagree with each other on what God has indeed said, believers are perplexed. This book is designed to answer that question and restore a sense of confidence that the Bible does indeed "belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). A theoretical text, buried in the sands of Egypt, is not sufficient. How can we obey all the words of God's Bible if all the words of that Bible have not been preserved?

The Egyptian Texts Are Corrupt

Dr. Pickering's essay clearly shows why the manuscripts underlying the NIV, the NASB, the ESV and most modern versions are not reliable, whereas the majority of Greek manuscripts¹ of the New Testament can be trusted. While many modern translations repeatedly appeal to the Alexandrian (Egyptian) manuscripts as being "the oldest and best manuscripts," the truth of the matter is that many evidences show them to be the most corrupted and unreliable of the manuscripts.

An estimated 28,500 variants exist within the Egyptian manuscripts.² Since there are almost 200,000 words in the New Testament,³ this

¹ The majority of manuscripts (over 5000) are referred to in the literature as the "Majority Text," or the "Antiochian," "Syrian," "Byzantine," "Traditional," or "Ecclesiastical" Text. The lectionaries of the church are Byzantine. The KJV, NKJV, MKJV, Young's Literal translation, the ALT and all Reformation era Bibles in various languages can generally be said to represent the Majority Greek text.

² Some place the figure much higher. In part it depends upon which manuscripts are included as "Egyptian." Some would place the highly corrupted "Western" and so-called "Caesarean" texts in Egypt. There is considerable debate on that question. And some manuscripts have fewer mistakes than others. Pickering says that the manuscript P⁶⁶ has

amounts to an incredible one in seven words that have been corrupted in this supposedly "oldest and best" manuscript tradition! Granted, most of those Egyptian texts tend to be ignored by textual critics in their actual practice of textual criticism, and most of the mistakes are so obvious that there is little debate about whether it is a mistake.

But we are analyzing the reliability of the copyists, not whether the mistakes can be easily recognized. And on this score, all of the Alexandrian manuscripts are defective. For example, if even the three most trusted manuscripts (B, $\aleph$, and A) are compared to the Majority Text, then 8% of the New Testament still comes into question. Granted, half of those differences are spelling differences, word order and other inconsequential changes that would not be reflected in an English translation. But that still leaves about 4% of the New Testament text in question. Even the differences between B and $\aleph$ are enormous. As Wilbur Pickering has noted, in the Gospels alone, these two manuscripts disagree with each other over 3000 times! Logic tells us that one or both of them are unreliable witnesses. Yet modern versions place most of their trust in those two Egyptian texts.

This should be a concern to any believer. An inspired original for Scripture does no good if God has not also preserved it. Therefore the issue that Dr. Pickering addresses is a critical one. If his conclusions are correct (and I am convinced that they are), then we *can* know with a high degree of confidence what the text of the New Testament is. On the other hand, if the modern fascination with the Alexandrian (Egyptian) text is correct, then (based on the evidence we currently have) we will never know what the text of at least 4% of the New Testament is.⁴

"roughly two mistakes per verse." (Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977], pp. 122-123.) Pickering's book is an outstanding introduction to the Majority Text debate, and is a must read. This is one of over two-dozen books that I have been heavily dependant upon for information.

³ From time to time, the figure of 184,590 words (and 839,380 letters) is dogmatically stated to be the number of words in the New Testament. However, that is the number that exist in *one* edition of the eclectic text. And the Byzantine manuscripts have many more words.

⁴ Textual critics often admit that they are dealing with probabilities and good guesses on most of the differences. And frequently, "intrinsic probability" completely contradicts "transcriptional probability" so that the critics are left with preferences. In Metzger's *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, one is struck by the degree of doubt that the committee had. 204 times they expressed "a considerable degree of doubt" and 39 times a "very high degree of doubt" on the reading they preferred. On other decisions, the

In contrast, I believe that God has preserved *every* jot and tittle of His word in *every* age and in *every* geographic region; and He has done it through the church, which is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1Tim. 3:15). I also believe that he has told us how He would transmit the text providentially. The Bible's own statements on God's methods of preserving the text ought to be taken seriously. Unfortunately, both the eclectic position (underlying the NIV, NASB, etc.) and the Textus Receptus position (underlying the "King-James-only" faction) have ignored either some or all of the Scripture's self-referential statements on preservation.⁵

The Two Primary Egyptian Texts

The question naturally arises that if there are so many differences among Egyptian texts, how do modern versions determine which "Egyptian" reading is correct? Though this is an oversimplification, it is generally true to say that the editors of these versions trust the expertise of five liberals who voted on each reading and then printed the results in the United Bible Society Greek New Testament. If all five agreed, the reading was given an A rating. If four agreed, it was given a B rating, if three agreed it was given a C rating. Though there are rules of textual criticism covering internal and external evidence, it is obvious from Bruce M. Metzger's commentary on their proceedings⁶ that the decisions

language shows probability: "a majority of the committee" "preferred," or "thought" or "considered," or decided that one reading was preferable to another. Coldwell (a prominent critic) says, "We need to recognize that the editing of an eclectic text rests upon conjectures." (Colwell, "*Scribal Habits in Early Papyri: A Study in the Corruption of the Text*," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, ed. J.P. Hyatt [New York: Abingdon Press, 1965], pp. 372) R.M. Grant said, "it is generally recognized that the original text of the Bible cannot be recovered" (Grant, "The Bible of Theophilus of Antioch," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXVI (1947), p. 173). Though the textbooks discussing textual criticism sometimes give the illusion that it is a hard science with confident results, the subjectivity of decisions becomes obvious when the reasoning of various experts is recorded. The degree of subjectivity involved in the decisions recorded in Metzger's *A Textual Commentary*, is very disturbing. No two eclectic scholars can agree on all readings. And even individual scholars routinely change their minds, as evidenced by the fact that each edition of the eclectic UBS Greek New Testament has had hundreds of changes.

⁵ See the discussion of the eleven Biblical presuppositions that should guide textual criticism, below.

⁶ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Society, 1971). See previous footnote.

were usually based on subjective criteria. Even their use of external evidence is troubling since they usually gave primary weight to one Greek manuscript (B, known as Vaticanus) even when every other Egyptian and Byzantine manuscript supported a different reading. Though there are 5,262 Greek manuscripts currently extant, and tens of thousands of early versions, the following manuscripts carried the most weight in the UBS Text:⁷

- 90% of the time these editors based their reading on the primary weight of only one Greek manuscript: Vaticanus (B). In practical terms, this manuscript is the authority.
- Another 7% of the time their disagreement with the Majority Text is based on a reading from Sinaiticus (Ⲁ). We have already seen that Sinaiticus disagrees with Vaticanus well over 3000 times in the Gospels alone. This shows that one or both of these manuscripts are highly unreliable.
- 2.5% of the time, their distinctive reading is based on Alexandrinus (A).
- Less than half a percent of the time the readings of modern versions are based on other Alexandrian manuscripts when one or more of them disagree with the previous three. (There are about 200 Alexandrian manuscripts.)

The following chart (from Floyd Nolan's book) illustrates the degree of conformity that four types of manuscript (papyri fragments, uncials, cursives and lectionaries) have to either the Majority Text or to Sinaiticus and Vaticanus (the primary text underlying most modern translations).⁸

	Total # of manuscripts	Support Ⲁ & B	Support Majority
Papyri	88	13 (15%)	75 (85%)
Uncials (all caps)	267	9 (3%)	258 (97%)
Cursives	2764	23 (1%)	2741 (99%)
Church lectionaries	2143	0	2143 (100%)
Total	5262		5217 (99%)

⁷ This was brought to my attention by Floyd Nolan Jones, PhD, *Which Version is the Bible* (The Woodlands, TX: KingWord Press, 1999).

⁸ For more information, read Floyd Nolan, *Which Version is the Bible*, (KingsWord Press: The Woodlands, Texas, 1999).

This chart shows that the Majority Text is truly majority. The Majority Text is also equally old to the supposed "oldest and best" referred to in the versions.⁹ It also represents the widest geographic distribution: across Greece, Asia Minor, Constantinople, Syria, Africa, Gaul, Southern Italy, Sicily, England and Ireland. In contrast, the text that modern versions are based on is found in Egypt, a place that had no letters sent to it, but where most of the early heresies originated.¹⁰

Humanistic versus Biblical Presuppositions

Majority Text advocates are often criticized for bringing Biblical presuppositions into the study of texts rather than being neutral. But while objectivity is important, neutrality is impossible. Evaluation of the evidence is always driven by prior presuppositions.

The presuppositions that drive modern textual criticism are thoroughly humanistic even when evangelicals use them. It is ironic that evangelicals who shrink in horror from the humanistic assumptions found in "higher criticism" have adopted the same assumptions when it comes to textual criticism. For example, Edward John Carnell rightly rejected higher criticism because "a fundamental presupposition of the higher critic is that the Bible is just another piece of human writing, a book to which the scientific method may safely be applied, not realizing that the Bible message stands pitted in judgment against that very method itself."¹¹ However he advocated textual criticism with the same presupposition.

Warfield and all later textual critics within the evangelical camp treat it in the same way they treat the transmission of secular documents. L. Harold De Wolfe, a liberal complained about the inconsistency saying,

"The intimate and inseparable relation between textual and historical studies of the Bible seems not to be adequately appreciated by some conservative scholars. For example, Edward J. Carnell praises

⁹ Though not a Majority Text advocate, Harry A. Sturtz has shown that the Byzantine Text is equally as old as any other "text-type." See his *The Byzantine Text-Type & New Testament Textual Criticism*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984). Many early papyri clearly show distinctive Byzantine readings.

¹⁰ On this last point, Pickering deduces some major implications in the last chapter of this book.

¹¹ Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 194.

unstintingly the devotion, skill, and results of textual criticism ... On the other, when the same writer considers the work of historical or 'higher' criticism, he has nothing to say for it."¹²

It is therefore important to see what God Himself teaches regarding the transmission of the text, and to begin by reasoning from His infallible presuppositions. In the following pages I give eleven Biblical presuppositions that should guide our analysis of the evidence. If the following presuppositions are true, then it is obvious that the Majority Text is the true text and the Alexandrian Text is false. All the evidence fits.

The job God has left to us is to recognize the correct text, not to determine it. Recognizing which text fits the Biblical presuppositions is a legitimate role of textual criticism. This prevents us from blindly following either Erasmus (like Textus Receptus fans do) or blindly following five liberal experts (like most modern evangelical translation teams do).

¹² L. Harold De Wolfe, *The Case for Theology in Liberal Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), pp. 51-52.

2 – God Has Indeed Spoken: Proper Use of Textual Criticism

Textual Criticism is a useful tool but it must be applied according to Biblical presuppositions. Eleven such presuppositions follow:

1. Every Word Preserved

We believe that the preservation of every word of Scripture is of critical importance to God (Rev. 22:18-19; Deut. 29:29) and therefore God has promised to preserve every detail of His Word in every age (Matt. 5:17-19; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33; Psa. 12:6-7; cf. also Deut. 29:29; Psa. 19:9; 102:18; 111:7-8; 119:89-91,152,160; Isa. 40:8; 59:20-21; Dan. 12:4; Matt. 4:4; Rom. 15:4; 1Cor. 9:10; 10:11; 1Pet. 1:25).

The preservation of every word of the Bible is of critical importance to God. At the beginning of the Bible He promises that "those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Deut. 29:29), and at the end of the Bible God promises severe vengeance upon anyone who adds to or takes away from the Bible:

"If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19).

While the last Scripture anticipates people who would indeed add to and take away from Scripture, God assures us that this attempt will not be successful. For example, the Psalmist writes: "The words of the LORD are pure words... You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever" (Psalm 12:6-7). This preservation of every word of Scripture in every age is a subject repeatedly promised in the Bible (Matt. 5:17-19; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33; Psa. 12:6-7; cf. also Deut. 29:29; Psa. 19:9; 102:18; 111:7-8; 119:89-91,152,160; Isa. 40:8; 59:20-21; Dan. 12:4; Matt. 4:4; Rom. 15:4; 1Cor. 9:10; 10:11; 1 Pet.1:25). For example, Christ said, "it is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for one tittle of the law to

be deleted"¹³ (Luke 16:17). On another occasion Jesus assures us ("Assuredly I say to you") that "till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18).

If God has promised to providentially preserve the text of the Bible, this automatically places the Scriptures into a totally different category than the transmission of secular documents like the works of Aristotle or Shakespeare. And indeed, the Byzantine manuscripts show such unity¹⁴ that liberal scholars have in effect cried "conspiracy," thinking that such faithful transmission would be impossible in the first three centuries. Wescott and Hort formalized this proverbial cry of "conspiracy" in their theory of the Lucianic Recension (or similar variations). Though both critics and defenders of the Byzantine text have repeatedly disproved such a recension of manuscripts¹⁵, the theory still seems to drive textual critics. It is easier to believe an unproved thesis of a Lucianic Recension than to believe that God could indeed providentially preserve the text from corruption.

2. Accountable to Every Word

We believe that God must preserve every word of Scripture if He intends to hold us accountable to live by every word (Matt. 5:17-19; Luke 16:17-18; Deut. 29:29; Psa. 19:7-11; 102:18; Isa. 59:20-21; Matt. 4:4; Rom. 15:4; 1Cor. 9:10; 10:11).

After stating that the smallest letter in the Greek (*iota* = "jot") and the smallest difference between a letter in the Hebrew (*kereia* = "tittle")

¹³ The word is *πτω*, and is defined as to fall, to fall away, to fall down, to experience a loss of status, to be destroyed (see BDAG).

¹⁴ Even of the broader group of manuscripts general called Byzantine, Sturtz concedes that "the Byzantine text... has maintained a high degree of homogeneity." (p. 124-125). Since the church is called by God the "pillar and ground of the truth" (see below), my confidence is in the portion of the Byzantine Majority Text that was used in the church (the ecclesiastical text).

¹⁵ For example, F. G. Kenyon, R. M. Grant, E.C. Colwell, Harry A. Sturtz, Wilbur N. Pickering. Kenyon said, "The absence of evidence points the other way; for it would be very strange, if Lucian had really edited both Testaments, that only his work on the Old Testament should be mentioned in after times. The same argument tells against any theory of a deliberate revision at any definite moment. We know the names of several revisers of the Septuagint and the Vulgate, and it would be strange if historians and Church writers had all omitted to record or mention such an event as the deliberate revision of the New Testament in its original Greek." (*Handbook*, p. 324-325.)

would be preserved till heaven and earth pass away, Christ then makes an application:

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:18-19)

The preservation of the jots and tittles was for the purpose of holding men accountable to keep all God's word. Unless the jots and tittles are preserved, no one can fulfill this injunction. So a theoretical preservation in God's mind, or in the sands of Egypt does not suffice.

Isaiah 59:20 speaks of the coming of Jesus Christ and then follows with verse 21:

"My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendant's descendants,' says the LORD, 'from this time and forevermore.'"

In order for that to be fulfilled, God would have to preserve His Word from generation to generation from that time and forever. God commands us to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). Deut. 29:29 says,

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

God preserves His word from generation to generation precisely because He wants us to keep it - "every word."

3. Protective Providence

Since God has promised to preserve His Word (point 1) so that every generation can live by every word (point 2), it logically follows that His protective Providence over this Book will be entirely different than over non-inspired books. Contrary to the theories of modern textual critics, God has indeed promised to intervene in unique ways for the preservation of the Scriptures (Deut. 29:29; Psalms 111:7-8; 119:160; Isaiah 40:8; 59:21; Daniel 12:4; Matthew 4:4; 5:17-18; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; Hebrews 2:2; 1 Peter 1:25; cf. also Psalm 102:18; cf. eg. Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 9:10; 10:11)

4. Faithful Transmission

Since the church was ordained by God to be the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1Tim. 3:14-15), and since God gave many careful warnings to care for the Scriptures (Rev. 22:18-19, Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:5-6 and 2Pet. 3:16), and warnings about heretics who would corrupt the text (Rev. 22:18-19; 2Pet. 3:16), it is natural to assume two things 1) the church would have been careful in accurately copying the Bible 2) heretics who had a low view of Scripture would have been less careful. Thus it is not at all unreasonable to assume that the "Ecclesiastical Text" (ie. the Majority Text) is superior to the non-ecclesiastical text.

The modern school of eclectic criticism stands in diametric opposition to this presupposition. They presuppose that godly, devout scribes would be motivated to change the text!!! For example, evangelical scholar Gordon Fee says, "For the early Christians it was precisely because the meaning was so important that they exercised a certain amount of freedom in making that meaning clear [ie. by changing words in the text]" (p. 406).

Kurt Aland says that devotion to Christ might make them add words and phrases to give a more polished effect. He insists that pious scribes would be troubled by problems in the Scriptures and would seek to minimize such problems by trying to harmonize apparent conflicts in Gospel accounts, by alleviating Scriptural difficulties, by replacing unfamiliar words with familiar ones, etc. Thus Aland explains away the smoothness of the Greek in the Byzantine text by saying that scribes were offended by the coarse and faltering Greek of the original and sought to change the word usage to make the poor Greek sound better.¹⁶ Bruce Metzger says much the same.¹⁷

¹⁶For example, in Kurt Aland & Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) he says, "These expansions quite frequently go beyond the purely stylistic level to add a devotional touch: Ἰησοῦς may first become Ἰησοῦς Χριστοῦς or κύριος Ἰησοῦς, then κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστοῦς and grow further to become κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστοῦς. Such devotional elements are not confined to single words, but may comprise whole phrases, sentences, or even verses. From the very beginning the text had a tendency to expand. This is why the shorter reading is generally the better, the original reading (cf. Rule 11 above, p. 276)...Not only does the text tend to grow, it also becomes more stylistically polished, conformed to the rules of Greek grammar. In Mark 1:37, for example, there is a typically Marcan construction: καὶ εὗρον αὐτὸν καὶ λεγουσιν. The overwhelming majority of Greek manuscripts replace this with the better Greek expression: εὗροντες αὐτὸν λεγουσιν. Only a few

On the other hand, Church history substantiates the Biblical presupposition. The church fathers were very zealous to guard against even the slightest deviation from Scriptural usage. Polycarp: "Whoever perverts the sayings of the Lord ... that one is the firstborn of Satan." (7:1). Justyn Martyr claimed that the heretic Marcion had changed the text of both Luke and Paul's epistles. As a result of this perverting of Scripture, the church was even more careful to check the manuscripts (Apol. i.58). Gaius in the later 100's named four heretics who altered the text and then had multiple copies of these altered texts prepared by their disciples. Dionysius: (bishop of Corinth from 168-176) complained that heretics not only tampered with his writings, they also tampered with the Scriptures. He insisted that the church had received a pure tradition. This contradicts current textual critical theory, which claims that most corruptions had already come into the Ecclesiastical text (as well as the Alexandrian text) by that time. Irenaeus: "True knowledge consists in a very complete tractatio of the Scriptures, which has come down to us by being preserved without falsification" (Massuet's rendering in footnote 8 page 508.) He was not only concerned about careful transcription of Scripture, but also of his own writings so he put at the close of his treatise: "I adjure you who shall copy out this book, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by his glorious advent when he comes to judge the living and the dead, that you compare what you transcribe, and correct it carefully against this manuscript from which you copy; and also that you transcribe this adjuration and insert it in the copy"¹⁸ He vigorously defended the number 666 versus 616 which some scribe had tried to enter into Revelation 13:18, saying that 666 was found "in all the most approved and ancient copies" and that "those men who saw John face to face" bear witness to it. He warns those who made this single letter change, "there shall be no light punishment upon him who either adds or subtracts anything from the Scripture." (xxx.1). Obviously they did not have a light attitude toward textual transcription. And he claims that they still had witnesses to the original text "those men who saw John face to face." This may include Polycarp, Irenaeus' mentor. He was a disciple of the apostle John.

manuscripts such as Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲱ), Codex Vaticanus (B), L, and a small number of other manuscripts withstand the temptation and preserve the stylistically embarrassing text." (pp. 284-285).

¹⁷See Bruce Metzger, *The Text of The New Testament*, pp. 195ff; etc.

¹⁸Metzger. *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 21.

Church history tells us that those from the third century were no less certain of the transmission of the text. Tertullian (early 200's) says, "I hold sure title-deeds from the original owners themselves ... I am the heir of the apostles. Just as they carefully prepared their will and testament, and committed it to a trust ... even so I hold it." He obviously had access to the autographs of at least some New Testament books in his day. Though Pickering thinks this may be an exaggeration, I see no reason to doubt Tertullian's word. In "On Prescription Against Heretics" 36, he tells people that if they want to know the exact wording of some other epistles, the original autographs could still be found. He said that Corinthians could be found in Achaia, Philippians and Thessalonians in Macedonia; Ephesians in Asia and Romans in Italy. Therefore, at least five New Testament books had autographs still in existence. Since the church fathers state that the Scriptures of the apostles were read in every church, there must have been hundreds of copies already at this early time.

The fourth century continues this claim to a pure tradition of copies. Jerome complained of copyists who "write down not what they find but what they think is the meaning; and while they attempt to rectify the errors of others, they merely expose their own"¹⁹ Bishop Spyridon (350 A.D.) took on the distinguished Triphyllios of Ledra who used the more refined Attic Greek word for bed when he quoted, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." Spyridon "sprang up and indignantly called to him before the whole assembly, "Are you, then, better than He [Jesus] who uttered the word κρᾶββατος, that you are ashamed to use His word?"²⁰ Even slight changes simply were not tolerated (and this was an oral quote!).

And copyists were extremely careful in subsequent centuries as well. Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia, in his commentary on Revelation (600 A.D.), "expressly applied the curse recorded in Rev. xxii. 18-19 to those literati who considered that Attic usage and a strictly logical train of thought were more worthy of respect and more to be admired ... than the peculiarities of Biblical language." Many other quotes have been multiplied in books to illustrate the fact that the church was indeed careful.

¹⁹As cited by Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 195, footnote 3.

²⁰Cited by Metzger (!) to try to prove the opposite on *Ibid.*, p. 196.

5. Suspect Grammar

Texts exhibiting grammatical carelessness and stylistic inferiority should be suspect. (cf. eg. Psa. 12:6; 19; Prov. 30:5-6; Heb. 12:27; Gal. 4:9; Gal. 3:16; John 8:58; Matt. 5:18)

Were unlearned peasants capable of smooth, stylistically beautiful Greek? On the face of it, our presupposition seems false. But careful reflection gives us cause to wonder.

For example, nearly all evangelical scholars agree that at least portions of these "peasants" writings (in any manuscript tradition!) are unparalleled in beauty and stylistic sophistication. The book of Revelation is a marvel of structure. How can this be? Our view of inspiration helps us to account for the symmetry, beauty, smoothness, fullness and stylistic sophistication of the Majority Text.

Speaking of consistency and niceness of language, Scripture is described as "perfect," "sure," "clean," "true," "pure," "right" (Ps. 19). Psalm 12:6 describes Scripture this way: "The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth. Purified seven times." Proverbs 30:5-6 says, "Every word of God is pure ... do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar." Grammar is in large part convention, it is true, but Scripture indicates that God supervised the very details of grammar when the Bible was written.

Thus there is significance to a phrase (Heb. 12:27 - makes a theological point over "yet once more"), the voice of a verb (passive versus active in Gal. 4:9 - "now after you have known God, or rather are known by God"), the tense of a verb (John 8:58 - "before Abraham was I AM"), the number of a noun (Gal. 3:16 - "not seeds as of many, but as of one, and to your seed, who is Christ") and the individual letters of a word (Matt. 5:18 - "one jot or one tittle"). Such Scriptures would lead one to believe that the Bible would not be grammatically awkward, garbled, or careless.

Yet this is precisely what evangelical textual critics affirm. They assume that the apostles would not have been capable of beautiful Greek, and that it is more likely that scribes polished the Greek than corrupted it. One of the oft-repeated proofs that the Majority text is an imposter is the beauty of its Greek - obviously the corrected work of embarrassed scribes! As one example: J. Harold Greenlee says,

"Byzantine readings are characteristically smooth, clear, and full. A conjunction or an appropriate word may be added to smooth out a rough transition ... The text may be changed to clarify a meaning ... A difficulty of meaning or a reading harder to understand may be alleviated ... The theology or the meaning in general may be strengthened ... One of the most common characteristics of the Byzantine text is the harmonization of parallel passages..."²¹

Greenlee intends this as a proof that editors must have changed the text because of embarrassment with its crude character. But is it not possible that the crudities and roughness of the Egyptian texts came as a result of non-Greek heretics butchering the text, and non-caring heretics making changes? Does it seem strange that the Greek of the Bible should be smooth, clear, full with appropriate words all in their place, and rough transition avoided, with difficult meanings absent and with not a trace of weak theology!? Is it really that difficult to believe? Many people are embarrassed with the great Greek in 1Peter and have a hard time defending Petrine authorship since the Greek of 2Peter is rougher. But the problem is alleviated in the Byzantine text.

Nor should it be thought that these editors prefer rough text when an entire textual tradition supports it. In many cases they prefer the coarser Greek of Vaticanus and Sinaiticus to every other manuscript. For example, Kurt and Barbara Aland state,

"Not only does the text tend to grow, it also becomes more stylistically polished, conformed to the rules of Greek grammar. In Mark 1:37, for example, there is a typically Marcan construction: *καὶ εὖρον αὐτὸν καὶ λεγουσιν*. The overwhelming majority of Greek manuscripts replace this with the better Greek expression: *εὖροντες αὐτὸν λεγουσιν*. Only a few manuscripts such as Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲱ), Codex Vaticanus (B), L, and a small number of other manuscripts withstand the temptation and preserve the stylistically embarrassing text."²²

²¹ J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 91.

²² *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 285.

6. No Guessing Allowed

Conjectural emendation (assuming an original reading that cannot be found in any Greek manuscript) should never be necessary (logical deduction of #1,2). If words and even letters would not pass away from the Bible till heaven and earth pass away (Matt. 5:17-18; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17), even the theoretical possibility of textual emendation is out of accord with the Bible. Yet evangelicals will on occasion resort to this.²³ Wescott & Hort had some 60 conjectural emendations.²⁴ The UBS text occasionally resorts to this as well (cf. Acts 16:12).

7. Suspect Singular Witnesses

Since God has established the principle that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established" (2Cor. 13:1; Matt. 18:16), we should be skeptical of readings that have only one witness. We should be even more skeptical when the united witness of a multitude of manuscripts contradicts that single witness. Yet modern versions frequently follow the UBS text even when it is supported by only one manuscript.²⁵

8. The Issue of Numbers

The true texts will far outnumber corrupt texts. (logical deduction from Col 4:16,18; 1Thes. 5:27; 2Thes. 3:17; 2Pet. 3:15-16; Jude 3; Rev. 1:11 with 1Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 14:33; 16:21 and from 2Thes. 2:2; 3:17; 2 Pet. 3:16-17; Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:8)

This is true for a number of reasons, among which are the following two:

1. The originals of each book of the New Testament (signed "by my own hand") were passed around to multiple churches in the apostles' lifetime (Col 4:16,18; 1Thes. 5:27; 2Thes. 3:17; 2 Pet. 3:15-16; Jude 3; Rev. 1:11 with 1Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 14:33; 16:21). This gave numerous "first copies" and gave transcriptional probability that the original would be preserved in many manuscripts in many places.

²³For example, see Lane's commentary on Romans 11:28. See F.F. Bruce on Acts 16:12.

²⁴For a listing, see Metzger, p. 184.

²⁵See for example, Matt 4:23; 5:22 (note the *vid*, beside p67 & 2174 and the * beside A); 8:18; 12:25; Mark 9:29; etc.

2. The church was warned to avoid those who distort the Scriptures (2Thes. 2:2; 3:17; 2Pet. 3:16-17; Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:8). This would ensure that corrupted versions would remain more localized and would not as easily be copied in the church.

Gordon Clark shows how modern textual critics have a diametrically opposing viewpoint.

"The critics, however, propose a rule that number is less important than weight. A dozen or a hundred manuscripts all copied from a single original ancestor count only as one; and therefore a lone manuscript of a different type equals the other hundred in weight. This argument, which seems plausible at first, is not so weighty a criterion as the critics seem to believe. There is another factor involved, which, if they have mentioned it, I have missed the mention. It is this. If a score or two score manuscripts have a single ancestor, it implies that a score or two score copyists believed that ancestor to be faithful to the autographs. But if a manuscript has not a numerous progeny, as is the case with B's ancestor, one may suspect that the early scribes doubted its value. Possibly the early orthodox Christians knew that B was corrupt, while the later heretics were less interested in wasting time copying their own altered text."²⁶

As one example, in 1 Timothy 3:16,

"300 Greek Manuscripts read 'God' while only eight read something else. Of those eight, three have private readings and five agree in reading 'who.' So we have to judge between 97% and 2%, 'God' versus 'who.' It is really hard to imagine any possible set of circumstances in the transcriptional history sufficient to produce the cataclysmic overthrow in statistical probability that is required by the claim that 'who' is the original reading."²⁷

In contrast, Aland says,

"It is true that the longer ending of Mark 16:9-20 is found in 99 percent of the Greek manuscripts as well as the rest of the tradition, enjoying over a period of centuries practically an official ecclesiastical sanction as a genuine part of the gospel of Mark. But in

²⁶ Gordon Clark, *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism*, (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1986), p. 15.

²⁷ Pickering, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 113.

Codex Vaticanus (B) as well as in Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲱ) the gospel of Mark ends at Mark 16:8..."²⁸



Sinaiticus (Ⲱ) at Mark 16

Notice the space where the last verses of Mark used to be.

What the reader is not told is that Sinaiticus had the original reading of Mark, but that it was subsequently erased. (See picture left.) This means that only one manuscript (Vaticanus) has any evidence that verses 9-20 can be omitted. Yet modern versions dishonestly imply that the evidence is much stronger for leaving the verses out.²⁹

9. Isolation of Errant Texts

Corrupt texts would tend to become more localized and time bounded (logical deduction from previous presupposition as well as from 2Thes. 3:17; 1Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18)

This is the flip side of presupposition #4. The church was warned to avoid those who distort the Scriptures (2Thes. 2:2; 3:17; 2Pet. 3:16-17; Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:8) and to be careful of using letters that did not bear the marks of authenticity (2Thes. 3:17; cf. also 1Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18). If this command was followed, texts corrupted by Marcion and others would not frequently be copied in the church and the main source of those texts would be in the local areas where the heretics taught and worked. If a heretical group died out, the manuscripts would have the tendency to die out as well.

²⁸ Aland, p. 287.

²⁹ For example, the NIV Study Bible says, "Serious doubts exist as to whether these verses belong to the Gospel of Mark. They are absent from important early manuscripts and display certain peculiarities of vocabulary, style and theological content that are unlike the rest of Mark. His Gospel probably ended at 16:8, or its original ending has been lost." The marginal note in all NIV bibles says, "The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20." The NASB says, "Some of the oldest mss. Do not contain vs. 9-20." The NKJV is much more honest when it says, "vv 9-20 are bracketed in NU as not original. They are lacking in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other mss of Mark contain them."

In fact we find that most of these so-called "best texts" come from Egypt, which became a hot bed for heretics. They also died out early. The Byzantine text on the other hand dominates the church. This is where the Majority Text principle of transcriptional probability fits the evidence.

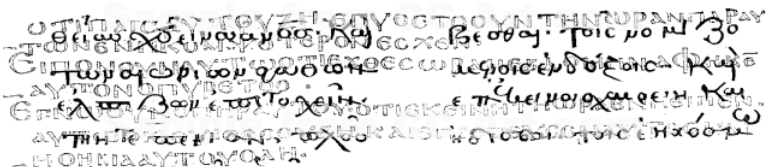
(See the previous example relevant to 1 Timothy 3:16).

10. Number, Weight, and Age

The credibility of a witness should be seen by how frequently it is in error, not by how old it is. (See Biblical doctrine of witnesses; Numb. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2Cor. 13:1; Rev. 11:3) Critics of the Majority Text complain that witnesses should be "weighed, not counted." We believe they should be both weighed and counted.

When the two "best" manuscripts from the Egyptian tradition are "weighed" in terms of transcriptional accuracy, they are found wanting. They not only disagree with the Byzantine texts over 6000 times, but they disagree with each other several thousand times as well. Dr. Scrivener speaks of the beauty and expensiveness of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, but he also demonstrates the carelessness of the scribes. He speaks of "the occurrence of so many different styles of handwriting, apparently due to penmen removed from each other by centuries, which deform by their corrections every page of this venerable-looking document." P66 is claimed as an old witness to the "Alexandrian text," yet it has "roughly two mistakes per verse."³⁰

Of the 250 uncials available today, 52 are palimpsests. A palimpsest is a parchment (animal hide) that has been re-scraped, washed and written over again. The person that erased it to use for another purpose obviously had little respect for the authenticity of the manuscript, yet many of these are given a fair degree of weight. St. Ephraem, a Syrian Church Father of the fourth century, erased "Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus" so that he could write his own essays on the parchment. "By the application of certain chemical regents and with the use of the ultraviolet-ray lamp, scholars have been able to read much of the almost obliterated underwriting, although the task of deciphering it is most trying to the eyes." (Metzger,



977),

A Palimpsest: A small portion of Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus with the underlying text highlighted by use of chemical regents and ultraviolet light.

p. 12) It is doubtful that such an enterprise is worth the effort and patience expended. The Egyptian texts have such conflicting testimony that they are not trustworthy witnesses. The Byzantine Text (especially the portion used in the church) is united with very few (and very minor) divergences across the 5000 plus manuscripts that represent this Traditional Text.

11. Caution with Internal Evidence Assumptions

Internal evidence should be used with extreme care in determining the text (1Cor. 2:11; Jer. 17:9-10).

Internal evidences are guesses as to what motive a scribe had to change the text. For example, the first rule of internal evidence states that the "shorter reading is to be preferred" because it was assumed that scribes tended to add material rather than omit material.³¹ The second rule states that "the harder reading is to be preferred" because it was assumed that scribes would try to simplify the text and/or resolve apparent contradictions or theological problems by changing the text. These and other rules of internal evidence are pure assumptions. While these rules of internal evidence give the illusion of being a scientific method, the reality is that motives are hard to read, and the best textual critics come to widely ranging conclusions. The use of internal evidence has made textual criticism extremely subjective. Scripture is clear, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?" (1Cor. 2:11). Jeremiah 17:9-10 indicates that no man can fully understand the motives of the heart.

Furthermore, the subjective opinions of these five liberal scholars are frequently driven by theological bias, yet the NIV and NASB have accepted their readings anyway. For example, in the Majority Text, John 3:13 reads: "And no one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man who is in heaven." The last phrase, "who is in heaven" speaks of Christ's omnipresence while on earth. All modern versions leave that out even though the liberal committee was divided two to three. Only twelve manuscripts leave it out. Most retain it. Almost all early church fathers quote the phrase as genuine.

³¹ Actually, A.C. Clarke, professor of Latin at Cambridge, demonstrated that with the Latin classics, scribes were much more prone to accidentally omit something than to add. (See Pickering, p. 80.)

Why was it left out? Metzger says, "...the majority of the Committee, impressed by the quality of the external attestation supporting the shorter reading, regarded the words 'who is in heaven' as an interpretive gloss, reflecting later Christological development." This statement presupposes that it was not possible for people in the first century to have such developed views of Christ. Similar arguments are made on Galatians 3:17 where the phrase "in Christ" is left out of all modern Egyptian-based translations because this would indicate a pre-incarnate presence of Christ in the Old Testament. This runs counter to liberal views of how doctrine "evolved."

Conclusion: What Authority Guides Us?

Given the humanistic assumptions that drive the editors of the Nestle's and UBS Greek texts, it is astonishing that evangelicals have almost blindly followed their recommendations.³² On the other hand, given the wealth of information that the self-attesting Scriptures give as to how God would preserve His text, it is equally astonishing that the Majority Text has not become the standard for evangelicals.

Ultimately, it is one's presuppositions that will determine the outcome on this debate. Everyone reads "the evidence" through a worldview grid of presuppositions. The debate will not be settled with more evidence. The evidence is clear, yet it is interpreted differently. The debate will only be settled when evangelicals are willing to allow their presuppositions to be challenged by Scripture and to be taken captive to Scripture. The question that must be settled is this: "What is the final authority in determining the text?"

There are several competing claims:

1. Rome claims to be the infallible determiner of both the canon and the text of Scripture.³³ Of course, this begs the question since the church

³² I say that it is "almost blindly" followed because, though the evangelicals parrot the same internal and external evidence provided by "the experts," they are just as quick to accept the new readings given in later editions of either the Nestle's or UBS *Greek New Testament*. The constant changes from edition to edition ought to alert the reader to the subjectivity involved.

³³ In Eck's debate with Luther, he said that "Scripture is not authentic without the Church's authority." John Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces*, "Against Luther and Other Enemies of the Church" (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 13, 14, 46 as cited by Curtis Crenshaw in unpublished paper.

has never stated which of the textual variants in the Latin Vulgate reflect the true text. The Church as infallible guide is thus a theoretical stance, but not a helpful one.

2. Another authority that is popular is individual autonomy. This is the approach taken by most modern commentators. They do not ordinarily follow a unified tradition. Nor do they tend to follow one edition of the critical text blindly. Instead, commentators often seem to assume that textual criticism can be an individual endeavor. On this view the commentator's own mind becomes the final judge and arbiter of truth. This makes the individual the highest authority.
3. The authority of a panel of five liberal experts is the third option. Though there have been other panels, the dominant panel to be trusted today is the one that makes up the United Bible Society Greek New Testament.³⁴ Since these men hold to presuppositions hostile to the authority of Scripture, this is a strange choice, yet it is the choice of most modern versions of the Bible and of the average evangelical pastor.
4. The Textus Receptus position claims that God providentially enabled Erasmus (or Stephanus or one of the other editors of the "Textus Receptus") to be free from error. This makes one man an authority for the whole church. There are no Biblical presuppositions that would warrant elevating one man to such a status. But it also fails to explain why one edition of the Textus Receptus should be followed rather than another.³⁵

³⁴ Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger and Allen Wikgren are not evangelicals, but liberals. And it is surprising to see the degree of trust that evangelicals have placed in these men. Gordon Clark in *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism* has done good work in showing many of their unbelieving presuppositions.

³⁵ Erasmus had several editions (1516 and following), as did Stephanus (1550 and following), Theodore Beza (1565-1611) and the Elzevir brothers (1624 and following). In addition to these there were the editions of Simon Colinaeus (1534) and the Oxford edition (1873). The third edition of the Stephanus text became the standard in Britain and the Elzevir text became the standard on the Continent. Though both of these differ from the Erasmus' text, Scrivener reported that in 119 places, Stephanus followed Erasmus despite the fact that all the Greek manuscripts that Stephanus consulted differed from Erasmus' version! Erasmus' first edition was obviously not kept from error as it had thousands of typographical errors. His 1519 edition corrected many, but added more. He also incorporated some readings from 3rd manuscript. His 1522 edition included a unique reading from the newly written (forged?) manuscript, Codex 61. Later Erasmus editions included readings from a Spanish edition of the NT put together by Cisneros. Various differences between editions range from 100-200 variants (not counting the typographical errors). With this evidence, it is difficult to argue that any of these editors

5. In contrast to all of these authorities, the Reformers insisted that Scripture and Scripture alone must be the authority in all matters related to life and practice. They insisted that the church's job is merely to recognize what God in His providence has made obvious, not to determine the text. They recognized that the moment man sets himself up as a judge of the text, he removes himself from the authority of the text (James 4:11) and comes under the curse of adding to or subtracting from the text of Scripture (Rev. 22:18-19).

The difference between recognizing and determining the text of Scripture may seem like splitting hairs at this point, but it has enormous implications. The Reformers insisted that the Bible gives us the criteria by which to recognize what is true and what is not true. The following quotes are representative:

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; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.³⁶

What does the church appeal to according to our Confession? Not to some theoretical autograph that we can never find and do not know about. An unpreserved text does the church no good. Rather the Reformers insisted that we are to appeal to the manuscripts that have been kept pure in every age. The London Confession of Faith (1689), the Philadelphia Confession (1742), and the Savoy Declaration all affirm the same statement. The following quote from the Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675) shows that the Continental church taught the same:

God, the Supreme Judge, not only took care to have His word, which is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care ever since it was written up to the present time, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore the Church

was providentially kept from error. It is infelicitous to argue for a TR reading that cannot be found in any Greek manuscripts (such as some words in the last few verses of Revelation), yet this is precisely what many TR advocates do. Though the TR is much closer to the Byzantine (Majority) Text than the Egyptian texts, it differs from the Majority Text in over 1800 places. Indeed, some distinctively Alexandrian readings can be found in the TR.

³⁶Westminster Confession of Faith, I:VII

justly ascribes it to His singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have to the end of the world, a "sure word of prophecy" and "Holy Scriptures" (2Tim. 3:15), from which, though heaven and earth perish, "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass" (Matt. 5:18).³⁷

These and similar quotes make it clear that the Reformers self-consciously committed themselves to the self-referential statements of Scripture. "What saith the Scriptures?" was their cry. Thus on the subject of textual criticism they unashamedly began with a certain set of presuppositions from the Bible. All men approach everything they do with a set of presuppositions, but not all are self-consciously aware of what those presuppositions are. "To argue by presupposition is to indicate what are the epistemological and metaphysical principles that underlie and control one's method."³⁸

The textual critics who have determined in large part the readings for the NIV, the NASB and almost all modern translations have a set of presuppositions that are completely out of accord with the Bible's statements about itself. And that should not be surprising since the men who put together the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament are all liberals. What is disconcerting is that Evangelicals have never bothered to discuss the presuppositions of these men, but have treated these men as objective, trustworthy guides.³⁹ Van Til in discussing another subject once said, "I would not talk endlessly about facts and more facts without ever challenging the non-believer's philosophy of fact."⁴⁰ It has been the purpose of this book to get the reader to do so with textual criticism.

The following essay by Pickering demonstrates that the Egyptian text is corrupt. However, corrupt presuppositions are the reason why this evidence has been ignored by so many. It is my prayer that Christians would return to the text of the Reformation (the Ecclesiastical Text⁴¹). This "Majority Text" is the only text that fits all eleven Biblical presuppositions.

³⁷John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (Richmond: John Knox Pres, revised edition, 1973), pp. 309, 310.

³⁸Van Til, *Defense*, pp. 116, 117.

³⁹Gordon Clark in *Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism* has done good work in showing many of their unbelieving presuppositions.

⁴⁰*The Defense of the Faith*, (1955), p. 258. Cf. also *Theory*, p. 293.

⁴¹Also known as *the Syrian Text*, *the Byzantine Text*, and *The Majority Text*.

3 – An Examination of the Alexandrian Texts

By Wilbur N. Pickering, PhD⁴²

Why Should We Listen to Egypt?

During the last hundred years it has been a commonplace of New Testament criticism to argue that the Alexandrian text-type is the most reliable among those available, and should receive the most consideration in any attempt to reconstruct the original text of the New Testament. It has been and continues to be the dominant point of view. Anyone who uses a United Bible Society (UBS3) or Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek text is, in effect, subscribing to that position, as is anyone who uses a version based upon them (almost all modern versions in English). It is the de facto position of the International Translation Department of Wycliffe Bible Translators since its Exegetical Helps series and Semantic Structure series basically follow UBS3.

That much is fact, but is it a good thing? There are over 6,000 differences between UBS3 and the form of the text exhibited by the vast majority of Greek manuscripts (MSS). Not infrequently UBS3 follows a few Egyptian witnesses against the united voice of the rest of the world. Does prudence suggest a query at this point? It is this writer's conviction that it does.

What are Egypt's claims upon our confidence? Why should we listen to Egypt against the rest of the world? I will write from the standpoint of those who believe and/or claim that the New Testament is God's Word. But why would God bother to provide a written revelation? If His purpose were to limit His communication to a single individual, community or people, at a given point in history, He would presumably use the spoken medium. If His purpose were to reach all people and all generations, then the written medium would be indicated. 2Timothy 3:16 gives some account of the purpose, or at least the usefulness, of Scripture

⁴² Reprinted with the written permission of Dr. Wilbur Pickering. For other articles by this author, visit www.esgm.org.

-- something not limited to one generation. The Old Testament, at least, was written for the benefit of succeeding generations, to the end of the ages (1Cor. 10:11). The point is, if God wants His written revelation to benefit future generations, it must be preserved for them. Also, it must be recognized for what it is. In other words, when the Holy Spirit inspired the New Testament writings He had to have a plan for making sure they would be recognized as Scripture and faithfully transmitted down through the centuries.

So, how would God proceed so as to achieve these two objectives? He evidently worked through the Church, using godly men. The Apostles knew they were writing Scripture, and the surviving writings of the earliest Church fathers of the first and second centuries show clearly that they recognized and used the New Testament writings as Scripture. Irenaeus wrote before the year A.D. 200. In his surviving writings he quotes from every New Testament book except Philemon and 3John, but he may have used them, too, in other writings that have not reached us. Evidently the dimensions of the New Testament Canon recognized by Irenaeus are very close to what we hold today. I emphasize the early, virtually immediate, recognition of the canonicity of the New Testament writings because it is a crucial factor for a correct understanding of what happened in their transmission.

What factors would be important for guaranteeing, or at least, facilitating, a faithful transmission of the text of the New Testament writings? I submit that there are three controlling factors: (1) an appropriate attitude toward the Text; (2) proficiency in the source language; and (3) access to the Autographs. First, the appropriate attitude.

The Proper Attitude Toward the Text

When careful work is required, the attitude of those to whom the task is entrusted is of the essence. Are they aware? Do they agree? If they do not understand the nature of the task, the quality will probably go down. If they understand, but do not agree, they might even resort to sabotage. In the case of the New Testament books we may begin with the question, "Why would copies be made?" We have seen that the faithful recognized the authority of the New Testament writings from the start, so the making of copies would have begun at once.

A second question would be, "What was the attitude of the copyists toward their work?" Being followers of Christ, and believing that they were dealing with Scripture, to a basic honesty would be added reverence in their handling of the Text. As the years went by, assuming that the faithful were persons of at least average integrity and intelligence, they would produce careful copies of the manuscripts they had received from the previous generation, persons whom they trusted, being assured that they were transmitting the true text. There might have been accidental copying mistakes in their work, but no deliberate changes. It is important to note that the earliest Christians did not need to be textual critics. Starting out with what they knew to be the pure Text, they had only to be reasonably honest and careful. I submit that we have good reason to believe they *were* careful.

However, as the influence of Christianity spread and began to make an impact on the world, opposition of various sorts arose. Also, there came to be divisions within the larger Christian community. In some cases faithfulness to an ideological position evidently became more important than faithfulness to the New Testament Text. It is certain that Church fathers who wrote during the second century complained bitterly about the deliberate alterations to the Text perpetrated by heretics. Such a scenario was totally predictable. If the New Testament is in fact God's Word then both God and Satan must have a lively interest in its fortunes. To approach the textual criticism of the New Testament without taking due account of that interest is irresponsible.

The Necessity of Proficiency

As a linguist and one who has dabbled in the Bible translation process for some years, I affirm that a "perfect" translation is impossible. Indeed, a tolerably reasonable approximation is often difficult enough to achieve. It follows that any divine solicitude for the precise form of the New Testament Text would have to be mediated through the language of the Autographs -- Greek. Evidently ancient versions (Syriac, Latin, Coptic) may cast a clear vote with reference to major variants, but precision is possible only in Greek (in the case of the New Testament). That is by way of background, but our main concern here is with copyists.

To copy a text by hand in a language you do not understand is a tedious exercise -- it is almost impossible to produce a perfect copy. Consider the case of p66. This papyrus manuscript is perhaps the oldest (c. 200) extant New Testament manuscript of any size. It is one of the worst copies we have. It has an average of roughly two mistake per verse -- many being obvious mistakes, stupid mistakes, nonsensical mistakes. I have no qualms in affirming that the person who produced p66 did not know Greek. Had he understood the text he would not have made the number and sort of mistakes he did.

Now consider the problem from God's point of view. To whom should He entrust the primary responsibility for the faithful transmission of the New Testament Text? If the Holy Spirit is going to take an active part in the process, where should He concentrate His efforts? Presumably fluent speakers of Greek would have the inside track, and areas where Greek would continue in active use would be preferred. For a faithful transmission to occur the copyists had to be proficient in Greek.

Who Had Access to the Autographs?

This criterion probably applied for than a hundred years (the Autographs presumably worn to a frazzle in that space of time) but it is highly significant proper understanding of the history of transmission of the Text. Already by the A.D. 100 there must have been many copies of the various books while it was certainly still possible to check a copy against the original, should a question arise.

The point is that there was a swelling stream of faithfully executed copies emanating from the holders of the Autographs to the rest of the Christian world. In those early years the producers of copies would have known that the true wording could be verified, which would discourage them from taking liberties with the text.

However, distance would presumably be a factor. I believe we may reasonably conclude that in general the quality of copies would be highest in the area surrounding the Autograph and would gradually



p66 showing John 1:1ff

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deteriorate as the distance increased. Important geographical barriers would accentuate the tendency.

Around the year 208, Tertullian claimed that the Apostles' "own authentic" writings were still being read in churches that received them. This expression might be understood to refer to the Autographs, although it seems scarcely possible that they could have survived so long, but at least it must mean that the respective churches were using exact copies. Was anything else to be expected? For example, when the elders of the Ephesian church saw that Autograph of Paul's letter getting frazzled, would they not carefully execute an identical copy for their own continued use? Would they allow the Autograph to perish without making such a copy? Would you? I believe we are obliged to conclude that in the year 200 the Ephesian church was still in a position to affirm the precise original wording of her letter (and so for the other holders of Autographs) -- but this is coeval with p46, p66, and p75!

So who held these Autographs? Speaking in terms of regions, Asia Minor may be safely said to have had twelve (John, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2Timothy, Philemon, 1Peter, John's three epistles, and Revelation), Greece may be safely said to have had six (1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1and 2Thessalonians, and Titus in Crete), and Rome may be safely said to have had two (Mark and Romans). As to the rest, Luke, Acts, and 2Peter were probably held by either Asia Minor or Rome, Matthew and James by either Asia Minor or Palestine, and Hebrews by Rome or Palestine. Jude was quite possibly held by Asia Minor. Taking Asia Minor and Greece together, the Aegean area held the Autographs of at least eighteen and possibly as many as twenty-four of the twenty-seven New Testament books, Rome held at least two and possibly up to seven, Palestine may have held up to three, and Alexandria (Egypt) had none! The Aegean region clearly had the best start, and Alexandria the worst.

Can Alexandrian Manuscripts be Trusted?

How does Egypt rate in terms of the three controlling factors discussed above? First, when did Christianity come to Egypt, and how strong was the Church there during the first and second centuries? I am not aware of any apostolic ministry in Egypt, although there is tradition to the effect that Mark the Evangelist labored there. The main line of advance seems to have been north into Asia Minor and west into Europe. If the selection

of churches to receive the glorified Christ's "letters" (Revelation 2 and 3) is any guide, the center of gravity of the Church seems to have shifted from Palestine to Asia Minor by the end of the first century.

Is it possible to evaluate their attitude toward the Text? The school of literary criticism that existed at Alexandria would have been a negative factor. But there is simple evidence that by the time of Eusebius the Alexandrian text-critical practices were being followed in at least some of the scriptoria where New Testament MSS were being produced. Exactly when Alexandrian text-critical principles were first used is not known. The Christian school founded in Alexandria by Pantaenus, around 180, was bound to be influenced by the scholars of the great library in that city.

To the extent that the roots of the allegorical approach to biblical interpretation that flourished in Alexandria during the third century were already present, they would also be a negative factor. Since Philo of Alexandria was at the height of his influence when the first Christians arrived there, it may be that his allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament began to rub off on the young church already in the first century. A literalist is obliged to be concerned about the precise wording of the text since his interpretation or exegesis hinges upon it. Since an allegorist is going to impose his own ideas on the text anyway, he would presumably have fewer inhibitions about altering it.

How about proficiency in Greek? The use of Greek in Egypt was already declining by the beginning of the Christian era. To what extent was it the mother tongue of the bulk of the population? By the third century the decline was evidently well advanced. I have already argued that the copyist who did p66 (c. 200) did not know Greek. Now consider the case of p75 (c. 220). E.C. Colwell analyzed p75 and found about 145 itacisms plus 257 other singular readings, 25% of which are nonsensical. From the pattern of mistakes it is clear that the copyist who did p75 copied letter by letter. This means that he did not know Greek -- when transcribing in a language you know, you copy phrase by phrase, or at least word by word. Before 200 the tide had begun to turn against the use of Greek in the areas that spoke Latin, Syriac, or Coptic, and fifty years later the changeover to the local languages was well advanced.

By the fourth century the level of proficiency in Greek to be found in Egypt must have been seriously reduced, yet it produced the two most important witnesses usually attributed to the Alexandrian text-type. The

parchment codices B (Vaticanus) and Aleph (Sinaiticus) are assigned to the fourth century and are generally understood to have been produced in Egypt. In the Gospels alone these two MSS differ well over 3,000 times, which number does not include minor errors such as spelling, nor even variants between certain synonyms. Now then, simple logic demands the conclusion that one or the other must be wrong 3,000 or more times -- that is, they have over 3,000 mistakes between them just in the Gospels.

Finally, how about access to the Autographs? Well, on this score Egypt was really in a bad way. Not only did the Egyptian church have none itself, but even the nearest ones were probably no closer than Jerusalem, and even so only until A.D. 70. The vast majority were across the Sea. If the Church got off to a slow start in Egypt, and remained weak into the second century (not to mention the Gnostic influence), we may wonder to what extent they would feel the need, or be willing to pay, to consult the Autographs.

Conclusion

Putting it all together, what are Egypt's claims upon our confidence? Frankly, it seems to me to be virtually impossible that a faithful, high quality transmission of the New Testament Text could have taken place in Egypt -- it simply lacked the necessary qualifications. Besides, we have the proof in the pudding. Each of the early MSS that is assigned to the Alexandrian text-type is in itself a poor copy -- demonstrably so. Not only that, they disagree among themselves to an astonishing extent. Not to mention the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times they disagree, as a group, with the rest of the world.

Is there a better way? Well, where do the three controlling factors point? The Aegean region was the area that was best qualified, from every point of view, to transmit the true Text, from the very first. I know of no reason to doubt that the Byzantine text-type is in fact the form of the Text that was known and transmitted in the Aegean area from the beginning. It is the result of the normal, faithful transmission of the New Testament Text -- in every age, including the second and third centuries, it has been the traditional text.

Resources Available from the Publisher

- Cummings, Tim. *Ministerial Training: The Bible's Normative Pattern*.
- Davis, Andrew. *Written on Your Heart: An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture*.
- Elliot, Michael (Ed.). *Bible Acrostic: An Aid to Memorizing the Content of Every Chapter of the Bible*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Biblical Romance: What Does the Bible Say About Courtship & Betrothal?*
- Kayser, Phillip. *The Canon of Scripture, Volume 1: Biblical Presuppositions*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Church Membership: Is It Biblical?*
- Kayser, Phillip. *December 25 Jewish Style: The Ancient Jewish Celebration Anticipating the Birth of Christ*.
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- Kayser, Phillip. *Feed My Lambs: Biblical Guidelines for Parents to Determine if Their Children are Ready for Communion*.
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- Rose, Ben Lacy. *Baptism by Sprinkling*.

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Has God Indeed Said?

The Preservation of the Text of the New Testament

Phillip Kayser, Ph.D. and Wilbur Pickering, Ph.D.

Has God preserved His Word? Unfortunately, many Christians and numerous versions of the Bible assume that 4% of the text of the New Testament is forever lost. This booklet's aim is to set the reader's mind at ease on this question and to convince him that God has indeed preserved His word in keeping with His promise: "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law." (Matt. 5:18)

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Wilbur Pickering is a New Testament textual scholar, linguist, and Bible translator. He has a ThM and a PhD in linguistics. He has worked with Wycliffe Bible Translators and serves as a missionary in Brazil.



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