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The Contributions of Textual Criticism to the Interpretation of the New Testament

Frank Pack

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RESTORATION QUARTERLY

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STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

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The Contributions of Textual Criticism to the Interpretation of the New Testament

Frank Pack

Christianity, like Judaism, is the religion of the Book. Its claims are presented upon the pages of the Holy Scriptures. It recognizes that the Old Testament which was the Bible of the Jews is incomplete and finds its true fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who fulfills the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17). The New Testament sets forth the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, who is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). "It is God's way of speaking to us now."¹

God willed that His Church should enjoy the benefit of His written will, at once as a rule of doctrine and as a guide unto holy living. For this cause He so enlightened the minds of the Apostles and Evangelists by His Spirit, that they recorded what He had imprinted on their hearts or brought to their remembrance, without the risk of error in anything essential to the verity of the gospel.²

A modern scholar of the liberal tradition has also stated the fundamental importance of the Bible in the following way.

The Bible is for us the word of God, our chief guide for the salvation of humanity. We need not attempt here to explain theologically how or why this may be so. The Bible is the historic basis for the Christian religion, and we who are Christians perceive in it, above all other writings, man's only hope of life. It is with this book that the textual critic deals. This is the book whose true text he seeks and whose transmission from generation to generation he studies to understand.³

No interpretation can take place without first settling the question of what is the text of the passage to be interpreted. That this has already been done in large measure through the careful study of textual scholars in past centuries should be cause for rejoicing by Bible students. Yet there are still passages where the light of recent discoveries and increased study can add to our understanding of the Scriptures. One must understand the meaning of God's word if he would obey his will, and anything that aids in that understanding makes a great contribution to the Christian's life. Professor W. A.

¹Wentz, Abdel Ross, "The New Testament and the Word of God," *An Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament* (New York: International Council of Religious Education, 1946), p. 64.

²Scrivener, F. H. A., *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, fourth edition, edited by Edward Miller (London: George Bell and Sons, 1894), Vol. I, pp. 1, 2.

³Clark, Kenneth W., "The Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament," Merrill M. Parvis and Allen P. Wikgren, editors, *New Testament Manuscript Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), p. 1.

Irwin in his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis in 1959 pointed out the fact that

. . . the first responsibility of the exegete . . . is to determine as exactly as possible just what the Biblical writer actually meant. . . the Bible itself is our first and altogether best source for the study of the Bible; not the necessities of modern theology, not the dictum of tradition, nor any clever idea which the current vogue may devise, but the Bible itself with whatever we can make of it by all the best known procedures is alone to tell us what the Bible is and what it means.⁴

The peculiar nature of the Bible thus leads us to desire as nearly as possible to secure its exact words, for we must know precisely what the written text is.⁵

The Quantity of the Witness to the New Testament Text

When we speak of the New Testament today we think of a printed book, yet we must be aware of the fact that printing is a modern invention and that none of the earliest copies of the New Testament books were printed. The originals of every one of the books of the New Testament have long since disappeared. These autographs were no doubt written upon papyrus which, like paper, was a perishable material. Only under the most favorable circumstances in a dry climate such as Egypt affords could they be expected to survive for many years. As the early church made use of these books in public reading and study they would soon wear out and need to be copied. Later copies had to be made of these copies and our oldest surviving New Testament manuscripts are no doubt copies of copies of the autographs.

The fact that no autographs of the New Testament books have survived should not greatly disturb us, however, for no one of the ancient classics so revered in later times survived in autograph form. All of the Greek and Latin classical writers with the exception of Vergil survived in manuscripts that are later than the 9th century A.D. which separates them several hundred years from the time of the autographs. Most of these are few in number and late in date for each author.⁶ By contrast we can say that "for no literary work that has come down to us from the ancient world is there such an

⁴Irwin, W. A., "A Still Small Voice . . . Said, What Are You Doing Here?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*. 78 (1959), p. 3.

⁵Dana, H. E., *Searching the Scriptures* (Kansas City: Central Seminary Press, 1946), p. 137.

⁶F. C. Grant calls attention to the fact that there are only two manuscripts of the Latin poet Lucretius, one a ninth century and the other a tenth century manuscript, besides some late copies of a lost uncial archetype. These manuscripts are faulty having large gaps in their material that must be supplied by the learned conjectures of scholars in order to make the poetic works complete. The New Testament is in no such unfavorable position. F. C. Grant, *Translating the Bible* (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1961), p. 123.

abundance of manuscript evidence as for the New Testament.”⁷ The earliest New Testament document in our possession comes from within a half century of the writing of the autograph. This is a fragment of the gospel of John 18:31-33, 37, 38 which is dated in the first half of the 2nd century. This would place it within 50 years of the traditional date assigned for the writing of this gospel.⁸ Interestingly enough, when the fragment is compared with the passage in Nestle’s Greek Testament it agrees word for word which testifies to the reliability of the transmission of the text of the New Testament. Not only are there a number of manuscripts from a very early date but a great number of copies of the New Testament or portions thereof have survived. While the largest number of these documents are late in date, coming after the 10th century, the period since the publication of the Westcott-Hort Greek Testament (1881) has been particularly fertile in the discovery of ancient manuscripts of the New Testament.⁹ Nearly 4,700 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament are basic witnesses to its text besides more than 9,000 manuscripts of the ancient versions as well as the vast number of quotations appearing in the early Christian writers and church fathers.

Recognizing the Manuscripts

To those who are not acquainted with the ways by which this mass of material is referred to, it will be appropriate to point out the notations employed in critical editions of the Greek New Testament as well as in many of the commentaries on various books in the New Testament. Greek manuscripts are divided into four groups: uncial (manuscripts written in ancient capital letters), miniscules (later manuscripts written in small letters), papyri and lectionaries (these are the service books containing selections for reading publicly in the worship of the early church). Since the time of J. J. Wettstein (1693-1754) it has been customary to refer to the ancient uncials by capital letters. Among the most important of these are Codex Sinaiticus (referred to by the Hebrew letter Aleph), Codex Vaticanus (B), both 4th century manuscripts; Codex Alexandrinus (A), Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C), both 5th century manuscripts; Codex Bezae (D), Codex Claromontanus (D²), both 6th century manuscripts;

⁷Tasker, R. V. G., “The Manuscripts and Ancient Versions of the New Testament,” *The Bible Today* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 94.

⁸Roberts, C. H., *An Unpublished Fragment of the Fourth Gospel in the John Rylands Library* (Manchester: University Press, 1935).

⁹Some of the more significant discoveries and studies made since 1881 include the following: The discovery of the Sinaitic Syriac Gospel manuscript in 1892, the Greek fragment of Tatian’s Diatessaron in 1933, the Codex Washingtoniensis of the four gospels in 1906, the Chester Beatty Papyri of 12 manuscripts in 1931 (including 3 of the New Testament from the 3rd century A.D.), the Koridethi Gospels (Theta) edited in 1913, the John Rylands fragment of John 18 (P 52), the recent Gnostic library at Chenoboskion with its apocryphal materials, and the Bodmer papyri collection stirring current interest.

Codex Washingtoniensis (W), a 5th century manuscript, Codex Koridethi (Greek letter Theta), and Codex Regius (L). While the great majority of the minuscule manuscripts conform to the later ecclesiastical texts and usually date after the 10th century, there are some that are textually of more value because they bear witness to ancient forms of the New Testament text. Out of the approximately 2,500 such minuscule manuscripts, which are usually cited by the Arabic numbers, the following are of more than usual interest. Family 1 and family 13 both exhibit very interesting textual characteristics. 33 has a text very near to Aleph and B. 81 gives a text very near to Vaticanus (B) in the book of Acts., 565 is one of the most beautiful of the known manuscripts written in gold letters on purple vellum and said to have been the property of Empress Theodora. 700 joins with Theta and 565 as well as family 1 and family 13 to preserve one of the major forms of the New Testament text known as the "Caesarean" text. 1739 presents a number of readings from the commentaries of Origen in Acts and the Epistles. 2427 has been referred to as the "antique Mark" in the library at the University of Chicago.

More than 1,500 lectionaries have been numbered and are in the process of being studied. These consisted of passages that were selected from New Testament books for public reading in the churches throughout the year. They are usually referred to by the Arabic number preceded by a small l standing for lectionary. These systems of reading go back to a very ancient period although very little is known at present concerning their origin or history.

It is their general faithfulness to an originally continuous text, taken in connection with these exceptions on the one hand, and with the well-known verbal conservatism of church services on the other, that gives to the evidence of lectionaries both its value and its limitation.¹⁰

Some of the most exciting discoveries have occurred among the papyri. These are referred to by P followed by the Arabic number. At present there are approximately 75 that have been classified according to the Gregory-von Dobschuetz numbering system.¹² These are all ancient witnesses coming mostly from the 3rd and 4th centuries, but some are to be found in the 2nd century. P⁵² is the John Rylands fragment referred to above containing John 18:31-33, 37, 38, dated in the first half of the 2nd century. The Chester Beatty Papyri on the Gospels and Acts (P⁴⁵), on the Pauline epistles (P⁴⁶), and the Book of Revelation (P⁴⁷) are 3rd century documents containing considerable portions from the New Testament. More recently New Testament scholars have been thrilled with the Bodmer Papyri col-

¹⁰Lake, Kirsopp, *The Text of the New Testament* (6th rev. ed.; London: Rivington's, 1949), p. 54.

¹²This numbering system is almost universally followed by textual scholars in referring to manuscripts. Originating with C. R. Gregory and continued by E. von Dobschuetz, it is being kept current by Professor Kurt Aland of the University of Münster, Germany.

lection, one of which (P⁶⁶) contains portions of all 21 chapters of the Gospel of John from about the year 200.¹³ P⁷² is the official number given to the Bodmer Papyri VII and VIII containing the text of Jude and 1 and 2 Peter in Greek as a 3rd century uncial. F. W. Beare recently remarked, "With the publication of these texts, we now have at our disposal relatively early papyrus witnesses to the Greek text of every book in the New Testament except the two minor Johannine epistles and the two epistles to Timothy."¹⁴

In addition to the Greek manuscripts the evidence found in the ancient versions of the New Testament is of particular help. "Most textual critics of the present generation recognize the great importance of the versions in attaining a primitive form of the Greek text of the New Testament."¹⁵ The ancient versions produced in the East including Egypt are made up of the following: the Syriac versions (the Diatessaron of Tatian, the old Syriac including both the Curetonian and the Sinaitic, the Peshitta with something like 250 copies surviving, the Philoxenian and the Harklean with its important marginal readings, and the Palestinian Syriac version); the Coptic versions (including the Sahidic and the Bohairic dialects); the Armenian version; the Georgian version; the Ethiopic version and the Arabic versions. The major versions of the West include the following: the Old Latin (both African and European), the Latin Vulgate; the Gothic; the Old Slavic. Because versions that are ancient often bear witness to a form of the underlying Greek text which is quite early, they make a great contribution in restoring the original text of the New Testament.

One of the most fruitful areas for textual study is the quotations of the early Christian writers. This is commonly called patristic evidence. Ranking them after the Greek manuscripts and ancient versions in value, Lake states:

Their value consists in the opportunity which they afford us of localizing and dating various kinds of texts in MSS. and versions. For instance, if we find a certain well-defined type of text in the Old Latin MSS., and also in the quotations of certain African fathers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, we are obviously justified in saying that this form of Latin version was used in Africa in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Whereas if we had not the quotations, we should have very little certain evidence either as to date or place.¹⁶

However, he points out that the fathers that are really important are those that are earlier than the 5th century. Latin fathers like

¹³P⁶⁶ (Papyrus Bodmer II) was discussed textually in an article by this writer in two parts in the *Restoration Quarterly*, Vol. 4 (1960), pp. 1-10; 61-70.

¹⁴Beare, F. W., "The Text of I Peter in Papyrus 72," *Journal of Biblical Literature*. 80 (1961), p. 253.

¹⁵Metzger, Bruce M., "The Evidence of the Versions for the Text of the New Testament," Merrill M. Parvis and Allen P. Wikgren, editors; *New Testament Manuscript Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), p. 25.

¹⁶Lake, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

Tertullian and Cyprian and Novatian of Rome represent the 3rd century Latin text in their numerous quotations. Western Greek writers like Justin Martyr, Marcion, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus of the 2nd and early 3rd centuries display the form of the Greek text in the West at this time. The Alexandrian fathers represented by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Cyril of Alexandria show the text in Egypt in the third century particularly. The Eastern Greek fathers represented by Methodius and Eusebius present another form of the Greek text centering in Palestine, while a group of Syrian fathers, Tatian, Aphraates, and Ephraem show us the text in that part of the ancient world.

Both versions and the patristic evidence are cited through a series of abbreviations that will indicate the particular version or father that gives the certain distinctive reading. If one is using such a critical text as Nestle's which is a standard work at the present time, he will find in the introduction to the testament the notations used in the citation of variants.

The Problem of Variant Readings

The very multiplicity of the documents for the text of the Greek New Testament, while giving a tremendous witness to the reliability of the New Testament text, also creates some particular problems of its own. If one were carefully to compare any two of these documents he would find differences to exist between them. When all of the documents are examined and differences are set down, a great multiplicity of variant readings becomes evident. While many of these are of no great significance at the same time they do demand classification and proper study for correct evaluation. Comparing the 70 verses in John that the Chester Beatty Papyrus and P⁶⁶ contain in common, G. D. Kilpatrick points out that there are some 73 variations in the 70 verses, besides mistakes.¹⁷ Yet he notes that the great number of variants is not so bad as it sounds for two reasons: first, our earliest manuscripts enable us to trace back the text to a period near to the composition of the autographs; second, scholars have worked out criteria that enable them to choose with fair confidence among the many variants that the manuscripts offer.¹⁸ For instance, almost fifty percent of the variants in any Greek manuscript will be simply matters of spelling.¹⁹ Hort's famous statement made in his introduction to the Westcott and Hort Greek New Testament is appropriate here.

Setting aside differences in orthography, the words in our opinion still subject to doubt only make up about 1/60 of the New Testament. In this second estimate, the proportion of

¹⁷Kilpatrick, G. D., "The Transmission of the New Testament and Its Reliability," *Bible Translator*, Vol. 9 (1959), p. 128.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Colwell, Ernest C., "The Text and Ancient Versions of the New Testament," *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 76.

comparatively trivial variations is beyond measure larger than in the former, so that the amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation is but a small fraction of the whole residuary variation, and can hardly form more than a 1/1000 part of the entire text.²⁰

The science of textual criticism has endeavored to classify these variants in such a way that they may be properly evaluated. These are usually grouped into two classes: unintentional variations and intentional variations. Unintentional variations are those due to slips of the scribes. Through mistakes of the eye a line can be omitted, particularly if the line begins or ends with the same words. Words can be repeated that should not be and words can be omitted that should have been repeated. Due to the free word order in the Greek language, variation in the way the words come in a sentence comprise a large number of variants, and at times this does have effect on the meaning. As has been noted above very many of the variations occur through spelling errors. Since some manuscripts were copied by dictation, the errors of such a method show up in some copies. Colwell points out that because we often see what we expect to see it is likely that scribes who were accustomed to certain wordings created variants in copies by mistaking a word they read for another word they expected to see and wrote down the expected word.²¹ McGarvey also states that some errors came from the scribe trusting to his memory too much.²² This type of variation is rather easy to detect and has been classified in the handbooks on textual criticism by scholars.²³

Intentional variation, however, came out of a desire on the part of a scribe or an early editor to "improve" the text or to "correct" the mistakes that he felt might be in the text. Colwell has a very able discussion of this type of variation in his article in the *Interpreter's Bible*.²⁴ He distinguishes between variations created by editors and those created by scribes. Christian scribes often tried to make the parallel material in the first three gospels harmonize exactly in wording with one another. Here a considerable portion of "correction" can be found because these gospels have the largest amount of parallel material. He points out the fact, well recognized by

²⁰Hort, F. J. A., *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek* (Cambridge: MacMillan and Co., 1881), p. 2.

²¹Colwell, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

²²McGarvey, J. W., *Evidences of Christianity*, Part I (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1886), p. 21.

²³Some standard handbooks on textual criticism in which such classifications are made and discussed are: Kirsopp Lake, *op. cit.*, F. H. A. Scrivner, *op. cit.*, A. T. Robertson, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925), F. G. Kenyon, *Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 2nd edition (London: MacMillan and Co., 1912), C. R. Gregory, *The Canon and Text of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), Leo Vaganay, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1937).

²⁴Colwell, Ernest C., *op. cit.*, pp. 72-83.

textual scholars, that the gospel of Matthew was the most popular of all the gospels in the early church and due to the similarity of material in Matthew and Mark the tendency of early scribes was to "correct" the gospel of Mark so that it would read in harmony with Matthew. This tendency to a lesser extent exhibits itself also in the gospel of Luke. Old Testament quotations made in a New Testament book were often harmonized with the Septuagint reading. Colwell says,

This is not to say that the scribe intended to create a new reading; what he intended was the correction of what he mistakenly identified as an erroneous reading. Reverence for scripture was a help rather than a hindrance to such action.²⁵

Other scribes made changes obviously for doctrinal reasons. Either they were intent on supporting a doctrine they felt should be stated or else they desired to take from a passage of scripture something that they conceived to be doctrinally heretical. Another class of intentional variations arose over the incorporation of explanatory notes into the body of the text. Some of these may have been writings on the margins of manuscripts at certain places in order to make the passage clearer in the text or the notes may have been made even between the lines of the text. A variation of this sort is the explanatory insertion that occurs in John 5:3b-4 which is not to be found in any of the most ancient copies of this gospel. This is the variant that reads "waiting for the moving of the water: for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole, with whatsoever disease he was holden" (ASV mg.). To these intentional variations Colwell adds those created by editors. These were responsible for making certain minor alterations in the text that would smoothe the grammar and make the language more graceful to the trained ear. Editors were also responsible for bringing together readings that were in different types of texts and blending them so that they are incorporated into one reading. Westcott and Hort called such readings "conflate" readings. At times variations arose through the influence of early translations upon the Greek text as in the case of Codex Bezae (D) in which the Latin text seems to have exercised some influence upon the Greek text of this bilingual document. While intentional variation is hard to distinguish, and there are instances in which good cases can be made out for both the unintentional as well as the intentional type of change, yet that it existed in the early documents cannot be denied. M. J. Lagrange, the great Roman Catholic scholar wrote,

When there was any doubt about the original text, since it was desired that the actual text be read, studied, and taken as the rule of faith in life should be absolutely perfect, the copyist, convinced that he was doing a good work, was bold in

²⁵Colwell, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

his corrections, his additions, and suppressions, and he grew bolder as his intentions became purer.²⁶

Sir Frederic Kenyon has pointed out that there were two major periods for the creation of variations: 1) the period of casual, un-systematic, and largely unintentional creation of various readings which he regards as having gone on unchecked "only through the earlier part of the second century,"²⁷ and 2) the period of conscious careful selection and editorial revision that resulted in the great recensions. The various forms of texts known by the common name "Western texts" are the result of early editorial efforts which include a number of explanatory glosses, interpolations and in general result in a fuller text of the New Testament. This particular text type was very wide-spread in the late second century so that its antiquity is well attested.²⁸ Side by side with this type of text there existed in Egypt through the influence of the scholarship at Alexandria a very carefully developed type of text that is known as the Alexandrian or the "Neutral" text of Westcott-Hort.²⁹ Since at Alexandria the scholarly works on the mss. of the ancient Greek classical writers had developed to such a high stage, it is not surprising that there should be in connection with the text of the New Testament a very careful and chaste editing of its text. Scholars have also been able to distinguish a type of text that has been called "Caesarean" because it was manifested in the work of Origen and his disciples at the great school and library that grew up at Caesarea in Palestine.³⁰ After the capital of the empire was moved to Constantinople there emerged there a type of text that is known as the Syrian or Byzantine text.³¹ It is characterized by bringing together readings from the Western, the "Caesarean," and the Alexandrian textual traditions and combining them in such a way that it is a full text. Its readings are thus called "conflate." While "most of its readings existed in the second century"³² these were combined to form the text that had back of it the authority of Constantinople, the center of the Eastern Orthodox Church. By the 10th century A.D. it was the dominant form of the Greek New Testament.

²⁶Lagrange, M. J., "Projet de critique textuelle rationnelle du Nouveau Testament," *Revue Biblique* 42 (1933), p. 495.

²⁷Kenyon, Sir Frederic, *Recent Developments in the Textual Criticism of the Greek Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 78.

²⁸The principal manuscript witnesses for the "Western" text type are: D (Codex Bezae), D² (Codex Claromontanus), Old Latin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and to some extent the Old Syriac versions.

²⁹The Alexandrian or "Neutral" text is best represented by Aleph (Codex Sinaiticus), B (Codex Vaticanus), C (Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus), the Egyptian versions, and to some extent A (Codex Alexandrinus) *et al.*

³⁰The "Caesarean" text is represented by Theta (Koridethi Gospels), family 1, family 13, 565,700, Origen, Eusebius.

³¹This text is characterized by Codices E, F, G, H, in addition to the majority of the minuscules.

³²Colwell, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

From the 10th to the 14th centuries, at least four distinguishable revisions of this Greek vulgate were produced. One of its forms appears in the first printings of the New Testament (notably in those of the Erasmus, Elzevir, and Stephanus), and through them determines the content of the 16th century translations into English which in their turn determine the content of the King James Version and the English New Testament down to A.D. 1880.³³

The Greek Testament that was first published by Erasmus in 1516 followed by the editions of Stephanus and later Elzevir is known as the *Textus Receptus*. Erasmus based his Greek Testament upon the choice of only a few very late mss. that were available to him at Basel. He worked on his Testament only 10 months before it was printed and at no time did he have access to any of the major ancient mss. In fact, none of these three men previously named whose editions so powerfully determined the nature of the Greek New Testament had access to any major uncial mss. of the Greek Testament that we know now and depend upon so firmly. Yet through long established usage this form of the Greek Testament held sway for a period of some 250 years. Only through the diligent efforts of textual scholars who amassed the wealth of information about the mss. of the Bible and then put these in practice by the forming of a critical edition of the New Testament beginning with Lachmann (1831) have we been able to free ourselves from the binding and constricting influence of the *Textus Receptus* and get closer to the original text.

Determining the Text from the Variants

In determining the genuine text among the many variants which exhibit themselves in the mass one cannot take simply a majority of the manuscripts supporting a certain reading and arrive at a genuine reading. This is because of the fact that most of the manuscripts now in existence were written late, certainly after the 10th century A.D., while the earliest ones are much fewer in number yet they are much nearer to the source of the New Testament and therefore much more important. Neither can the text be chosen simply on the basis of taking the oldest manuscript available and following it without deviation. Our oldest portions of the New Testament reach only to the 2nd century and it is in the 2nd century where we have a number of competing readings exhibited by different groups of manuscripts. While age is important it is not the decisive thing. One cannot even select a single manuscript that is of outstanding quality and follow it throughout, for no manuscript is of the same quality throughout. This is due to the fact that mixture has taken place in the transmission of the manuscripts. Since early copies of these books circulated individually before they were collected together into one total New Testament, it was easy for manuscripts to be copied from different exemplars incorporating various readings into one manuscript.

This mixture, as it may be conveniently called, of texts pre-

³³*Ibid.*

viously independent has taken place on a large scale in the New Testament. Within narrow geographical areas it was doubtless at work from a very early time, and it would naturally extend itself with the increase of communication between distant churches.³⁴

A good illustration of mixture in a manuscript that is early is to be found in the Washington Manuscript (W) written probably in the late 4th century and now a part of the Freer collection in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D. C. Matthew is Byzantine in type while the first five chapters of Mark are "Western" but the rest of the book is "Caesarean." Luke is "Neutral" in the first 8 chapters, while the last part of the book is Byzantine and John is "Neutral" throughout.³⁵ Hort thought that one of the most important ways of arriving at the original was through the grouping of manuscripts according to ancestry. As one might trace back his ancestors through generations in constructing a family tree, so this was used in order to try to reconstruct the New Testament text all the way back to the originals. However, it is extremely difficult to accomplish in the face of the mixture that occurs in manuscripts. Scholars can trace the genealogy of text types better than to go beyond them to the original. Some have felt that the church fathers might enable the scholar to arrive at the proper form of the New Testament text. The oldest of the church fathers supposedly would have available the oldest form of the New Testament. Of course, in using any of the early writers one must be sure that an early writer is quoting the text verbatim and not paraphrasing. The same problem of arriving at a critical text for the writings of the fathers exists as for the arriving at the text of the New Testament. What all of this says is that there is no easy or simple way to arrive at the New Testament text in the face of the great mass of manuscripts and the variations which they present. This is why scholars have worked out methods of determining and re-establishing the original text of the New Testament.

First, external evidence from the documents must be used in which the evidence of single documents or groups of documents and particularly of families or types of texts can be properly assessed. Through family relations and the construction of a family tree of manuscripts, documents can be evaluated and the groupings placed in the total history of the transmission of the New Testament. Second, the individual readings within a document or documents are appraised. Scholars through the years have endeavored to set up a list of rules by which such appraisal may be governed. These are called canons of textual criticism. As early as 1711 Gerhard von Maestricht in his edition of the Greek New Testament drew up 43 rules to guide the textual critic in finding the best reading. Johann

³⁴Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³⁵Lake, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Bengel in the preface to his *Gnomon of the New Testament* reduced these to 27 in 1743. Griesbach further reduced them to 15 in 1796, and Hort brought them down to 2.³⁶ Most modern scholars are inclined to follow Hort's 2 major canons: 1) that reading is to be preferred which best suits the context, and 2) that reading is to be preferred which best explains the origin of all other readings. Colwell points out that these rules are simple formulas for what the textual critic must know and use in order to solve his problem. The first rule simply means that the scholar must know the document thoroughly and the second that he must know the whole background of church history out of which such readings may have been produced. To these two principles the handbooks add a third, conjectural emendation. While this has to be used very widely in reconstructing classical and other ancient documents, the multiplicity of evidence in the New Testament is such that it is almost never justified. In fact, such emendations are usually so questioned that no one of them has ever been able to establish itself apart from actual manuscript evidence. This particular area is negligible in importance. Colwell summarizes the whole method of textual criticism as simply one of reversing the flow of history.

In history, as manuscript begets manuscript the number of variant readings is increased. In manuscript study (textual criticism to the scholar) variant readings are decreased until a reading is selected that may be regarded as the original with a high degree of probability.³⁷

It is this type of process which is represented in the excellent critical editions that have been printed and made available to modern students. All students of the Greek New Testament are very familiar with the edition of Westcott and Hort whose text has been a landmark in modern studies.³⁸ In addition, the text of Eberhard Nestle which first appeared in 1906 has gone through a succession of editions to keep it up to date with new manuscript discoveries. Through the successive work of Erwin Nestle, Walter Eltester, and at present Kurt Aland it continues to be a very widespread blessing in the study of the Greek New Testament.³⁹ Roman Catholic scholars have contributed greatly in recent years to work along this line and their editions have helped, particularly as they have explored the minuscule manuscripts and endeavored to use these in their edi-

³⁶F. C. Grant, "The Greek Text of the New Testament," *An Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament* (New York: International Council of Religious Education, 1946), p. 40.

³⁷Colwell, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³⁸Westcott, B. F., and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1881).

³⁹Nestle, Eberhard and Erwin Nestle, *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine* (Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1906ff.).

tions. The work of Augustinus Merk,⁴⁰ H. J. Vogels,⁴¹ and J. M. Bover⁴² are of excellent quality and make their contribution in the study of the text of the New Testament.

An illustration of the application of textual criticism to the text of the New Testament will show the process of study and action. In a previous article⁴³ this writer noted the interesting variations found in John 1:18. The reading of *ho monogenes huios*, "the only begotten Son," which is found in the KJV, ASV, and RSV and is read by A (Alexandrinus) W (Washingtoniensis) Theta (Koridethi) fam 1 fam 13 lat (The Latin versions) sy cur (the Curetonian Syriac) sa (Sahidic Egyptian version) Tertullian Eusebius Chrysostom. The other reading is *monogenes theos*, "only begotten God" which is read by P⁶⁶ (Papyrus Bodmer II) Aleph (Sinaiticus) B (Vaticanus) C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) 33 sy pesh hl. mfl. (the Syriac Peshitta and Harklean margin versions) bo (Bohairic Egyptian version) along with Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The former reading is supported by representation of the "Western" and "Caesarean" text types, while the latter is supported by strong Alexandrian witnesses along with some Syriac witnesses. To anyone who knows the antiquity and weight of the documents in the latter group, it will be evident that this reading is the preferable reading. As this author pointed out in the article "*monogenes theos* must be the original reading for which the more usual reading, *ho monogenes huios*, occurring with some frequency elsewhere in this gospel was easily substituted."⁴⁴ Since sacred names were often abbreviated in the ancient documents and the abbreviation for God, *theos*, was very similar to the abbreviation for son, *huios*, the change could have been made either through unintentional variation by the carelessness of the scribe or by intentional variation through desire for similarity with other expressions found in the Gospels. The proper reading here should be determined upon the basis of the antiquity of the witnesses and the value of their combined witness.⁴⁵

It is only through constantly working with the textual data presented for various passages that one becomes adept in knowledge of

⁴⁰Merk, Augustinus, *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine*, 7th edition (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1951).

⁴¹Vogels, H. J., *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine*, 3rd ed. (Friburgi Brisgoviae: Herder, 1950).

⁴²Bover, J. M., *Novi Testamenti Biblia Graeca et Latina*, editio quarta (Matriti: 1959).

⁴³Pack, Frank, "A Study of Papyrus Bodmer II (P⁶⁶)," *Restoration Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1960), p. 5.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵An important additional illustration of textual studies in interpretation is best given in previous discussions in the *Restoration Quarterly* on John 7:53-8:11. See Earle McMillan, "Textual Authority for John 7:53-8:11," Vol. 3 (1959), pp. 18-22; Roy Bowen Ward, "The Case for John 7:53-8:11," Vol. 3 (1959), pp. 130-139; Fausto Salvini, "Textual Authority for John 7:53-8:11," Vol. 4 (1960), pp. 11-15.

manuscripts and how to evaluate their witnesses. Usually commentators will give some guidance in cases of perplexity to the average student. It is well to see whether the variant readings in a passage will materially affect the interpretation of a passage one may be studying. It is thrilling to know that we are living in an age where increasing study of the manuscript evidence and new discoveries of documents are constantly bringing new light to our understanding of textual problems and thus contributing to the interpretation properly of the Word of God.