

Is NT textual criticism a science?

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Have you ever heard or read (or said) the phrase, 'the science of NT textual criticism'? How about the phrase, 'textual critic'? So what does a critic do? He criticizes. What does he criticize? In this case it is the text of the NT in Greek. But just what is he criticizing? A literary critic looks at things like style and choice of vocabulary; a commentator tries to decide what was the meaning intended by the author of the text. So what does a textual critic do? He attempts to reconstruct the original wording of a text—notice that he is assuming that the original wording is 'lost', in the sense that no one knows for sure what it is, or was. (Notice also that this places the critic above the text, to which I will return.) Textual criticism only exists for texts whose original wording is deemed to be 'lost'. No one does textual criticism on today's newspaper, or last week's news magazine. No one even does textual criticism on the 1611 King James Version, since we still have printed copies thereof. Any and all arguments surrounding the KJV come under other headings; they are not textual criticism.

Anyone familiar with the terrain knows that for the last 150 years (at least) the academic world has been dominated by the notion that the original wording of the NT text is in fact 'lost'. Just to illustrate, some 65 years ago Robert M. Grant wrote, "it is generally recognized that the original text of the Bible cannot be recovered".¹ For a number of further references echoing that sentiment please see page 3 of my *Identity III*.² Before attempting to rebut that fiction [canard?], as I believe, I will sketch a bit of relevant history.

The discipline as we know it is basically a 'child' of Western Europe and its colonies; the Eastern Orthodox Churches have generally not been involved. (They have always known that the true Text lies within the Byzantine tradition.) In the year 1500 the Christianity of Western Europe was dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, whose pope claimed the exclusive right to interpret Scripture. That Scripture was the Latin Vulgate, which the laity was not allowed to read. Martin Luther's 95 theses were posted in 1517. Was it mere chance that the first printed Greek Text of the NT was published the year before? As the Protestant Reformation advanced, it was declared that the authority of Scripture exceeded that of the pope, and that every believer had the right to read and interpret the Scriptures. The authority of the Latin Vulgate was also challenged, since the NT was written in Greek. Of course the Vatican library held many Greek MSS, no two of which were identical (at least in the Gospels), so the Roman Church challenged the authenticity of the Greek Text. In short, the Roman Church forced the Reformation to come to grips with textual variation among the Greek MSS. But they didn't know how to go about it, because this was a new field of study and they simply were not in possession of a sufficient proportion of the relevant evidence.³ (They probably didn't even know that the Mt. Athos peninsula with its twenty monasteries existed.)

In 1500 the Roman Catholic Establishment was corrupt, morally bankrupt, and discredited among thinking people. The Age of Reason and humanism were coming to the fore. More and more people were deciding that they could do better without the god of the Roman Establishment. The new imagined freedom from supernatural supervision was intoxicating, and many had no interest in accepting the authority of Scripture (*'sola Scriptura'*). Further, it would be naive in the extreme to exclude the supernatural from consideration, and not allow for satanic activity behind the scenes—Ephesians 2:2.⁴ 'Sons of the disobedience' joined the attack against Scripture. The so-called 'higher

¹ R.M. Grant, "The Bible of Theophilus of Antioch", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXVI (1947), 173. Notice the pessimism, it 'cannot be recovered'. In that event, the critics are wasting their time, and ours. Surely, because we would have no way of knowing whether or not they have found it.

² *The Identity of the New Testament Text III* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

³ Family 35, being by far the largest and most cohesive group of MSS, was poorly represented in the libraries of Western Europe. For that matter, very few MSS of whatever text-type had been sufficiently collated to allow for any tracing of the transmissional history.

⁴ Strictly speaking the Text has "according to the Aeon of this world, according to the ruler of the domain of the air"—the phrases are parallel, so 'Aeon' and 'ruler' have the same referent, a specific person or being. This spirit is presently at work (present tense) in 'the sons of the disobedience'. 'Sons' of something are characterized by that something, and the something in this case is 'the' disobedience (the Text has the definite article)—a continuation of the original rebellion against the Sovereign of the universe. Anyone in rebellion against the Creator is under satanic influence, direct or indirect

criticism' denied divine inspiration altogether. Others used the textual variation to argue that in any case the original wording was 'lost', there being no objective way to determine what it may have been (that is, they could not perceive such a way at that time).

The uncritical assumption that 'oldest equals best' was an important factor and became increasingly so as earlier uncials came to light. Both Codex Vaticanus and Codex Bezae were available early on, and they have thousands of disagreements, just in the Gospels (in Acts, Bezae is wild almost beyond belief). **If** 'oldest equals best', and the oldest MSS are in constant and massive disagreement between/among themselves, then the recovery of a lost text becomes hopeless. Did you get that? **Hopeless, totally hopeless!** However, I have argued that 'oldest equals worst', and that changes the picture, radically.¹

Since everyone is influenced (not necessarily controlled) by his milieu, this was true of the Reformers. In part (at least) the Reformation was a 'child' of the Renaissance, with its emphasis on reason. Recall that on trial Luther said he could only recant if convinced by Scripture and reason. So far so good, but many did not want Scripture, and that left only reason. Further, since reason cannot explain or deal with the supernatural, those who emphasize reason are generally unfriendly toward the supernatural. [To this day the so-called historic or traditional Protestant denominations have trouble dealing with the supernatural.]

Before Adolf Deissmann published his *Light from the Ancient East* (1910), (being a translation of *Licht vom Osten*, 1908), wherein he demonstrated that Koiné Greek was the *lingua franca* in Jesus' day, there even being a published grammar explaining its rules, only classical Greek was taught in the universities. But the NT is written in Koiné. Before Deissmann's benchmark work, there were two positions on the NT Greek: 1) it was a debased form of classical Greek, or 2) it was a 'Holy Ghost' Greek, invented for the NT. The second option was held mainly by pietists; the academic world preferred the first, which raised the natural question: if God were going to inspire a NT, why wouldn't He do it in 'decent' Greek?

All of this placed the defenders of an inspired Greek Bible on the defensive, with the very real problem of deciding where best to set up their defense perimeter. Given the prevailing ignorance concerning the relevant evidence, their best choice appeared to be an appeal to Divine Providence. God providentially chose the TR, so that was the text to be used (the 'traditional' text).²

(in most cases a demon acts as Satan's agent, when something more than the influence of the surrounding culture is required—almost all human cultures have ingredients of satanic provenance; this includes the academic culture [the academic requirement that one demonstrate 'acquaintance with the literature' obliges one to waste time on all that Satan's servants have written—consider 1 Corinthians 3:18-20]). Anyone in rebellion against the Creator will also have strongholds of Satan in his mind. Since Satan is the 'father' of lies (John 8:44), anytime you embrace a lie you invite him into your mind—this applies to any of his sophistries (2 Corinthians 10:5) currently in vogue, such as materialism, humanism, relativism, Marxism, Freudianism, Hortianism, etc.

¹ The benchmark work on this subject is Herman C. Hoskier's *Codex B and its Allies* (2 vols.; London: Bernard Quaritch, 1914). The first volume (some 500 pages) contains a detailed and careful discussion of hundreds of obvious errors in Codex B; the second (some 400 pages) contains the same for Codex Aleph. He affirms that in the Gospels alone these two MSS differ well over 3,000 times, which number does not include minor errors such as spelling (II, 1). Well now, simple logic demands that one or the other has to be wrong those 3,000+ times; they can't both be right, quite apart from the times when they are both wrong. **No amount of subjective preference can obscure the fact that they are poor copies, objectively so.**

John William Burgon personally collated what in his day were 'the five old uncials' (א, A, B, C, D). Throughout his works he repeatedly calls attention to the *concordia discors*, the prevailing confusion and disagreement, which the early uncials display between themselves. Luke 11:2-4 offers one example.

"The five Old Uncials" (א ABCD) falsify the Lord's Prayer as given by St. Luke in no less than forty-five words. But so little do they agree among themselves, that they throw themselves into six different combinations in their departures from the Traditional Text; and yet they are never able to agree among themselves as to one single various reading: while only once are more than two of them observed to stand together, and their grand point of union is no less than an omission of the article. Such is their eccentric tendency, that in respect of thirty-two out of the whole forty-five words they bear in turn solitary evidence. (*The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*. Arranged, completed, and edited by Edward Miller. London: George Bell and Sons, 1896, p. 84.)

Yes indeed, oldest equals worst. For more on this subject, please see pages 80-84 in *Identity III*.

² Please note that I am not criticizing Burgon and others; they did what they could, given the information available to them. They knew that the Hortian theory and resultant Greek text could not be right.

To all appearances Satan was winning the day, but he still had a problem: the main Protestant versions (in German, English, Spanish, etc.) were all based on the *Textus Receptus*, as were doctrinal statements and 'prayer books'. Enter F.J.A. Hort, a quintessential 'son of the disobedience'. Hort did not believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible, nor in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Since he embraced the Darwinian theory as soon as it appeared, he presumably did not believe in God.¹ His theory of NT textual criticism, published in 1881,² was based squarely on the presuppositions that the NT was not inspired, that no special care was afforded it in the early decades, and that in consequence the original wording was lost—lost beyond recovery, at least by objective means. His theory swept the academic world and continues to dominate the discipline to this day.³

Moreover, Hort claimed that as a result of his work only a thousandth part of the NT text could be considered to be in doubt, and this was joyfully received by the rank and file, since it seemed to provide assurance about the reliability of that text—however, of course, that claim applied only to the W-H text (probably the worst published NT in existence, to this day).⁴

So much for my sketch of history. I will now return to the question in the title. To begin, I observe and insist that in any scientific exercise a rigorous distinction must be made between evidence, interpretation, and presupposition. It is dishonest to represent one's presuppositions as being part of the evidence (opinion is not evidence). So, if NT textual criticism is to be a 'science', presuppositions must be excluded. But if we exclude the presupposition that the original wording is 'lost', then textual criticism ceases to exist; and how can you have a 'science' of something that doesn't exist? Science is one thing; theory is another. A theory is based on presupposition, of necessity, so it is legitimate to speak of a Hortian theory of textual criticism, since he considered the original wording to be lost. My own theory does not include textual criticism, since I consider that the original wording is not lost. I defend a theory of the divine preservation of the NT Text.⁵

By now it should be evident to the reader that the question of a 'lost' original is the crux, the central issue in any attempt to identify the original wording of the NT. So to that issue I now turn. To be fair, I need to recognize two definitions of 'lost': 1) lost beyond recovery, at least by objective means; 2) lost from view, in the sense that the available evidence has not been sufficiently studied to permit an empirical choice between/among competing variants. I consider that my *Identity III* provides more than enough evidence to demonstrate that the first definition is false. The Hortian theory and all derivatives thereof, such as eclecticism (of whatever type), is not science, and may not honestly be called science. The second definition allows for scientific procedure. I suggest and recommend that we start using the term 'manuscriptology', rather than 'textual criticism'—manuscriptology refers to the study of the MSS, and is neutral as to presupposition. Any scientific exercise should begin with the evidence; so what is the evidence?

¹ For documentation of all this, and a good deal more besides, in Hort's own words, please see the biography written by his son. A.F. Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort* (2 vols.; London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1896). The son made heavy use of the father's plentiful correspondence, whom he admired. (In those days a two volume 'Life', as opposed to a one volume 'Biography', was a posthumous status symbol.) Many of my readers were taught, as was I, that one must not question/judge someone else's motives. But wait just a minute; where did such an idea come from? It certainly did not come from God, who expects the spiritual person to evaluate everything (1 Corinthians 2:15). Since there are only two spiritual kingdoms in this world (Matthew 12:30, Luke 11:23), then the idea comes from the other side. By eliminating motive, one also eliminates presupposition, which is something that God would never do, since presupposition governs interpretation (Matthew 22:29, Mark 12:24). Which is why we should always expect a true scholar to state his presuppositions. I have repeatedly stated mine, but here they are again: 1) The Sovereign Creator of the universe exists; 2) He delivered a written revelation to the human race; 3) He has preserved that revelation intact to this day.

² B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (2 Vols.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1881). The second volume explains the theory, and is generally understood to be Hort's work.

³ For a thorough discussion of that theory, please see chapters 3 and 4 of my *Identity III*.

⁴ I would say that their text is mistaken with reference to 10% of the words—the Greek NT has roughly 140,000 words, so the W-H text is mistaken with reference to 14,000 of them. I would say that the so-called 'critical' text currently in vogue is 'only' off with reference to some 12,000, an improvement (small though it be). And just by the way, how wise is it to use a NT prepared by a servant of Satan?

⁵ I consider myself to be a textual scholar, not critic. The Text is above me, not the opposite. In eclecticism the critic is above the text, is above the evidence; instead of faithfully following the evidence, he makes the evidence follow him. The MSS are reduced to the role of 'supplier of readings'.

The primary evidence is furnished by the continuous text manuscripts (Greek) of the NT. The evidence furnished by the lectionaries is secondary. The evidence furnished by ancient versions and patristic citations is tertiary. Genuine historical evidence (to the extent that this can be determined) is ancillary. Where the primary evidence is unequivocal, the remaining types should not come into play. For example, at any given point in the four Gospels there will be around 1,700 extant MSS, representing all lines of transmission and all locales.¹ Where they all agree, there can be no legitimate doubt as to the original wording. But what if an early Papyrus comes to light with a variant, does that change the picture? The very fact of being early suggests that it is bad; why wasn't it used and worn out?

We have probably all heard/read the canard, 'manuscripts are to be weighed, not counted'. The basic meaning of the verb 'to weigh' refers to an objective procedure; it is done with physically verifiable weights. But do the followers of Hort (who are the main ones who keep repeating it) 'weigh' manuscripts using objective criteria? They do not, which is why I call it a 'canard'. That said, however, I submit for the consideration of all concerned that it is indeed possible to weigh MSS using objective criteria. I will here draw on my treatment of the subject in *Identity III* (pages 97-99).

Just how are MSS to be weighed? And who might be competent to do the weighing? As the reader is by now well aware, Hort and most subsequent scholars have done their 'weighing' on the basis of so-called 'internal evidence'—the two standard criteria are, 'choose the reading which fits the context' and 'choose the reading which explains the origin of the other reading'.

One problem with this has been well stated by E.C. Colwell. "As a matter of fact these two standard criteria for the appraisal of the internal evidence of readings can easily cancel each other out and leave the scholar free to choose in terms of his own prejudgments."² Further, "the more lore the scholar knows, the easier it is for him to produce a reasonable defense of both readings. . . ."³ The whole process is so subjective that it makes a mockery of the word 'weigh'. The basic meaning of the term involves an evaluation made by an objective instrument. If we wish our weighing of MSS to have objective validity, we must find an objective procedure.

How do we evaluate the credibility of a witness in real life? We watch how he acts, listen to what he says and how he says it, and listen to the opinion of his neighbors and associates. If we can demonstrate that a witness is a habitual liar or that his critical faculties are impaired then we receive his testimony with skepticism. It is quite possible to evaluate MSS in a similar way, to a considerable extent, and it is hard to understand why scholars have generally neglected to do so.

Please refer back to the evidence given in the discussion of the oldest MSS (pages 80-85).⁴ Can we objectively 'weigh' P⁶⁶ as a witness? (It is the oldest one of any size.) Well, in the space of John's

¹ Of course we know that there are many MSS not yet 'extant', not yet identified and catalogued, so the number can only go up.

² Colwell, "External Evidence and New Testament Criticism", *Studies in the History and Text of the New Testament*, eds. B.L. Daniels and M.J. Suggs (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1967), p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴ P⁷⁵ is placed close to P⁶⁶ in date. Though not as bad as P⁶⁶, it is scarcely a good copy. Colwell found P⁷⁵ to have about 145 itacisms plus 257 other singular readings, 25 percent of which are nonsensical (E.C. Colwell, "Scribal Habits in Early Papyri: A Study in the Corruption of the Text", *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, ed. J.P. Hyatt [New York: Abingdon Press, 1965], pp. 374-76). Although Colwell gives the scribe of P⁷⁵ credit for having tried to produce a good copy, P⁷⁵ looks good only by comparison with P⁶⁶. (If you were asked to write out the Gospel of John by hand, would you make over 400 mistakes? Try it and see!) It should be kept in mind that the figures offered by Colwell deal only with errors which are the exclusive property of the respective MSS. They doubtless contain many other errors which happen to be found in some other witness(es) as well. In other words, they are actually worse even than Colwell's figures indicate.

P⁴⁵, though a little later in date, will be considered next because it is the third member in Colwell's study. He found P⁴⁵ to have approximately 90 itacisms plus 275 other singular readings, 10 percent of which are nonsensical (*Ibid.*). However P⁴⁵ is shorter than P⁶⁶ (P⁷⁵ is longer) and so is not comparatively so much better as the figures might suggest at first glance. Colwell comments upon P⁴⁵ as follows:

Another way of saying this is that when the scribe of P⁴⁵ creates a singular reading, it almost always makes sense; when the scribes of P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵ create singular readings, they frequently do not make sense and are obvious errors. Thus P⁴⁵ must be given credit for a much greater density of intentional changes than the other two (*Ibid.*, p. 376).

As an editor the scribe of P⁴⁵ wielded a sharp axe. The most striking aspect of his style is its conciseness. The dispensable word is dispensed with. He omits adverbs, adjectives, nouns, participles, verbs, personal pronouns—without

Gospel (not complete) it has over 900 clear, indubitable errors—as a witness to the identity of the text of John it has misled us over 900 times. Is P⁶⁶ a credible witness? I would argue that neither of the scribes of P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵ knew Greek; should we not say that as witnesses they were impaired?¹

Recall from Colwell's study that the scribe of P⁴⁵ evidently made numerous **deliberate** changes in the text—should we not say that he was morally impaired? In any case, he has repeatedly misinformed us. Shall we still trust him? Similarly, it has been demonstrated that Aleph and B have over 3,000 mistakes between them, just in the Gospels. Aleph is clearly worse than B, but probably not twice as bad—at least 1,000 of those mistakes are B's. Do Aleph and B fit your notion of a good witness?² Again I say: oldest equals worst!

We really need to understand that age guarantees nothing about quality. Each witness must be evaluated on its own, quite apart from age. Further, and perhaps more to the point, we need to know how a given MS relates to others. Once a MS has been empirically identified as belonging to a family (line of transmission), then it is no longer an independent witness to the original—it is a witness to the family archetype. As Colwell so well put it, "the crucial question for early as for late witnesses is still, 'WHERE DO THEY FIT INTO A PLAUSIBLE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HISTORY OF THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION?'"³

Lamentably, the Hortian theory, allied to the fiction that 'oldest equals best', has had a soporific effect upon the discipline such that comparatively few MSS have been fully collated, and in consequence few families have been empirically defined. A rough idea based on spot checking is not adequate; there is too much mixture.

Going back to the 1,700 extant MSS for any given point in the Gospels, it should be evident that a variant in a single MS, of whatever age, is irrelevant—it is a false witness to its family archetype, at that point, nothing more. If a number of MSS share a variant, but do not belong to the same family, then they made the mistake independently and are false witnesses to their respective family archetypes—there is no dependency. Where a group of MSS evidently reflect correctly the archetypal form of their family, then we are dealing with a family (not the individual MSS). Families need to be evaluated just as we evaluate individual MSS. It is possible to assign a credibility quotient to a family, based on objective criteria. But of course any and all families must first be empirically identified and defined, and such identification depends upon the full collation of MSS.

Although the discipline has (so far) neglected to do its homework (collating MSS), still a massive majority of MSS should be convincing. For example, if a variant enjoys 99% attestation from the primary witnesses, this means that it totally dominates any genealogical 'tree', because it dominated

any compensating habit of addition. He frequently omits phrases and clauses. He prefers the simple to the compound word. In short, he favors brevity. He shortens the text in at least fifty places in **singular readings alone**. But he does **not** drop syllables or letters. His shortened text is readable (*Ibid.*, p. 383).

P⁴⁶ is thought by some to be as early as P⁶⁶. Zuntz's study of this manuscript is well-known. "In spite of its neat appearance (it was written by a professional scribe and corrected—but very imperfectly—by an expert), P⁴⁶ is by no means a good manuscript. The scribe committed very many blunders My impression is that he was liable to fits of exhaustion" (Gunter Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles* [London: Oxford University Press, 1953], p.18).

It should be remarked in passing that Codex B is noted for its 'neat appearance' also, but it should not be assumed that therefore it must be a good copy. Even Hort conceded that the scribe of B "reached by no means a high standard of accuracy" (Westcott and Hort, p. 233). Aleph is acknowledged on every side to be worse than B in every way. Zuntz says further: "P⁴⁶ abounds with scribal blunders, omissions, and also additions" (*Op.Cit.*, p. 212).

. . . the scribe who wrote the papyrus did his work very badly. Of his innumerable faults, only a fraction (less than one in ten) have been corrected and even that fraction—as often happens in manuscripts—grows smaller and smaller towards the end of the book. Whole pages have been left without any correction, however greatly they were in need of it (*Ibid.*, p. 252).

¹ The fact that the transcriber of P⁷⁵ copied letter by letter and that of P⁶⁶ syllable by syllable (Colwell, "Scribal Habits", p. 380) suggests strongly that neither one knew Greek. When transcribing in a language you know you copy phrase by phrase, or at the very least word by word. P⁶⁶ has so many nonsensical readings that the transcriber could not have known the meaning of the text. Anyone who has ever tried to transcribe a text of any length by hand (not typewriter) in a language he does not understand will know that it is a taxing and dreary task. Purity of transmission is not to be expected under such circumstances.

² If you copied the four Gospels by hand, do you think you could manage to make a thousand mistakes? Try it and see!

³ Colwell, "Hort Redivivus: A Plea and a Program", *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, E.C. Colwell (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), p. 157. [Emphasis in the original.]

the global transmission of the text. The INTF *Text und Textwert* series, practitioners of the Claremont profile method, H.C. Hoskier, von Soden, Burgon, Scrivener—in short, anyone who has collated any number of MSS—have all demonstrated that the Byzantine bulk of MSS is by no means monolithic. There are any number of streams and rivulets. It is clear that there was no 'stuffing the ballot box'; there was no 'papal' decree; there was no recension imposed by ecclesiastical authority. In short, the transmission was predominantly normal.

Under normal circumstances the older a text is than its rivals, the greater are its chances to survive in a plurality or a majority of the texts extant at any subsequent period. But the **oldest** text of all is the autograph. Thus it ought to be taken for granted that, barring some radical dislocation in the history of transmission, a majority of texts will be far more likely to represent correctly the character of the original than a small minority of texts. This is especially true when the ratio is an overwhelming 8:2. Under any reasonably normal transmissional conditions, it would be . . . quite impossible for a later text-form to secure so one-sided a preponderance of extant witnesses.¹

I insist that the transmission of the NT Text was in fact predominantly normal, based on historical evidence. Chapter 5 of my *Identity III* lists and discusses that evidence (which please see). But here is a thumbnail sketch:

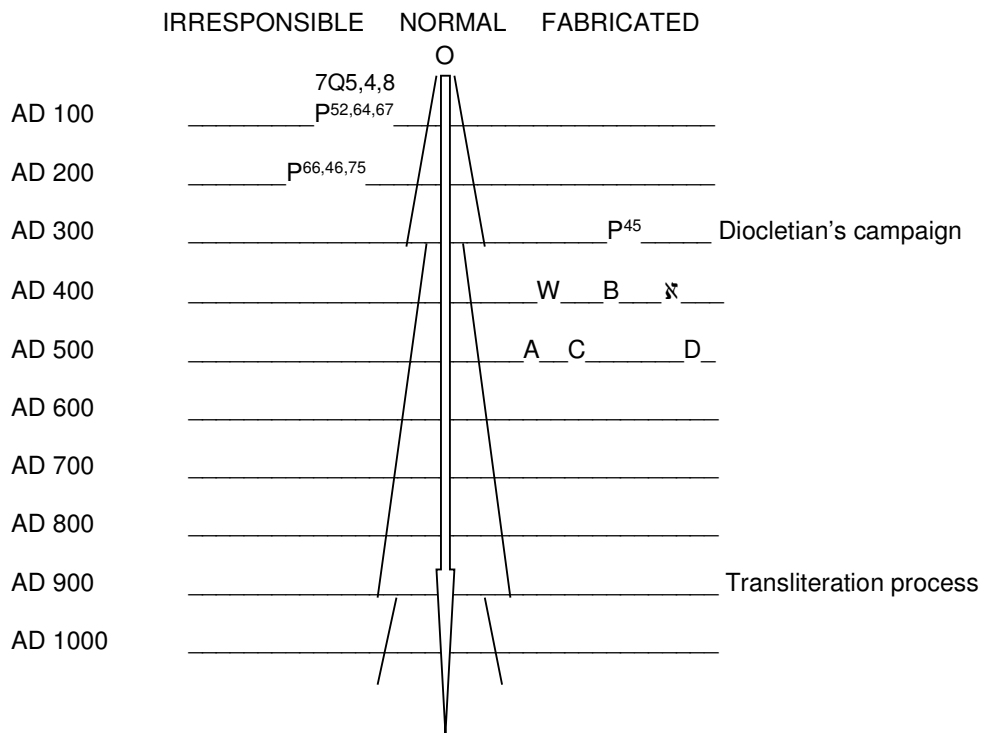
- 1) The authors of the NT books believed they were writing Scripture;
- 2) The Apostles recognized that their colleagues were writing Scripture;
- 3) The 'Church Fathers' of the I and II centuries regarded the NT writings as Scripture;
- 4) The NT writings were used along with the OT by the Christian congregations from very early on;
- 5) The early Christians were concerned about the purity of the NT Text.
- 6) What regions started out with the Autographs? Aegean area (18-24), Rome (2-7), Palestine (0-3), Egypt (0).
- 7) Where was the Church strongest during the II and III centuries? Asia Minor and the Aegean area.
- 8) Where was Greek used most and longest? Aegean area and Asia Minor.
- 9) What are the implications of Diocletian's campaign and the Donatist movement?

I submit that the evidence is clear to the effect that the transmission was in fact predominantly normal. I again borrow from *Identity III* (pages 69-70).

Now then, what sort of a picture may we expect to find in the surviving witnesses, given the understanding that the history of the transmission of the New Testament Text was predominantly normal? We may expect a broad spectrum of copies, showing minor differences due to copying mistakes but all reflecting one common tradition. The simultaneous existence of abnormal transmission in the earliest centuries would result in a sprinkling of copies, helter-skelter, outside of that main stream. The picture would look something like the figure on the next page.

The MSS within the cones represent the 'normal' transmission. To the left I have plotted some possible representatives of what we might style the 'irresponsible' transmission of the text—the copyists produced poor copies through incompetence or carelessness but did not make deliberate changes. To the right I have plotted some possible representatives of what we might style the 'fabricated' transmission of the text—the scribes made deliberate changes in the text (for whatever reasons), producing fabricated copies, not true copies. I am well aware that the MSS plotted on the figure above contain both careless and deliberate errors, in different proportions (7Q5,4,8 and P^{52,64,67} are too fragmentary to permit the classification of their errors as deliberate rather than careless), so that any classification such as I attempt here must be relative and gives a distorted picture. Still, I venture to insist that ignorance, carelessness, officiousness and malice all left their mark upon the transmission of the New Testament text, and we must take account of them in any attempt to reconstruct the history of that transmission.

¹ Z.C. Hodges, "A Defense of the Majority Text" (unpublished course notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975), p. 4. Appendix C of my *Identity III* shows that the mathematical science of statistical probability gives ample support to Hodges' statement. It is statistically impossible for a late comer to dominate the transmission.



As the figure suggests, I argue that Diocletian's campaign had a purifying effect upon the stream of transmission. In order to withstand torture rather than give up your MS(S), you would have to be a truly committed believer, the sort of person who would want good copies of the Scriptures. Thus it was probably the more contaminated MSS that were destroyed, in the main, leaving the purer MSS to replenish the earth (please see the section "Imperial repression of the N.T." in Chapter 6). The arrow within the cones represents Family 35 (see Chapter 7).

Another consideration suggests itself—if, as reported, the Diocletian campaign was most fierce and effective in the Byzantine area, the numerical advantage of the 'Byzantine' text-type over the 'Western' and 'Alexandrian' would have been reduced, giving the latter a chance to forge ahead. But it did not happen. The Church, in the main, refused to propagate those forms of the Greek text. Codices B, x̄, D, etc., have no 'children'. Since it is impossible to produce an archetypal form for either the 'Western' or the 'Alexandrian' text-types, so-called, based on manuscript evidence, do they even exist?

Returning to the 'crux', is/was the original wording lost? I answer with an emphatic, "**No**". It certainly exists within the Byzantine bulk, but what do we do if there is confusion within that bulk? (To insist that it must be one of the existing variants is better than nothing, I suppose, but I, at least, want to identify the original wording.) To my mind, any time at least 90% of the primary witnesses agree, there can be no reasonable question; it is statistically impossible that a non-original reading could score that high.¹ Any time a reading garners an attestation of at least 80%, its probability is very high. But for perhaps 2% of the words in the NT the attestation falls below 80% (a disproportionate number being in the Apocalypse), and at this point we need to shift our attention from MSS to families.² I have already mentioned assigning a credibility quotient to each family, based on objective criteria, and this needs to be done. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of 'homework' waiting to be

¹ See Appendix C in *Identity III*.

² Once all MSS have been collated and have been empirically assigned to families, then we can confine our attention to those families, from the start (as I have done in the Apocalypse).

done in this area (so far as I know, only Family 35 has an empirically defined profile),¹ but enough work has been done to allow for some rough ideas.

We are indebted to the *Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung* for their *Text und Textwert* series. A careful look at their collations indicates that there probably is no **K^x**, anywhere. Take, for example, the *TuT* volumes on John's Gospel, chapters 1-10. They examined a total of 1,763 MSS (for 153 variant sets) and included the results in the two volumes. Pages 54 - 90 (volume 1) contain "Groupings according to degrees of agreement" "agreeing more often with each other than with the majority text". Only one group symbol is used, **K^r**—the first representative of the family, MS 18, heads a group of about 120 MSS, but all subsequent representatives have only a **K^r** (that I call **f³⁵**). Following **K^r**, there are 22 groups with between 52 and 25 MSS, and all but four of them are really **K^r** / **f³⁵**, and the same holds for a number of smaller groups, so their **K^r** should probably be over 200 (I would say that Family 35 in the Gospels has over 250 representatives, but their ranking here is based on only 153 variant sets, in half of John).

Consider the largest group apart from **K^r**: 2103. Of its 52 members, 15 show only a 95% agreement with MS 2103. If those 52 MSS are ever collated throughout the Gospels, it is entirely predictable that the 'group' will shrink considerably; it may even disappear.

Some years ago now, Maurice Robinson did a complete collation of 1,389 MSS that contain the P.A.,² and I had William Pierpont's photocopy of those collations in my possession for two months, spending most of that time studying those collations. As I did so, it became obvious to me that von Soden 'regularized' his data, arbitrarily 'creating' the alleged archetypal form for his first four families, **M^{1,2,3,4}**—if they exist at all, they are rather fluid. His **M^{5&6}** do exist, having distinct profiles for the purpose of showing that they are different, but they are a bit 'squishy', with enough internal confusion to make the choice of the archetypal form to be arbitrary. In fact, I suspect that they will have to be subdivided. In contrast to the above, his **M⁷** (that I call Family 35) has a solid, unambiguous profile—the archetypal form is demonstrable, empirically determined.

As for the Apocalypse, of the nine groups that Hoskier identified, only his Complutensian (that I call Family 35) is homogenous. Of the others, the main ones all have sub-divisions, that will require their own profile.

I will borrow again from *Identity III*, pages 133-35. Given my presuppositions, I consider that I have good reason for declaring the divine preservation of the precise original wording of the complete New Testament Text, to this day. That wording is reproduced in my edition of the Greek NT, available from www.walkinhiscommandments.com. BUT PLEASE NOTE: whether or not the archetype of **f³⁵** is the Autograph (as I claim), the fact remains that the MSS collated for this study reflect an incredibly careful transmission of their source, and this throughout the middle ages. My presuppositions include: God exists; He inspired the Biblical Text; He promised to preserve it for a thousand generations (1 Chronicles 16:15); so He must have an active, ongoing interest in that preservation [there have been fewer than 300 generations since Adam, so He has a ways to go!]. **If He was preserving the original wording in some line of transmission other than **f³⁵**, would that**

¹ So far as I know, neither **f¹** nor **f¹³** exists outside of the Gospels, but even there, has anyone ever produced an empirically defined profile for either one? Consider the following statement by Metzger:

It should be observed that, in accord with the theory that members of **f¹** and **f¹³** were subject to progressive accommodation to the later Byzantine text, scholars have established the text of these families by adopting readings of family witnesses that differ from the Textus Receptus. Therefore the citation of the siglum **f¹** and **f¹³** may, in any given instance, signify a minority of manuscripts (or even only one) that belong to the family. (*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [companion to UBS³], p. xii.)

Would it be unreasonable to say that such a proceeding is unfair to the reader? Does it not mislead the user of the apparatus? At least as used by the UBS editions, those sigla do not represent empirically defined profiles.

² 240 MSS omit the PA, 64 of which are based on Theophylact's commentary. Fourteen others have lacunae, but are not witnesses for total omission. A few others certainly contain the passage but the microfilm is illegible. So, 1389 + 240 + 14 + 7(?) = about 1650 MSS checked by Robinson. That does not include Lectionaries, of which he also checked a fair number. (These are microfilms held by the *Institut* in Münster. We now know that there are many more extant MSS, and probably even more that are not yet 'extant'.) Unfortunately, so far as I know, Robinson has yet to publish his collations, thus making them available to the public at large.

transmission be any less careful than what I have demonstrated for f³⁵? I think not. So any line of transmission characterized by internal confusion is disqualified—this includes **all** the other lines of transmission that I have seen so far!¹

On the basis of the evidence so far available I affirm the following:

- 1) The original wording was never 'lost', and its transmission down through the years was basically normal, being recognized as inspired material from the beginning.
- 2) That normal process resulted in lines of transmission.
- 3) To delineate such lines, MSS must be grouped empirically on the basis of a shared mosaic of readings.
- 4) Such groups or families must be evaluated for independence and credibility.
- 5) The largest clearly defined group is Family 35.
- 6) Family 35 is demonstrably independent of all other lines of transmission throughout the NT.
- 7) Family 35 is demonstrably ancient, dating to the 3rd century, at least.
- 8) Family 35 representatives come from all over the Mediterranean area; the geographical distribution is all but total.
- 9) Family 35 is not a recension, was not created at some point subsequent to the Autographs.
- 10) Family 35 is an objectively/empirically defined entity throughout the NT; it has a demonstrable, diagnostic profile from Matthew 1:1 to Revelation 22:21.
- 11) The archetypal form of Family 35 is demonstrable—it has been demonstrated (see Appendix B).
- 12) The Original Text is the ultimate archetype; any candidate must also be an archetype—a real, honest to goodness, objectively verifiable archetype; there is only one—Family 35.²
- 13) God's concern for the preservation of the Biblical Text is evident: I take it that passages such as 1 Chronicles 16:15, Psalm 119:89, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 5:18, Luke 16:17 and 21:33, John 10:35 and 16:12-13, 1 Peter 1:23-25 and Luke 4:4 may reasonably be taken to imply a promise that the Scriptures (to the tittle) will be preserved for man's use (we are to live "by every word of God"), and to the end of the world ("for a thousand generations"), but no intimation is given as to just how God proposed to do it. We must deduce the answer from what He has indeed done—we discover that He **did!**
- 14) This concern is reflected in Family 35; it is characterized by incredibly careful transmission (in contrast to other lines). [I have a perfect copy of the Family 35 archetypal text for most NT books (22); I have copies made from a perfect exemplar (presumed) for another four (4); as I continue to collate MSS I hope to add the last one (Acts), but even for it the archetypal form is demonstrable.]
- 15) If God was preserving the original wording in some line of transmission other than Family 35, would that line be any less careful? I think not. So any line of transmission characterized by internal confusion is disqualified—this includes **all** the other lines of transmission that I have seen so far.
- 16) I affirm that God used Family 35 to preserve the precise original wording of the New Testament Text; it is reproduced in my edition of the Greek Text. (And God used mainly the Eastern Orthodox Churches to preserve the NT Text down through the centuries—they have always used a Text that was an adequate representation of the Original, for all practical purposes.)

Honesty used to be part of the definition of a true scholar. Anyone who wishes to be one should absolutely stop representing his presuppositions as being part of the evidence. Since the original was never lost, there is no legitimate textual criticism of the NT, and therefore no science of such. Since NT textual criticism (as practiced by the academic community during the past 130 years) depends on a false presupposition, it cannot be a science. Those who reject the primary evidence can, and probably will, continue to propound a theory of textual criticism. I suppose they have a right to their theory, but I cannot wish them well.

¹ Things like **M⁶** and **M⁵** in John 7:53-8:11 come to mind.

² If you want to be a candidate for the best lawyer in your city, you must be a lawyer, or the best carpenter, or oncologist, or whatever. If there is only one candidate for mayor in your town, who gets elected?