

Coherence-Based Genealogical Method

Anyone who deals with NT textual criticism in any way will presumably have heard about the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM). Whenever you see the phrase ‘genealogical method’ you should say to yourself, “Aha, this will be just another attempt to avoid the drudgery of collating all the MSS”. Having myself collated at least one book in over a hundred MSS (over 30 entire), I can assure you that it is indeed a drudgery, slave labor.

The CBGM is basically another attempt to avoid the job of collating all the extant MSS. It uses a computer to plot probabilities. The main problem with this method (from our point of view) is that at almost every stage of the procedure the critic must make subjective choices, and he will make those choices using the same criteria used in eclecticism (prefer the harder reading, the shorter reading, etc.). In the recent *ECM Acts*, Klaus Wachtel plainly states, “In the first stage, the traditional methods of eclectic textual criticism are applied” (p. 28*). So it is basically the old eclecticism dressed up in new clothes. The method is not empirical, even though it uses actual variants.

The tendency is illustrated by the *Editio Critica Maior (ECM)* series for the General Epistles. For James they included 182 MSS out of 522 complete MSS and larger fragments. By their own definition, they included 78 MSS that they considered to be so Byzantine that they grouped them under the symbol ‘Byz’. However, for the remaining six books the total of MSS was reduced by an average of 50 MSS, while the total of ‘Byz’ MSS was reduced by an average of 35 MSS. From my point of view, the *ECM James* is clearly more useful than the other six books.

In the *ECM Acts* they continue to call the Byzantine text a “carefully controlled form” (p. 18*), as they did twenty years before in the *ECM James* (p. 11*), but they never say who did the controlling. The reason is simple: they can’t, because the statement is false. They are just repeating a cherished canard.