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## **The Controversy over Greek Texts**

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Anyone who writes on this subject has the unenviable position of wearing both the blue and the gray. There is little that can be said on this topic that does not draw "fire" from one side or the other. Nevertheless, we must decide whether we are concerned to make fundamentalism historically correct or biblically correct. If we choose to become historically correct, we may not always be biblically right. If we chose to be biblically correct, on the other hand, then everything we claim to believe should be open to a careful examination by the biblical text.

### **Introduction**

The subject which I have been assigned, the current Greek texts of the NT, is not a question of exegesis or biblical principle but rather one of historical study. Of the various positions taken on the Greek text of the NT, all are predicated to a great extent on personal preferences based on varying levels of knowledge of the subject. It is only fair at the outset to remind ourselves that everyone brings to the issue at hand a biased spirit. We all approach the "text" question of the NT with varying degrees of familiarity with the issues, reading,

personal study, questions, pre-suppositions, imperfect and even wrong information, as well as "alleged" authorities to support one's position.

Consequently it is imperative that every conclusion be open to a "quest for the truth" rather than a disposition which refuses honest inquiry and sound evaluation. It may be on this point that fundamentalists are vulnerable to legitimate criticism. It is possible in a pursuit of the truth that words and attitudes toward those who dissent drive some away from an otherwise biblical position (James 3:1-18). Bernard Lonergan wisely writes:

The problem is that the breadth of anyone's mind is limited. Because of the explosion of knowledge in the twentieth century, the amount of knowledge one individual is able to grasp becomes every day a smaller and smaller proportion of the total knowledge available. In this situation the alternative to a blank mind can easily become, not a broad mind, but a narrow mind. We limit our thinking to areas we know something about, and give to our limited knowledge a universal application it does not deserve<sup>1</sup>

Those who wrestle with the "text" issue today from within fundamentalism approach the question with different concerns. A few are adamantly against any position other than the TR/KJV. Those who use Greek are genuinely concerned about the Greek text which does or should provide the basis for a serious study of the NT. Many others are concerned about the establishing/defending and using the best English translation to reach our contemporary society with the gospel. Still others are seeking to understand clearly the issues involved in the text/translation debate so that they can make intelligent judgments which are God-honoring. In every case there should be a genuine desire to gather all the evidence available to see which position on the text of the NT is most tenable based on

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), 157.

information available today. Among fundamentalists there is no question that the sixty-six autographs, which comprise the totality of the Bible, are the inspired word from God. They were given without error and they did not suffer from any omission. However, the same cannot be said for any extant Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscript since no two manuscripts agree exactly with each other.

The intent of this paper is fourfold: (1) to show the need among fundamentalists for a more cautious stance in statements regarding the "inspiration" and "preservation" of texts, whether Greek or English, (2) to set forth a summary of the transmission of Greek manuscripts prior to the invention of the printing press; (3) to summarize the three Greek texts in use by fundamentalists during the last decade of the twentieth century; and (4) to suggest issues relating to the status of the NT text which should be of concern for fundamentalists.

### **Preliminary Considerations**

Several introductory remarks are necessary before beginning this study. Certain issues have been brought into the discussion of the Greek text which need to be recognized for what they are.

### **Biblical View of Inspiration**

The biblical view of inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21) recognizes that only the initial writing of each book of the Bible falls within the scope of inspiration. Therefore, it must never be applied to translators, or the translating process. To relate the term "inspiration" to copied manuscripts, to any Greek text, or to any English translation is an errant use of the term both biblically and theologically. This perspective was recently affirmed by the Fundamentalist Baptist Fellowship movement. Since fundamentalist pastors most often make contact with the Bible through the English language, we need to remind ourselves that the 1611 KJV contained

the Apocrypha between the Old and New Testaments.<sup>2</sup> Because the Apocrypha was a part of the "authorized Bible" at that time, what does that signify for those making claims for inspiration of this English translation?

### Use of English Versions

The use of any English version of the Bible, as being the translation *exemplar* is a self-defeating methodology. Prior to the first English translation of the Bible, the word of God existed for more than thirteen hundred years both in Greek and in a variety of languages.<sup>3</sup> The earliest translations into foreign languages were called versions and were done from Greek manuscripts. The relevance of English to them was non-existent. In the non-English language countries even in the twentieth century there exists no concern among nationals for what any English version of the Bible

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<sup>2</sup>Before you leave the seminary we invite you to look at our 1611 version of the KJV and see the placement of the Apocrypha yourself. For historical documentation see William A. Wright, ed. *The Authorized Version of the English Bible 1611*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909).

<sup>3</sup>According to recent statistics (1988) there are 6,170 living languages in the world. By 600 C.E. the four gospels were translated only into eight languages. At the time of the invention of printing, some part of the Bible could be found in thirty-three languages. By 1800 the number increased to sixty-seven. During the 19th century more than four hundred languages had some portion of the scriptures in their language. By 1991 the entire Bible was available in 318 languages and dialects with some portions found in 1946 languages and dialects. See B. Metzger, "Important Early Translations of the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (January-March 1993): 35-49. He remarks concerning the third and fourth major periods of translation efforts: "The third period may be called the great 'missionary endeavor,' when pioneer translators undertook the preparation of renderings into the hundreds of languages in which there was often not even an alphabet before these men and women undertook to reduce such languages to written form" (p.36). Interestingly he adds that a fourth period now exists in which trained nationals are making new translations which will be more effective in communicating God's word, since they know the language better.

says.<sup>4</sup> The existence of the early translations, like the later versions, was to provide the populace with a comprehensible copy of the Bible in the reader's own language.

It was only through difficulty that English translations began to occur. Latin had long been the church text of Scripture in Europe and there was great resistance to providing lay people with a Bible in their own tongue, lest in reading they might distort the true meaning of scripture. Beginning with the 1382 Wyclif translation from the Latin, a series of English Bibles became available. Tyndale's version came next and 92% of it was carried over into the King James Version of 1611.<sup>5</sup> In the "Translators to the Reader" of the KJV, Miles Smith spoke of making one translation out of many good ones to which men could not justly take exception.<sup>6</sup> Consequently the early English Bibles were similarly worded. The KJV in 1611 became the *third authorized* English version in less than one hundred years.

### Viewpoint of the Text

An erroneous pattern of hermeneutics still found in the 20th century provides insight into a methodological error followed in dealing with the text issue. Too often the Bible is seen from a 20th century reader's view, such as a feminist's view, rather than from the

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<sup>4</sup>Those who have spoken in foreign countries, as this writer has, are sensitive to the reading of a passage in an English version only to have their translator probably say, "that is not in our Bible". Since their version is not English based, why would or should they consider an English version to be relevant to their translation?

<sup>5</sup>Following this translation Coverdale's, Matthew's, and the Great Bible were printed. In studying the time of these Bibles contemporary history must be kept in mind for heavy restrictions were placed on the circulating of specific Bibles during some of this time. English separatist exiles in Geneva published a Bible that became the Bible of the Puritans and was published in three differing editions. Its notes so offended the church officials in England that in 1568 the Bishop's Bible was printed with about 4% of its unique readings carried into the KJV. Both the Great and Bishop's Bible were "authorized" versions. See Jack Lewis, *The English Bible: From KJV to NIV*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 17-34.

<sup>6</sup>E.J. Goodspeed, ed., *The Translators to the Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 33.

perspective of its initial writing. As a result, if a preacher assumes the Bible is to conform to his viewpoint rather than he to the Bible's, erroneous conclusions are sure to follow. This is the same error found in liberation theology, reader-response advocates and post-modernists--an agenda is established before looking at all the data. Similarly it is imperative to have some understanding of the historical development of all current Greek texts before drawing conclusions in the late twentieth century.

### Corruption of the Greek Text

Some have asserted that a deliberate alteration of some Greek manuscripts, particularly those of the non-Byzantine tradition, took place early in the transmission process. That the purpose for the "corruption of the text" was to distort doctrinal teaching such as the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, and the blood of Christ is assumed a proven fact. It is then suggested that this accounts for at least some deviations found in non-TR Greek manuscripts. However, such allegations are not supported by the evidence. For example, the absence of the "blood" in one Greek text does not change the many occurrences of the "blood" in other places in the same manuscript. No teaching is changed. Therefore, the "blood" has not diminished in importance as asserted.

It also has been argued that the non-TR texts remove the deity of Christ by deleting one or more of the names of Christ from a Greek reading. In fact it could be argued by selecting a group of passages carefully that the KJV following the TR text is guilty of removing the deity of Christ from the text four times in the eight selected passages, which is more than the TEV.<sup>7</sup> What does this prove? It does not

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<sup>7</sup>See Victor Parry, "Problem Passages of the New Testament in Some Modern Translations" *The Expository Times* 87 (1976): 214-215. Using John 1:1, 18; Act 20:28; Rom 9:5; 2 Thes 1:12; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:1 as a test base the author shows which of nine translations adopts the translation which calls Jesus God and which does not. The KJV has four of eight passages calling Jesus God which is the same number as the RV, the RSV, and the NEB. However the TEV (Good News

show which translations deny the deity of Christ but rather that they followed different Greek manuscript traditions and made critical judgments when they translated.

### Copying of Manuscripts

Concern has developed that non-Byzantine manuscripts tend to have less words than the TR and are guilty of removing words so that they cannot be trusted. However, that assumption can be turned on its head by saying that the TR text, where it has longer readings, is guilty of adding to the text and is thus not trustworthy. Whichever of the two scenarios actually occurred is a matter of concern. However, this issue cannot be resolved merely by appealing to a majority of copies extant at a given point in history. Most copies of NT Greek manuscripts were made during the millennium of the dark ages where copying of manuscripts took place under more difficult circumstances than would be thought.<sup>8</sup>

By the year 300 C.E. the cost of producing one complete Bible by a professional scribe was 30,000 denarii. In the previous century a legionary was paid 750 denarii per annum above his maintenance.<sup>9</sup> Thus the cost of quality manuscript multiplication was extremely high and only the wealthy could afford a professionally made copy. By the fourth century manuscripts often were produced in a scriptorium, where trained scribes listening to a single reader's voice, produced multiple copies simultaneously. Because of the tendency to make errors one or more correctors was used to check the work. During the Byzantine period the copying of manuscripts was usually done by monks in monasteries. These monks worked in solitary cells preparing a book or manuscript for themselves or a benefactor. Metzger identifies four distinct operations involving the copier, which

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for Modern Man) has five and the NIV has seven.

<sup>8</sup>See B. Metzger, "When Did Scribes Begin to Use Writing Desks?" in *Historical and Literary Studies* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 123-137.

<sup>9</sup>See Rendel Harris, "New Testament Autographs" *American Journal of Philology* 12 (882), 23.



could easily lead to errors in manuscripts and thus produce variant readings:

(1) the reading to oneself (in antiquity no doubt reading half-aloud) of a line or a clause of the text to be copied, (2) the retaining of this material in one's memory, (3) the dictating of this material to oneself (either silently or half-aloud), and (4) the movement of the hand in executing the copy.<sup>10</sup>

### Use of OT Quotations in the NT

A final issue of importance to the text of the Bible is the transmission of the Old Testament Hebrew text, which relies upon one complete but late Hebrew manuscript dating from the 10th century C.E. and a handful of late incomplete manuscripts. Further the transmission of the OT Hebrew text was left in the hands of unbelieving Jews. A pertinent question about the New Testament text is why the Gospel writers when quoting the Lord's use of Old Testament passages often quoted from the Greek Septuagint when it had a reading different than the Hebrew? It would seem reasonable that NT authors would always cite the Hebrew "inspired" reading, which they could then translate into Greek but this is not always the case. However, they used the text of the LXX, which was the OT in the language of their intended audience. This practice was acceptable to the writers of the Gospels, Acts, and the epistles.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 16. See also 16-19 and 193-195 for a more detailed account of the rigors of copying and examples of the errors which followed.

<sup>11</sup>See Gleason L. Archer and G.C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), for a study of each citation of the OT in NT writings.

## The Need for Caution among Fundamentalists

Because the KJV is the Bible most used by fundamentalists in preaching and memorization, it is necessary to take a careful look at the claim of its "divine preservation". The term, *Textus Receptus*, which is said to be its text base, is often used interchangeably as a synonym for the KJV. A number of issues to consider provides significant challenges to the argument that the TR and the KJV provide the "text" solution for fundamentalists. These issues need be answered adequately prior to making claims which may be inaccurate. For the sake of time and space only a limited number of examples can be given.

### Incorrect Claims of the Textus Receptus

All too frequently an incorrect claim is made concerning TR. It is believed by some advocates of the TR that this text is a divinely transmitted text using manuscripts having no error. Nothing is further from the truth. All Greek texts, including the TR, are eclectic in nature, because there was a mixing together of words and phrases from different manuscripts, not the copying of an infallible text. It is essential to remember, as Swanson affirms, that Erasmus did not transmit a text, but created a text by using manuscripts which at times disagreed with each other.

It [Erasmus' Greek text] was composed from a number of manuscripts with readings being chosen from each according to the principle of substitution. For example, although Erasmus used minuscule 2 as the basis for his text, he sometimes substituted readings from minuscule 1 for readings in minuscule 2 on the premise that a particular reading from minuscule 1 was superior or more authentic than a reading in minuscule 2. Modern scholarship has demonstrated that, although both manuscripts 1 and 2 are twelfth century, manuscript 1 preserves a better text in many passages than the text of manuscript 2. Erasmus relied principally upon a late and inferior text for the

production of his edition and simply corrected that text in certain passages by substituting readings from minuscule 1. From the beginning the principle has prevailed in the preparation of critical editions that an eclectic text is superior to an actual manuscript text that had been scripture for an early Christian community.<sup>12</sup>

In a letter to Antonio Pucci dated 1518 Erasmus gives insight into his thinking about variations found in manuscripts, as he was preparing a second edition Greek-Latin NT:

And to relieve your mind of any possible misgivings, I will briefly explain the principles on which I have been working. After comparing many copies of the Greek and following the one which seemed the most accurate, I have made a Latin version and added my translation to the Greek to make it easy for the reader to compare the two; . . . . The reading of the Greek is the basis of my version everywhere, but I do not everywhere accept it; in other places I prefer our own, always pointing out where the orthodox Latin authorities and the Greeks agree or differ. Besides which, variant readings are not merely no obstacle to the study of Holy Scripture, they are a great help, as St Augustine himself, avers. But nowhere is the degree of variation great enough to imperil the orthodox faith.<sup>13</sup>

His close work with both Greek and Latin did affect his thinking and choices at times. Furthermore Erasmus in making his Latin translation sought to translate the sense of the Greek passage, not merely individual words.<sup>14</sup> To him language had both *words*,

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<sup>12</sup>Reuben Swanson, ed. *New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, vol. 1, *Matthew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), iv.

<sup>13</sup>Erasmus, Desiderius, *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 842-992, 1518 to 1519*, R.A. Mynars and P.F.S. Thomson, trans. *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982), 97.

<sup>14</sup>Jerry Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 165-166.

which do not always correspond exactly to words in the receiver's language, and *meanings*. Accuracy of meaning may well be lost if there is a strict reliance on a one to one correspondence.<sup>15</sup> Erasmus specifically states,

whoever translates, is regularly obliged to deviate from the details and finer points of the original. . . . do not condemn the new version, if you can establish that I have given a truer rendering of the meaning and intention than the maker of the Vulgate.<sup>16</sup>

Inherent in his translation philosophy is a reluctance to be merely text-oriented but to be, at least to some degree, receptor-oriented.

### Incorrect Claims Regarding the King James Version

Before making the plea that the KJV is without error, one should recognize that not everyone accepts this premise.<sup>17</sup> The nature of the early errors was not limited to flaws in the printing process, though many mistakes can be attributed to printers, especially in the seventeenth century. Among the problems was the English text itself, which has changed over the years and continues to change. For example, in 1659, William Kilburne claimed 20,000 errors were found in six editions of the KJV printed in the 1650's<sup>18</sup> and he was not the only critic of the printers through the centuries.<sup>19</sup> Any error

<sup>15</sup>Henk J. de Jonge, "Erasmus Method of Translation in His Version of the New Testament," *Bible Translator* 37 (January 1986), 137, 138.

<sup>16</sup>*Desiderius Erasmus, Apologia*, ed. H. Holborn, *Ausgewählte Werke* (Munich, 1933), 170; quoted in Jonge, "Erasmus' Method," 137.

<sup>17</sup>See Lewis, *The English Bible*, 35-68 for the extent and nature of errors claimed to be in the KJV.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>19</sup>In 1977 my wife receive an authorized KJV from Oxford Press copyright 1967 which in one test passage, Jeremiah 1:11-19, had three different words than my KJV preaching Bible. This modernization of vocabulary is relatively frequent throughout this 20th century edition of the KJV. The reason is clearly to modernize the vocabulary where words have become obsolete.

which fails to communicate God's word accurately creates a problem. All such errors do effectively trouble the learning process.

Not only did the early KJV printings contain printer errors, but allegations have been made concerning doctrinal problems. Jack Lewis remarks concerning certain doctrinal problems in the KJV,

it is naive to declare that they have no doctrinal significance. It would be miraculous if the early seventeenth-century struggle between Catholics and Anglicans, the Prelate party and the Puritans, and the Calvinists and non-Calvinists did not influence the way scholars at that time chose between options.<sup>20</sup>

Several liturgical words were placed into the 1611 to please the Church of England including, pastor, church, bishop, elder and baptism. Likewise there are passages such as Acts 2:47, where the KJV, "and the Lord added to the church daily *such as should be saved*" is translated. The correct reading is "daily the Lord added *the ones being saved* to the church." While it may seem to be a small matter, it is puzzling why Jacob is correctly translated in Hebrews 11 but is always translate James when referring to the brother of the Lord. Does this continue to reflect the anti-semiticism so prevalent in the Middle Ages? In like manner why is "love" sometimes translated "charity" as in 1 Corinthians 13. Most all would agree that this is a misleading translation for the 20th century reader.

Well known is the insertion of the Johannine comma by Erasmus in his third edition even though no Greek manuscript before the 16th century has this reading in its text. Acts 9:6 reads "And the Lord said to him" in the KJV although not one Greek manuscript has this reading. This reading came from the Latin text which was present in a parallel column in Erasmus *Novum Instrumentum* published in 1516.

On some occasions the translation of the KJV is clearly wrong. In the parallel passages of 2 Kings 24:17 the successor to Jehoiachin,

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<sup>20</sup>Lewis, *The English Bible*, 62.

Zedekiah, is called "his father's brother" whereas 2 Chronicles 36:10 says Zedekiah is "his brother." It is not possible for both passages to be true. A check of the Hebrew word in 2 Chronicles makes clear that "his brother" must be translated "his kinsman." After almost 400 years this error has not been changed. There are serious problems in other passages, with inconsistent numbers in parallel passages, and errant translations of hapaxlegomena, which recently have been correctly understood as a result of the study of Ancient Near Eastern texts and cognate words in the Semitic languages.

In summary, it must be recognized that the usual argument defending a "divine preservation" of one specific text is not consistent with the evidence. No English text including the KJV is perfect and none can be called "inspired". This is also true of all extant Greek manuscripts and all Greek New Testaments. The question at hand is what options are available for fundamentalists? Before this query can be answered with confidence, the transmission of the Greek text from the autographs to the printed text needs to be investigated.

### **A Summary of Transmission**

With the coming of the Messiah divine revelation once again entered into history with the activity of God's Son (Heb 1:1) and His followers (2 Pet 1:21). The initial revelation given from Moses was written first in Old Canaanite script, then later the complete Old Testament became available in Hebrew with some parts in Aramaic. In the third century B.C.E. because of the Diaspora and the inability of most Jews to read Hebrew (even in the days of Ezra), the Old Testament was translated into Greek. This Greek version of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, became the Christian Bible in the first century. About 80% of the quotations from the Old Testament found in the New Testament follow the readings of the Greek rather than the Hebrew text.

## Early Greek Manuscripts

While the Old Testament was written over a period of 1000 years, the writing of the New Testament appears to cover no more than 50 years. The gospels, following the pattern of ancient Graeco-Roman βίβλος, were written twenty to fifty-five years after the ministry of the Lord. These were written to Theophilus, Jewish Christians, Romans and other Gentiles respectively who lived in different geographic locations. It is clear that it would take significant time to circulate written manuscripts of the gospels to all areas of Christianity. A reading of the earliest church fathers shows little use of our written gospels which seems somewhat surprising. Does this suggest that a longer period of time was necessary for the text of the New Testament to become widely spread? Of greater difficulty is discerning with certainty the nature of manuscript copying and the quality of the earliest copies. The same problems of manuscript multiplication faced the dissemination of the book of Acts and the letters of the New Testament. The common man at this time was not skilled in reading and writing. L.D. Twilley writes,

What happened to these original letters of the Apostles and others? We can be sure that they were treasured by the churches which received them, and were shown to Christians from other towns who might visit them. For example, a Christian merchant in the course of his voyages might put in at the harbor near to Corinth. Being shown the letters which Paul had written to that Church he would realize that they contained teaching which would be invaluable to his own church at Rome or wherever it may be, and would make a rough copy of it. Thus in due course the Church at Rome would not only have the letter which Paul wrote to it but also those written to Corinth. In this way groups of books would be built up in important centres of the faith. Others who came to Rome would be interested in these epistles which had originally been written to the Corinthian Christians and would make a copy of the copy and this process of copying would go on all over the then known world, wherever the sacred

writings were to be found. Now two important facts should be noted about these early copies. First, they were often made by ordinary people and not by professional scribes. This meant that the likelihood of copyists' errors creeping into the text was great. Secondly, the copies were made for edification, and so slight alteration of phrasing or even the omission of an unimportant word would not be considered of any consequence. Thus a whole variety of slightly different readings of the epistles (etc.) came into being.<sup>21</sup>

Oral teaching and rote memorization were prevalent in that day and could easily produce slight variations of wording,<sup>22</sup> spelling or the use of synonyms, which an untrained copier might have inadvertently inserted into his manuscript.

At what point in history were the twenty-seven books of the NT first recognized as a unified collection and how long did it take before this was known and then accepted throughout early Christianity? A study of the history of the canon provides no certain conclusion. Reasons for the difficulty in resolving this question include the following: (1) there are few extant records from the earliest centuries of the Christian era, (2) preserving texts was difficult because of state and local persecutions, and (3) early Christians have not provided information about their recognition of the canonical books. Is it possible that a failure of some Christians to understand which manuscripts were to be accepted as canon fostered copying errors at that time? In any case much copying occurred before the canon was recognized or most churches would never have received written NT documents<sup>23</sup> before proclamations about the canon.

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<sup>21</sup>L.D. Twilley, *The Origin and Transmission of the New Testament A Short Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), 36-37.

<sup>22</sup>See the works of Kenneth Bailey, "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *Expository Times* 106 (September 1995): 363-367.

<sup>23</sup>It is widely accepted that the canon was not recognized in its complete state until the second half of the second century. Some argue that it was not until the fourth century that all recognized the twenty seven books as canon. See Lee M.



The early history of manuscript multiplication is unclear in specifics because of the inability to preserve most ancient records. On February 23, 303 Diocletian initiated the destruction of church buildings and Christian books, including copies of the New Testament.<sup>24</sup> That this persecution was severe is clear from the writings of the early church historian, Eusebius, who states, "all this [persecution] has been fulfilled in our day, when we saw with our own eyes our houses of worship thrown down from their elevation, [and] the sacred Scriptures of inspiration committed to the flames in the midst of the markets."<sup>25</sup>

Christians most seriously affected by persecution lived in the south-eastern Mediterranean areas of Palestine, Egypt and North Africa. While many manuscripts were lost or destroyed and many Christians killed, some of the copies of scripture were saved by church readers and believers in rural communities. A number of early manuscripts survived in the dry climate and provide an early witness to the Greek text of the New Testament from this area.

### The Development of Text-types

The earliest extant copy of the complete Greek New Testament is codex Sinaiticus, which is dated about 375 and belongs to the Alexandrian family of manuscripts. Codex Vaticanus, dated about 350, lacks the pastoral epistles and Revelation. Earlier papyrus manuscripts dating from the early second century to the fifth century contain varying lengths of the same text type. The quality of the manuscripts from this period varies from careful to careless attempts at copying the earlier manuscripts.<sup>26</sup> Many of these Alexandrian manuscripts, especially the papyri, remained hidden for 1500 years.

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McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 137-257.

<sup>24</sup>Philip W. Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 13.

<sup>25</sup>Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 8:2:1.

<sup>26</sup>Comfort, *Quest for the Original Text*, 22-23.

However, this should not be surprising in light of the nature of Egypt's secular history, and especially the Muslim invasion from the east, which began in the seventh century C.E.

From the same early period came manuscripts which have been categorized as the Western manuscripts. Although also from the second and third century, the text tends to deviate from the Alexandrian manuscripts by having longer readings. These manuscripts usually provide explanatory information which is seldom accepted as original. However, the western manuscripts also have some shorter readings than the other non-western manuscripts.<sup>27</sup>

A third type of manuscripts known as Byzantine can be dated to the early fourth century, usually traced to the region of Antioch, and specifically to a recension by Lucian, who was martyred in 312. It is possible that this was the text used for the 50 copies of the New Testament in Greek ordered by Constantine<sup>28</sup> although some believe Sinaiticus and Vaticanus came from the fifty. During the Dark Ages Byzantine type manuscripts, representing the Greek Orthodox church, became the dominant stream of NT manuscripts in the Greek speaking world and later the basis for the early printed Greek texts and early English versions.

### Modern Greek Texts and the Fundamentalist

Three printed Greek texts, the TR, the UBS/NA and the MT are currently being used by fundamentalists for teaching, study, and in textual criticism. The specific nature of these texts needs to be known both for current discussion and for the next generation of fundamentalists to understand the text issues and intelligently engage in the discussions about the "Greek NT Text."

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>28</sup>F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 204. See also Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 4:36 for the ordering of the 50 copies of the Greek New Testament to be used in the churches.

## The "Textus Receptus"

Although the production of hand-written Greek manuscripts must have been significant especially in the area around Constantinople where Greek was still spoken, Greek New Testament manuscripts were not easily located in the West, since the language of western Christians was Latin. By the beginning of the 15th century the revival of Greek learning made possible the making of a Greek text from available manuscripts. The invention of the printing press made possible mass production of the product so that all copies of any printed Greek NT would have the same readings.

Desiderius Erasmus was the first man to have an edition of a Greek text printed and circulated. His first of five editions came off the press in February 1516 titled, *Novum Instrumentum*, and was dedicated to Pope Leo X. Almost immediately he expressed dissatisfaction with it stating that "the New Testament was rushed out rather than edited."<sup>29</sup> His text contained in two parallel columns his Greek edition and his new Latin translation of the New Testament, which he hoped would replace the Latin Vulgate. "Erasmus based his Greek edition largely on two codices now regarded as inferior witness to the Greek New Testament" both dating from the twelfth century.<sup>30</sup> He appears to have used a total of five manuscripts none of which contained the whole New Testament. In fact the one manuscript containing Revelation was no earlier than the 12th century and lacked the final six verses of chapter twenty-two. Consequently Erasmus used the Latin Vulgate to "create" Greek words which have never

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<sup>29</sup>See Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 122-123 where he cites *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P.S. Allen et. al., 12 vols. (Oxford, 1906-1958) and particularly EE, nos.402, 694 (2:226; 3:117). F.H.A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* 4th ed., vol. 2 (London: George Bell & Sons, 1894), 185 speaks of the hundreds of typographical errors calling it "in that respect the most faulty book I know."

<sup>30</sup>See Bentley, *Humanists and the Holy Writ*, 127 and 125-135 for a discussion of the four or five manuscripts used by Erasmus in his first edition. Today there are over 5,000 manuscripts of some part of the New Testament.

been found in any Greek manuscript to this day. However they are still found in printed versions of the TR to this day.<sup>31</sup>

In his day when Erasmus was charged by one editor of the Complutensian Polyglot with omitting a portion of 1 John 5:7-8 he allegedly responded that it was not in any Greek manuscript. He supposedly promised to include it in his text, if any existing Greek manuscript could be found containing it. A recently copied manuscript, dated about 1520 written on paper was produced, which used the Latin Vulgate reading. This well known insertion became a part of his third edition and all subsequent printed editions of Byzantine type Greek New Testaments.<sup>32</sup> However, Henk de Jonge quotes Erasmus' comment as actually saying,

If a single manuscript had come into my hands, in which stood what we read (sc. in the Latin Vulgate) then I would certainly have used it to fill in what was missing in the other manuscripts I had. Because that did not happen I have taken the only course which was permissible, that is, I have indicated (sc. in the *Annotationes*) then what was missing from the Greek manuscripts.<sup>33</sup>

Consequently the Johannine Comma is still found in the TR and the KJV. In the course of his five editions Erasmus made corrections in

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<sup>31</sup>See Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 99-100 where he discusses passages including words which do not occur in any manuscript of Revelation and one word which is never found in the Greek language. There are other places outside of Revelation where Erasmus inserted readings from the Latin Vulgate which do not occur in any Greek manuscript.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 101. To this day only three other manuscripts have this reading: Gregory's 88 from the 12th century has this printed in the margin; a 16th century manuscript which is a copy from the Complutensian Greek text; and Gregory's 629 dating from the 14th or 16th century. Interestingly 20th century Roman Catholic scholars do not include this in their editions of the Greek New Testament but they do in their Latin versions.

<sup>33</sup>Henk Jan De Jonge, "Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum" *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 56:4 (1980), 385.

his text due to the influence of the Complutensian Polyglot.<sup>34</sup> He concluded his editions of the Greek New Testament in 1535. A printed Greek text was now established and it had no serious competitors for more than three hundred years. Metzger remarks, "subsequent editors, though making a number of alterations in Erasmus' text, essentially reproduced this debased form of the Greek Testament."<sup>35</sup>

The first among the numerous texts created in the next 150 years was that of Robert Estienne (Stephanus), whose third edition became the standard for England. He used Erasmus, the Complutensian Polyglot and 15 manuscripts. Beza followed with nine editions between 1565 and 1604 and two of his editions (1588, 1598) were consulted by KJV translators, even though they rejected his readings about 190 times. His Greek text differs little from the 1551 fourth edition of Stephanus.<sup>36</sup> Later, on the continent, the Elzevir Brothers printed a text using Beza and a few late manuscripts in 1624. In their 1633 edition the publisher added these words in Latin to the introduction,

Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum: in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus [what you have here then, is the text which is now universally recognized: we offer it free of alterations and corruptions].<sup>37</sup>

For the first time twenty-two years after the KJV was published the term *textus receptus* was put in print. Since the previously mentioned printed texts were based on the same type of manuscripts as the earlier work of Erasmus, the name *textus receptus* has been generally applied to all of the texts in spite of the fact that there are

<sup>34</sup>Jack Finegan, *Encountering New Testament Manuscripts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1974), 57.

<sup>35</sup>Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 103.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>37</sup>Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, trans. Erroll R. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1987), 6.

differences in virtually every edition of each text. Metzger remarks, "yet its textual basis is essentially a handful of late and haphazardly collected minuscule manuscripts, and in a dozen passages its reading is supported by no known Greek witness."<sup>38</sup> Consequently *it is wise to remember that the TR, textus receptus, is not a manuscript but a Greek text made when few manuscripts were available.* It is primarily the work of one man's efforts, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and is a reflection of a small number of Byzantine manuscripts and the Latin text available in his day. From this tradition came the KJV of the New Testament in 1611.<sup>39</sup>

### The UBS/NA Text

For more than 200 years after the time of the Elzevir brothers' publication many new manuscripts were found and collated (compared for purposes of noticing differences in manuscript readings).<sup>40</sup> At differing times attempts were made to challenge the existing Greek text, to develop a critical apparatus, to group manuscripts being found into text types, and define principles of textual criticism. In the 19th century Constantin Tischendorf located, collected, and published many manuscripts including the well known codex Sinaiticus, which is one of 59 manuscripts containing the entire New Testament. His last edition of the Greek New Testament, the 8th, published in 1872, brought variant readings to light from uncials,

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<sup>38</sup>Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 106. See also F.H.A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 4th ed., Edward Miller, ed. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1894), 183-184 and following for the number of differences among the various early Greek texts.

<sup>39</sup>For a critique of the King James Only movement based on the 1611 version of the English Bible see James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995).

<sup>40</sup>For a brief but helpful survey of textual criticism see Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee, "Textual Criticism of the New Testament," *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 3-18.

cursives, versions and the church fathers which brought a change in textual history that has never reversed. Of significant interest was the nature of the Greek text at the time of the 4th century. Consequently, by 1831 a quest for a text using the early witnesses had begun in earnest.<sup>41</sup> S.P. Tregelles, a Plymouth Brethren scholar, sought to "form a text on the authority of ancient copies without allowing the 'received text' any prescriptive rights."<sup>42</sup>

With the work of Westcott and Hort, *The NT in the Original Greek* in 2 volumes published in 1881, a battle between two kinds of texts was inevitable. The Byzantine text being based on a large number of late manuscripts was now challenged by a new text and a new methodology. In the introduction by Hort, he attacked the TR text by arguing against the Byzantine family on three counts.

(1) The Syrian text-type is filled with conflate readings, i.e., readings that combine the elements found in the earlier two text-types; (2) the readings peculiar to the Syrian text-type are never found in the ante-Nicene Fathers, neither in the East nor West; and (3) when the readings peculiar to this text-type are compared with rival readings on the principles of internal evidence, "their claim to be regarded as the original readings is found gradually to diminish, and at last to disappear."<sup>43</sup>

Hort and Westcott considered that on the basis of internal considerations, what they called the Neutral (Alexandrian) text was far superior in most cases. Epp writes, "thus their resultant text was an edition of the Neutral text-type, except in those instances where internal evidence was clearly against it."<sup>44</sup> Vigorous responses to this

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<sup>41</sup>E. J. Epp, "Textual Criticism," in *The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters*, Eldon J. Epp and George W. MacRae eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 79-84.

<sup>42</sup>E.J. Epp, "The Eclectic Method in New Testament Textual Criticism: Solution or Symptom?" *Harvard Theological Review* 69 (July-October 1976): 233.

<sup>43</sup>Hort, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2:116.

<sup>44</sup>Gordon Fee, "Textual Criticism," 12.

printed text and its implications came for more than a decade from J.W. Burgon, E. Miller, F.H.A. Scrivener for differing reasons and with different conclusions.

Burgon published three of his articles in 1883 taken from the *Quarterly Review* criticizing both the Greek Text of Westcott and Hort, and a new English Version, which was based upon it, as well as the new textual theory which they followed. However, in evaluating the work of the Revisionists of the 1881 English translation he concedes:

Not the least service which the Revisionists have rendered has been the proof their work affords, how very seldom our Authorized Version is materially wrong; how faithful and trustworthy, on the contrary, it is throughout. Let it be also candidly admitted that, even where (in our judgment) the Revisionists have erred, they have never had the misfortune *seriously* to obscure a single feature of Divine Truth; nor have they in any quarter (as we hope) inflicted wounds which will be attended with worse results than to leave a hideous scar behind them. It is but fair to add that their work bears marks of an amount of conscientious (though misdirected) labour, which those only can fully appreciate who have made the same province of study to some extent their own.<sup>45</sup>

Scrivener, another critic of Westcott and Hort's Greek NT, provided four practical rules relating to the determination of a true Greek text for the New Testament. Interestingly these rules do advocate a TR only text, but in addition to this he argued for a genuine textual study of variant readings.

(1) That the true readings of the Greek New Testament *cannot safely be derived from any one set of authorities*, whether manuscripts, versions, or Fathers, but ought to be the result of a

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<sup>45</sup>John W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (London: John Murray 1883), 232.



patient comparison and careful estimate of the evidence supplied by them all.

(2) That where there is a real agreement between all documents containing the Gospels up to the sixth century, and in other parts of the New Testament up to the ninth, the testimony of later manuscripts and versions, though not to be rejected unheard, *must be regarded with great suspicion*, and UNLESS UPHELD BY STRONG INTERNAL EVIDENCE, can hardly be adopted.

(3) That where the more ancient documents are at variance with each other, the later uncial and cursive copies, especially those of approved merit, are of real importance, as being the surviving representatives of other codices, very probably as early, perhaps even earlier, than any now extant.

(4) That in weighing conflicting evidence *we must assign the highest value not to those readings which are attested by the greatest number of witnesses, but to those which come to us from several remote and independent sources*, and which bear the least likeness to each other in respect to genius and general character.<sup>46</sup>

Are the differences between those two factions as great as has been argued?<sup>47</sup> Since more than one hundred years separate their

<sup>46</sup>F.H.A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* ed. Edward Miller (London: George Bell & Sons, 1994), 300-301. It must be remembered that these men wrote and drew conclusions before they were aware of the twentieth century manuscripts and papyri.

<sup>47</sup>Philip R. Williams states correctly that the differences between the TR and the "critical text" fall into three categories: variation of words, variation of word order and variation of spelling. Probably 2/3 of variations come from the later two categories and never alter the meaning of the text. None of the differences affect any doctrine of Christianity nor do they omit doctrine in either text. He concludes, "We ought to do everything within our power to discover the exact text, even down to the individual letters. It seems regrettable, though, that some seem to imply (and others

comments from the present day, one can only speculate what they would say were they alive today considering the new manuscripts which have been found and modern attempts to deal with all the evidence. It is unfortunate that the legitimate concerns of all these men have been neglected by fundamentalists for the most part during the twentieth century.

For the next fifty years textual discussions focussed negatively or positively on the "neutral text" versus the "Byzantine/Syrian text" and their respective worth. In the early thirties very early papyri manuscripts of the New Testament were discovered leading to what Epp calls a fifty year "Period of the Papyri."<sup>48</sup> The finding of these new documents, having an early date compared to the large number of later manuscripts, brought serious questions about how to work with such early readings. New studies were made of manuscripts, in methodology, and versional evidence. Several different critical editions of Greek texts were produced.

As of 1990 more than 5,300 Greek manuscripts (uncials, cursives and lectionaries) have been found, though many are only fragmentary. Of this total, only 287 preserve some of the text of Revelation, making this the least attested book of the New Testament. In considering this large amount of "raw material," three ways have been developed to determine the most likely original reading. These three methods (1) the historical-documentary method, (2) the rigorous eclectic method, and (3) the reasoned eclectic method each have their advocates. The first, the historical documentary method, is an attempt to "cluster" manuscripts by date, provenance and similarity of reading with the hope that the earliest manuscripts which "cluster" together would provide the original readings. The "rigorous eclectic" approach seeks to establish a reading based only on the internal evidence. This includes examination of a variation unit and

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frankly state) that one is a heretic or an ignoramus for holding to one text or the other. How good if we could stop fussing with each other about the text and join hands in preaching it;" in Philip R. Williams, "The Textual Debate: Mountain or Molehill?" *Baptist Bulletin* 48:3 (1982): 10.

<sup>48</sup>Epp, "Textual Criticism," 84.

evaluating it in light of its context, author's style, theology, syntax, vocabulary and scribal habits.<sup>49</sup> The reasoned eclectic method (often called the eclectic method) combines both methods. Epp remarks that, "If the reconstruction of the early textual history cannot be achieved, the eclectic method will continue to be the method of choice—and of necessity."<sup>50</sup> The late 20th century Greek texts, UBS/NA follow the eclectic approach; this does not mean, however, that their conclusions are always correct.<sup>51</sup>

### The Majority Text (MT) of the Twentieth Century

A view also prevalent in the late 20th century argues that the Byzantine text-type is the only true text of the New Testament and that other text-types (Western, Alexandrian, etc.) are corruptions so that they must be disregarded.<sup>52</sup> Further, this view is predicated on their teaching that divine inspiration necessitates divine preservation in the copying of the manuscripts. As Hills says, "then it is obvious that He would not allow this revelation to disappear or undergo any alteration of its fundamental character."<sup>53</sup> In making this claim Hills rejects non-Byzantine readings and ignores the differences which do

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<sup>49</sup>For further study, see the extensive writings of J.K. Elliot, E.J. Epp and G. Fee.

<sup>50</sup>Epp, "Textual Criticism," 96. See also 97-106 for a thorough discussion of the work yet to be done in textual criticism. He concludes his article with these words: quoting George Luck "Part of the problem is that our critical texts are no better than our textual critics." If competent textual critics can be rallied in NT studies, our new materials and refined methods can be utilized to solve the critical problems, and the discipline can move toward that ideal of a critical text that closely approximates the "original" NT text.

<sup>51</sup>One has only to study the changes made in the choices of readings in the various editions of the United Bible Societies edited by Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce Metzger and Alan Wikgren. See also Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Society, 1971) which discusses the committee's choices of readings.

<sup>52</sup>John W. Burgon, *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1896), 128.

<sup>53</sup>Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended!* (Des Moines, IA: The Christian Research Press, 1956), 8.

occur in the Byzantine family of manuscripts. Followers of this view in November, 1978 formed the Dean Burgon society and began publishing in 1979, *The Dean Burgon News*, a paper reflecting their views.

Harry Sturz, carefully arguing for a fair hearing of the Byzantine text readings together with the other textual traditions, demonstrates that there are different Byzantine texts dating from different periods of time.<sup>54</sup> Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad holding to the primacy of the Byzantine text have published, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, arguing that a large number, the majority, of extant Byzantine manuscripts give the "true" Byzantine text-type. Their work includes a 38 page introduction explaining their position. Unfortunately this is not a fresh work but one that relies on other editions of the Greek NT. Numerous reviews of this project from a wide spectrum of scholars have appeared so that this will not be pursued here.<sup>55</sup> Within the last decade the Majority Text Society was established for the purpose of perpetuating the views of Majority text theory.

In the MT Greek NT the questionable readings in the TR<sup>56</sup> have been removed so that the modern reader is now left with a third choice for a Greek NT text, which represents the majority of Byzantine manuscripts and places minority readings in footnotes. The theory behind the need for this work was set forth in 1977 in a volume written by Wilbur Pickering and responded to by Donald Carson.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 39.

<sup>55</sup>See the following journals for reviews: *Novum Testamentum* 26 (1984): 85-86; *Bible Translator* 34 (July 1983): 342-344; *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (October 1983): 590-592; *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (Spring 1983): 119-126; *Trinity Journal* NS 4 (Spring 1983): 107-113.

<sup>56</sup>It is estimated that "the differences between the TR and the Majority Text range from one to several thousand" see Michael W. Holmes "The 'Majority text debate': new form of an old issue" *Themelios* 8 (January 1983): 18.

<sup>57</sup>See Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1977) and the response by D. A. Carson, *The King James Version: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979).

Numerous critical articles began to appear about 1980 dealing with various aspects of the Majority Text theory.<sup>58</sup> While most appreciate having a text which does in fact represent the majority of the manuscripts from the Byzantine family, the thesis behind and claims of their work is questioned. The following questions provide a sample of the issues which need answers. Is textual criticism a science to find the original readings of lost originals and also the history of the variants or is it a mere counting of manuscripts to see which reading is in the majority? If the MT reflects the original, why did it become available only in 1982? Since the MT differs from the TR in more than 2000 places and the TR has some readings never found in any Greek manuscript, how could Pickering state that this "pure text" was available to "God's followers in every age throughout 1900 years."<sup>59</sup> However, if the Byzantine text is the original, why are no early versions based upon it?

Wallace lists the main arguments of the MT advocates:

- (1) a theological *a priori* that God has preserved the text - and that such a preserved text has been accessible to the Church in every age; (2) an assumption that heretics have, on a large scale, corrupted the text; (3) an argument from statistical probability

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<sup>58</sup>See Gordon D.Fee, "The Majority Text and the Original Text of the New Testament" *The Bible Translator* 31 (1980): 107-118; Holmes, "The Majority text debate" new form of an old issue," 13-19; Harold P Scanlin, "The Majority Text Debate: Recent Developments" *The Bible Translator* 36 (1985): 136-140; Daniel Wallace, "The Majority Text: A New Collating Base?" *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 609-618; Daniel Wallace, "The Majority Text and the Original Text: Are They Identical" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991): 151-169; T.R. Ralston, "The Majority Text and Byzantine Origins" *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992): 122-137; Daniel Wallace, "The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique" *JETS* 37 (1994): 185-215; Daniel B. Wallace, "Historical Revisionism and the Majority Text Theory: The Cases of F.H.A. Scrivener and Herman C. Hoskier" *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 280-285.

<sup>59</sup>Wallace, "Majority Text and the Original Text," 156 responding to a note in a paper presented on February 21, 1990 by Wilbur N. Pickering, president of the Majority Text Society, at Dallas Theological Seminary on the majority text and the original text.

related to the corollary of accessibility (viz., that the majority is more likely to contain the original wording); and (4) a pronouncement that all early Byzantine MSS must have worn out. As well there is a fifth point to be inferred from these four: arguments based on internal evidence (e.g., canons such as preference for the harder and shorter readings ) are invalid since determination of the text is based on the 'objective' evidence of quantity of MSS.<sup>60</sup>

A serious problem for MT advocates exists in the text of Revelation, which has no majority text. That the text of the Apocalypse is relatively fluid, when compared to other NT books, becomes obvious when looking at the textual apparatus in the MT and the UBS/NA. Is it reasonable to assume that since God did not "preserve" a MT for the last book of the Bible, it is still the best text for all other biblical books because its readings are in the majority? It becomes clear that the MT advocates have not produced the answer in the pursuit for the "original text." However, they have provided the world with the first real Majority Greek Text and for this all should be grateful.

In summary, the first Greek text of the NT was produced from differing manuscripts and by the work of various editors from Erasmus to Stephanus with each departing from the work of his predecessor at various points. TR is that term applied to the texts of several printed Greek texts, which developed at different times from a variety of Greek manuscripts. This text was defended in the late 1800's by Burgon against the work of Westcott and Hort and recently by the Dean Burgon Society as well as the Trinitarian Bible Society. Near the end of the 20th century a new text based on the readings from a majority of the Greek manuscripts was produced. While differing in more than 2000 readings it too lays claim to preserving

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<sup>60</sup>Wallace, "Historical Revisionism," 282. In this article Wallace clearly shows that both Scrivener and Hoskier differed significantly in theory and practice from the work of John W. Burgon.

the "original" manuscripts. The third choice for the modern reader of the Greek NT is the "eclectic" text, which seeks to evaluate each variant reading of the text, as is done in textual criticism of all other ancient literature in order to ascertain the original readings and explain the history of how the variant readings occurred.

It is important to realize that no theology of the Bible is changed by variant readings. Most variants have to do with spelling errors, word order or tenses of verbs. The total number of words in question are no more than 10% of the NT. Rather than seeking a solution to the problem by appealing to simplistic answers, would it not be more profitable to seek out legitimate questions first and then answer them? To argue from the English to the Greek is not only unsound methodology, it is certainly a prejudicial perspective against translations of other language stocks. More than that it is insulting and demeaning to claim that only the English language has the "authoritative" Bible.

### **Issues Confronting Fundamentalists**

While most of this paper has been spent dealing with the issue of printed Greek texts, it is also necessary to reflect for a moment on the English Bible. Thankfully we live in a time of history when the Bible is easily obtainable and at minimal expense. Yet perhaps fundamentalists err in seeking to resolve questions of the Greek text and its English translations based on the problem of limited knowledge. Premature pigeon-holing must not supersede serious investigation of available data. It must be remembered that answers are too often the result of one's own presuppositions and prejudices. Certainly it is imperative that fundamentalists remove error in our thinking not just doubts about our personal preferences, especially those relating to the Biblical text.

Since the English language now has 600,000 words, which is six times more than French and three times more than German, should we not investigate whether we are clearly communicating God's truth in written form to this generation? Is it not time that we take a careful look at what makes a good translation? The language level of the

third world immigrant is said to be that of a 3rd grade level. Perhaps the average American high school graduate reads at a 7th or 8th grade level. The KJV requires a reading comprehension level of at least 12th grade. A lack of comprehension of God's message results in a lack of growth in "grace" and growth in fundamentalist churches. Many Christians do not read their Bibles. Dare we consider the possibility that they cannot understand what they are supposed to read? Are fundamentalist leaders assuming that church members have a clear understanding of the language, because they read from an "authorized" text of scripture.

All recognize that mere reading or speaking does not necessarily produce true communication. Is it not time for fundamentalists to recognize that a pastor, who uses any conservative English translation for his study or for his preaching, may be a fundamentalist?<sup>61</sup> Should it be thought unusual that students, who translate the Greek NT, always produce a different English translation than the KJV and consider it, not only acceptable, but helpful at getting a better understanding of the texts meaning? If this is not true why is Greek even taught in college and seminary? It is hoped that this time together has been a step in the direction of looking at problems which need to be faced rather than applying "old answers."

### Summary

Erroneous statements have been made arguing for the "inspiration" and "preservation" of both Greek and English texts, which cannot be substantiated. While this may have removed doubts about certain texts in the minds of some proponents, it did not necessarily remove the error of this position. The transmission of the text prior to the printed editions of the Greek NT and later English versions is complex and all the data is not yet available. What can be

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<sup>61</sup>See Kendall H. Easley, "Teaching Textual Criticism to Future Pastors: Can We Keep Future Congregants from Charging Them with Liberalism?" a paper read at the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting in Chicago, Illinois in November, 1995.



said is that God provided the world with more than 5,000 Greek manuscripts of various lengths and quality which numerically dwarfs the number of manuscripts of any other ancient work. As a result of these manuscripts there is a single theology and a textual harmony which has significant differences of less than one page. None of these differences change the message of the New Testament. There are three Greek texts used in fundamentalist circles-- the TR, the MT and the UBS/Nestle's text. As a result there is also more than one English version used by fundamentalists-- from the TR came the KJV, from the MT came the NKJV, and from the UBS came the NASB and the NIV (however, the NIV follows a different translation strategy-- "receptor oriented"). As a result several issues face fundamentalists today and not all will respond alike. Questions concerning which Greek text, preaching Bible, study Bible and reading Bible for church members are being asked and need answers. What Bible version(s) can unbelievers read and understand? How does language work in communicating the meaning of an ancient text to a modern reader?

I conclude my thoughts with a fourfold challenge. First, all fundamentalists need to be more cautious in what they say and how they treat those who may differ with their theories regarding the so-called "inspiration" and "preservation" of Greek texts and English language translations of the Bible. Strong personal preferences are not necessarily biblically correct. Second, all fundamentalists need to be open to learning more about how God used a variety of people and manuscripts to transmit His Word, both before and after the invention of printing. Since the transmission of the text is an historical study, cautious remarks are always in order since some evidence is not yet discovered. Third, fundamentalists must acknowledge that godly men can and do take differing views on contemporary Greek texts and English translations and still remain fundamentalists. The texts do not teach different theologies but are attempts by translators to clarify the difficult question of which Greek text reflects the autographs, and consequently which English translation best represents the autographs. Finally, all fundamentalists need to discover first the problems and only then uncover the answers which will correctly influence the communication of God's Word, both publicly and

privately to the current generation of Christians and unbelievers. To do anything less is to withhold the message of God for the world.