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The 'Majority Text Debate': New Form of an Old Issue

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Earlier this century, Leon Vaganay expressed a widely-held view when he wrote that the *Textus Receptus* (TR) is 'dead at last and, let us hope, forever'.[1] In recent years, however, an increasing number of books and pamphlets have appeared which argue for a return to the Byzantine or Majority text, of which the TR is the chief printed representative, on the grounds that it more accurately represents the original text of the New Testament than does any modern critical edition. The movement back to the TR is usually linked as well to a defence of the King James Version (AV) as the most accurate available translation of the TR.

Not surprisingly, this call to abandon the critical Greek texts which lie behind all recent English translations of the New Testament in favour of the Majority text has not gone without notice. Thus there has occurred a revival of sorts of the old 'TR debate' which was originally sparked in 1881 by the publication of Westcott and Hort's *The New Testament in the Original Greek*[2] and whose best-known participant was the doughty J. W. Burgon. In what follows an effort will be made to survey the contours of this new debate about an old question, focusing on the key issues and their significance.

In brief, the proponents of the Majority text argue that Westcott and Hort's text-critical theories and methods were wrong, and that their false views have misled other textual critics for a century. The 'Neutral' text preferred by them, far from being a very pure representative of a very ancient text, is actually a late corrupt form of text influenced by heretical doctrines and poor scholarship. The way to correct this 100-year-old error is to return to the Majority text. Not only does a huge preponderance of extant manuscripts support this text-type but, it is claimed, the Majority text is closer to the original and is doctrinally superior.

While the basic position of the Majority text advocates is similar, the arguments brought to bear in support of that position vary considerably, and it is necessary to distinguish two groups. There are elements of continuity between them, but the differences are sufficiently great so as to require separate treatment.

Prominent among the first group, which defends the TR, are Terence Brown, David Otis Fuller, J. J. Ray, and E. F. Hills. In contrast to Burgon, their champion, who was a scholar and

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[1] Leon Vaganay, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Test*ament (London, 1937), p. 173.

[2] B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Cambridge, 1881).

indefatigable textual critic whose writings were based on tiresome work on original manuscripts, most of these men betray little if any first-hand acquaintance with either the materials of textual criticism or any of the scholarly literature of the last fifty years.[3] Their writings largely consist of reprints of or extracts from earlier writers, especially Burgon, who are quoted as if every line they ever wrote were true. Their attacks on the theories of Westcott and Hort consist primarily of *ad hominem* accusations (they are variously called papists, Arians, Origenists, rationalists, and naturalists)[4] and leading questions left unanswered. The points adduced in favour of the TR are theological rather than historical and are related to an extreme form of the doctrine of divine preservation. Fuller, for example, claims that those 'who believe in the Verbal, Plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures... of necessity must believe in the Providential Preservation of the Scriptures through the centuries';[5] further, says Hills, the 'consistently orthodox Christian' must believe 'that it was through the usage of the Church that Christ has fulfilled His promise always to preserve the true New Testament text, and that therefore the Byzantine Text found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament

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manuscripts is the true text'.[6]

In other words, the Greek Orthodox church is identified as the 'channel through which the Scriptures were preserved.[7] No arguments or historical evidence are offered in support of this view; it is simply asserted that this is how it happened. Moreover, to believe otherwise, it is implied, is tantamount to holding to a low view of Scripture.[8]

It is not to be inferred that these men are idiots or scoundrels; their motives appear to be sincere. Unfortunately, as one writer has observed, an understandable but wrongly-directed zeal for the KJV and the Greek text it represents has made them careless with regard to facts,[9] and ignorance has too frequently resulted in the substitution of invective and special pleading for reasoned argument.

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[3] A notable exception is E. F. Hills, who wrote a Harvard dissertation on the Caesarean text and published related articles in reputable scholarly journals. Ironically, however, Hills represents a most extreme form of TR advocacy. Unlike most TR defenders, Hills argues for the very wording of the TR, including the places where it follows the Vulgate against all known Greek manuscripts. In his opinion, it was part of God's providence that these Vulgate readings should enter the TR, there to be available to the translators of the KJV! *See The King James Version Defended. A Space-Age Defense of the Historic Christian Faith* (Des Moines, Iowa: Christian Research Press, 1973), pp. 111, 188, 194-197.

[4] The humanist Erasmus, however, at times is nearly canonized.

[5] D. O. Fuller (ed.), *True or False?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International, 1973), p. 5.

[6] E. F. Hills, 'The Magnificent Burgon', in D. O. Fuller (ed.), *Which Bible?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International, ^{2}1971), p. 67.

[7] There is an anti-Catholic bias to this point as well; *cf*. Hills, 'Burgon', p. 66.

[8] One wonders how such noted conservatives as B. B. Warfield or J. Gresham Machen, who utilized a critical text, would have responded to this charge.

[9] D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), p. 43.

The most direct response to these particular arguments is found in a slim volume by D. A. Carson.[10] It is difficult not to think that it is a very devastating rebuttal. Besides pointing out quite carefully the logical contradictions and theological *non sequiturs* in their reasoning, he speaks quite clearly to the theological concerns of the TR advocates as he notes the ways they have mis- or over-interpreted Scripture in support of their views. By the time Carson finishes his discussion, the lack of real substance in the arguments of Fuller or Hill, *e.g*., is fairly apparent.

When one turns, however, to the works of the second group, which supports not the TR but the Majority text (of which the TR is only a corrupt late representative), and whose leading figures include Zane Hodges, Wilbur Pickering, and Jakob van Bruggen,[11] one encounters a much more sophisticated and creditable-appearing line of approach. The *ad hominem* arguments have largely (though not entirely) disappeared and *a priori* theological statements no longer form the primary basis of their arguments.[12] Instead one finds a determined effort to point out problems in the views of W estcott and Hort (especially in Pickering), and an attempt to set the preference for the Majority text on some kind of historically-grounded basis. These writers, moreover, in sharp contrast to the first group, have read and make liberal use of much of the recent literature on textual criticism.

The efforts of this group to rehabilitate the Majority text have not gone unnoticed. Carson's book devotes an appendix to a critique of Pickering, and both Gordon Fee and Richard A. Taylor have written critical reviews of it.[13] Pickering's response to the latter was later published along with a rejoinder by Taylor.[14] Also, a general article on the 'TR revival' by Fee was followed by a response from Hodges, which in turn was accompanied by a rejoinder and surrejoinder by each.[15] Thus there has been direct interaction between the proponents of the opposing views, and this primarily constitutes the 'Majority text debate' today.

More precisely, it is a debate over text and method. For Hodges *et al*. are contending not just for a different form of text, but for a completely different method of doing textual criticism. That is, they reject both the current critical texts and the approaches used in arriving at those texts. Herein

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[10] See n. 9 above.

[11] Zane C. Hodges, 'The Greek Text of the King James Version', *Bib Sac* 125 (1968), pp. 334-345; *idem*, 'Rationalism and Contemporary New Testament Criticism', *Bib Sac* 128 (1971), pp. 27-35; *idem*, 'A Defense of the Majority Text', printed syllabus notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, n.d.; Wilbur Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977); Jakob van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament* (trans. C. Kleijn; Winnipeg: Premier, 1976).

[12] One still finds, nonetheless, statements such as this by Hodges ('Rationalism', pp. 29-30): 'the logic of faith demands that documents so unique cannot have had a history wholly like that of secular writings'.

[13] Carson, *KJV Debate*, pp. 105-123; G. D. Fee, 'A Critique of W. N. *Pickering's The Identity of the New Testament Text*. A Review Article', *WestTheolJour* 41(1979), pp. 397-423; Richard A. Taylor, 'Queen Anne Resurrected? A Review Article', *JETS* 20 (1977), pp. 377-381.

[14] W. N. Pickering, " 'Queen Anne..." and All That: A Response', *JETS* 21 (1978), pp. 165-167; Taylor, " 'Queen Anne" Revisited: A Rejoinder', *JETS* 21 (1978), pp. 169-171.

[15] G. D. Fee, 'Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the Textus Receptus,' *JETS* 21 (1978), pp. 19-33; Zane Hodges, 'Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Response', *JETS* 21 (1978), pp. 143-155; Fee, 'Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Rejoinder', *JETS* 21 (1978), pp. 157-160; Hodges, 'Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Surrejoinder', *JETS* 21 (1978), pp. 161-164.

lies the real significance of the movement, for if they are right, the consequences of their approach would entail no less radical a shift today than that which occurred in 1881, when Westcott and Hort succeeded in overthrowing the long-dominant TR. Nor is the debate without pragmatic considerations, since the Majority text arguments appear to be having some impact on Bible translators and translations in the Third World.[16]

In what follows no attempt will be made to summarize the views of each participant in the

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debate, since this has largely been done in the literature just mentioned. Rather, the focus will be on the key issues raised by the Majority text proponents, and how well these have fared under the criticism they have received.

One may begin with the fact that some 80% to 90% of known manuscripts represent the Majority text-type. Hort, nevertheless, and most critics since, have rejected this majority in favour of the so-called Alexandrian text-type. Hort had two reasons for doing this, one theoretical and one historical. Theoretically, in accord with the genealogical principle, numbers mean nothing. As Colwell observed,

> Suppose that there are only ten copies of a document and that nine are all copied from one; then the majority can be safely rejected. Or suppose that the nine are copied from a lost manuscript and that this lost manuscript and the other one were both copied from the original; then the vote of the majority would not outweigh that of the minority ... a majority of manuscripts is not necessarily to be preferred as correct.[17]

It was by means of this *a priori* possibility that Westcott and Hort rejected the argument based on the numerical superiority of the Byzantine text.

Historically, Hort considered the Majority text to be a late recension characterized by inferior secondary readings.[18] He considered it to be late because it was found in none of the earliest manuscripts nor was it used by any ante-Nicene Father, and viewed its readings as secondary because when tested by the canons of internal evidence, such as harmonization *or brevior lectio potior* (preferring the shorter reading), they repeatedly proved to be inferior to those of other text-types. As, for its recensional character, he suggested that it was due to the editorial activity of Lucian of Antioch in the early fourth century.

[16] Cf. Eugene A. Nida, 'The New Testament Greek Text in the Third World', in E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee (eds.), *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis. Essays in honour of Bruce M. Metzger* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), pp. 375-380.
[17] E. C. Colwell, 'Genealogical Method: Its Achievements and Its Limitations', *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), p. 65.
[18] B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* [ii,] Introduction [and] Appendix (Cambridge, 1881), pp. 93-117, 132-139.

While most scholars continue to view the Majority text as late and secondary, Hort's explanation of its origin is widely rejected. There is no direct evidence that Lucian ever worked on the New Testament text, nor can the Majority text any longer be traced back to a single event. In fact, 'neither the origin of the Byzantine text viewed as entirety nor the origin of its various sub-forms in the course of history is known'.[19] Thus most textual critics are in the position of rejecting a key part of Hort's argument while continuing to accept his results.

It is here that the Majority text advocates raise their challenge. Hodges regards as unscientific any claim of progress towards recovery of the original which leaves 80% of the witnesses wrapped in obscurity. The key question in his opinion is how does one explain the relative uniformity of the overwhelming mass of manuscript witnesses. In place of the agnosticism of most critics, Hodges and his allies offer a reconstruction of the text that not only accounts for the origin and uniformity of the 80%, but of the (on their view) deviant 20% as well: the Byzantine text is original, and the other textual traditions represent expected deviations from it. Only this view, Hodges feels, adequately accounts for all the data.[20]

Like Hort's, their argument has two poles, one theoretical and one historical, of which the former is the key to their whole position. Hort, in discussing the genealogical principle, had observed that 'A theoretical presumption indeed remains that a majority of extant documents is more likely to represent a majority of ancestral documents at each stage of transmission than *vice versa*.[21] Hodges then develops the point:

> under the 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 for all practical purposes quite impossible for a later text-form to secure so one-sided a preponderance of extant witnesses.[22]

This argument is supported by a lengthy statistical analysis worked out by Hodges' brother, an Army statistician; Hodges concludes his brother's analysis by charging that the acceptance of modern critical texts 'constitutes nothing less than a wholesale rejection of probabilities on a sweeping scale!'[23]

While the statistical argument is central, the need to answer Hort's other two points is not overlooked. The absence of any early manuscript or patristic witnesses to the Majority text is

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[19] J. N. Birdsall, 'The New Testament Text' in P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 1 (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), p. 320.
[20] Hodges, 'Defense', p. 9.
[21] Westcott and Hort, *Introduction*, p. 45. Hort's next sentence, however, should be noted: 'But the presumption is too minute to weigh against the smallest tangible evidence of other kinds.'
[22] Hodges, 'Defense', p. 4.
[23] *Ibid*., p. 9.

countered in a number of ways. Both Hodges and van Bruggen note that all really early mss are from just one location,

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Egypt, and that there is no evidence preserved from any early Antiochian Father—thus with regard to Patristic evidence there is a gap just where one would expect to find the Byzantine text.[24] But this only meets an argument from silence with the same, and this line of reasoning cannot bear the weight placed upon it.[25] Thus Pickering's approach becomes the critical one. He asserts two points: many Majority readings are early, and early Fathers do support the Majority text. For this second point he relies entirely on the labours of Miller and Burgon, who collected a huge file of patristic citations of the New Testament.[26]

Since consideration of Hort's third point, the supposed inferiority of Majority readings, will take us into the crucial area of methodology, it may be well to pause at this point to evaluate the case for the Majority text made thus far. What is one to make of the contention that the 8:2 MS ratio of extant MSS in favour of the Majority text swings probability overwhelmingly in favour of it being original, and that the Majority text is found in early witnesses and Fathers?

The latter point, it appears, simply will not stand. With regard to the Fathers, Fee, who is among the most active and significant researchers in the area of patristic citations, has demonstrated quite clearly that Pickering is simply wrong; his list of nearly thirty Fathers who allegedly 'recognize' Majority readings has no basis in fact. No early Father witnesses to the Majority text; the only one prior to Chrysostom known to have used it was the heretical Asterius the Sophist (d. 341). Pickering's claim to the contrary overlooks completely the researches of the last eight decades. Further, in citing Burgon and Miller he is only repeating their errors. Miller, *e.g.*, claimed that seven Fathers supported the Majority reading in Matthew 9:13; Fee's check, however, showed that only one of the seven actually did so.[27] In sum, Pickering's whole point is without foundation.

Pickering and the others are correct, on the other hand, in saying that Majority readings are early, but they still fail to make their point, since they have confused readings with text-type. Many Majority readings are ancient readings; this has been known, though inadequately recognized, at least since the discovery of p 45 and p 46 over forty years ago.[28] But while individual readings are early, the Majority text as an identifiable grouping of readings is not. That is, one must distinguish between the earliest appearance of scattered readings and the earliest appearance of an identifiable pattern of readings. The distinctive grouping of variants that identifies a text as 'Alexandrian' can be found in the second century, as can that which marks the so-called 'Western' text-type. But while Majority readings can also be found in the second century, the

[24] *Ibid*., p. 15; van Bruggen, *Ancient Text*, pp. 22-23,25-26. For a discussion of their remarks about the destruction of manuscripts after copying, see Carson, *Plea*, pp. 47-48.
[25] Cf. Carson, *Plea*, p. 47, n. 5.
[26] Pickering, *Identity*, pp. 62-77.
[27] Fee, 'Critique', pp. 415-423.
[28] Cf. G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles* (London: British Academy, 1953), pp. 55-56, 150-151.

Majority text cannot; the characteristically Byzantine pattern of variants occurs only at a later time.

As for Hodges' statistical argument, it rests on a single crucial assumption: that the transmission process has been 'reasonably normal', as Hodges puts it; 'barring some radical dislocation', the point is valid. Thus the key question now becomes, has there been any 'radical dislocation' in the history of transmission? That is, has the transmission of the New Testament occurred in a relatively normal fashion, in which case the autographs are represented by the Majority, or are there reasons to think that the process has been disrupted in such a way as to account for the numerical preponderance of a secondary text form?

A quick historical overview suggests that the transmission process has been affected to such an extent that belief in a 'normal' process becomes difficult. The following points may be noticed:[29]

1. The destruction of manuscripts in pre-Constantinian persecutions. Diocletian's first Edict,[30] *e.g.*, included specific orders commanding the burning of copies of Scripture and other church books, which resulted in the loss of untold numbers of biblical manuscripts.[31] The only library which appears to have escaped Diocletian's systematic destruction, the 30,000 volume collection in Caesarea utilized by Origen, Pamphilius, Eusebius, and Jerome, was later destroyed by Moslems in AD 638—a loss of inestimable value.

2. The spread of Islam. The Muslim conquests of the seventh century included three of the five ancient patriarchates, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch; the Christian populations of North Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia either disappeared or were greatly reduced, with corresponding effects on the transmission of Scripture in those areas.[32]

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3. The reduction in the geographic range of Greek. At one time the *lingua franca* of the Empire, by the sixth century Greek was scarcely understood beyond the borders of the Byzantine empire.[33] It was virtually an unknown language in Europe from the time of Gregory the Great to the Renaissance.[34] This does not mean that there was no interest in the propagation of Scripture; the existence of over 8,000 manuscripts of the Vulgate, or of several thousand in Armenian,[35] for

[29] On points (1) and (2) below, see Bart D. Ehrman, 'New Testament Textual Criticism: Quest for Methodology' (M.Div. thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1981), pp 87-91; on (3), cf. Fee, 'Modern Textual Criticism', p. 30, and Carson, *Plea*, pp. 49-50.
[30] For the text of the Edict see G. E. M. De Ste. Croix, 'Aspects of the "Great" Persecution', *HarvTheolRev* 47 (1954), p. 75.
[31] See W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (London: OUP, 1965; New York: New York University Press, 1967), pp. 372-377.
[32] For Hodges' attempted reply, see 'A Response', p. 150.
[33] Which included, it must be remembered, Sicily, parts of southern Italy, and Venice. *Cf.* D. J. Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice. Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning From Byzantium to Western Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1962).
[34] B. Bischof, 'The Study of Foreign Languages in the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 36 (1961), pp. 209-224.
[35] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).

example, is proof to the contrary. It does mean, however, that Greek manuscripts were copied only in a limited geographic area. So while it is true that about 90% of extant manuscripts are of Byzantine character, it is also true that about 90% were written after the restriction of Greek to basically the confines of Byzantium.[36]

In light of these points, the central assumption upon which the statistical argument is based—that the transmission process was normal—appears to be invalid; the arbitrary character of these historical contingencies rules out any appeal to probability. Moreover, these observations are adequate to explain the numerical superiority of the Majority text: it was the dominant form in the only area where Greek was known during the late Middle Ages, when most extant manuscripts were written.

Final proof that the manuscripts known today do not accurately represent the state of affairs in earlier centuries comes from patristic references to variants once widely known but found today in only a few or even no witnesses. The ‘longer ending’ of Mark, 16:9-20, today is found in a large majority of Greek manuscripts; yet according to Jerome, it ‘is met with in only a few copies of the Gospel—almost all the codices of Greece being without this passage’.[37] Similarly, at Matthew 5:22 he notes that ‘most of the ancient copies’ do not contain the qualification ‘without cause’ (*eikē*), which, however, is found in the great majority today.[38] In the other direction, in the tenth century Arethas of Caesarea reports that in Romans 3:9 the reading of the oldest and most accurate manuscripts is *katechomen perisson*, a variant not found in any extant manuscript.[39] In Hebrews 2:9, the variant *chōris theou*, which occurs in numerous early Fathers both eastern and western, indicating that it once was quite widely known, is today found in only three manuscripts.[40] In other words, variants once apparently in the minority are today dominant, and *vice versa*; some once dominant have even disappeared. This fact alone rules out any attempt to settle textual questions by statistical means.[41]

So far, the analysis has focused on theoretical and historical issues. There remains to be examined the methodological side of the matter: how does one do textual criticism? On what basis does one decide between competing variants? To this the discussion now turns.

The central element in the procedures used by Westcott and Hort in establishing their text was internal evidence of documents.[42] Their high appraisal of the ‘Neutral’ tradition in preference to ‘Western’ or Byzantine readings rests essentially on internal evidence of readings, and it is upon this basis that most contemporary critics, even while rejecting their historical constructions, continue to follow them in viewing the Majority text as secondary.

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[36] Carson, *Plea*, p. 50.
[37] Bruce M. Metzger, ‘St Jerome’s explicit references to variant readings in manuscripts of the New Testament’, in E. Best and R. McL. Wilson (eds.), *Text and Interpretation* [Matthew Black Festschrift] (Cambridge: University Press, 1979), p. 182.
[38] *Ibid*., p. 180.
[39] Birdsall, ‘The New Testament Text’, p. 321.
[40] Zuntz, *Text*, pp. 34-35.
[41] *Ibid*., p. 84.
[42] Colwell, ‘Geneaological Method’, p. 66.

Majority text advocates, however, object quite strenuously to the use of the canons of internal evidence. These canons, they argue, are only very broad generalizations about scribal tendencies which are sometimes wrong and in any case frequently cancel each other out, leaving the critic free to manipulate the text according to his own subjective bias.[43] ‘The result is only opinion; it is not objectively verifiable.’[44] Thus they call for a total rejection of all use of internal evidence.

There is some truth in this point, which echoes the views of many recent critics such as Colwell, K. W. Clark, E. J. Epp, and Fee.[45] Some of the canons are only generalizations which do need to be refined in light of new data; *e.g.*, the papyri indicate that the maxim *lectio brevior potioris* not really applicable to manuscripts from the first three centuries.[46] That the

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canons are sometimes wrong, however, is hardly grounds for their total rejection; rather, it points out the need to use them with discrimination. Moreover, more than a few of them are ‘objectively verifiable’.[47] In any case, for precisely these reasons scarcely any contemporary critics rely solely on internal evidence in evaluating variants.[48] Instead, depending on the facts in any given case, they apply a *combination* of internal and external considerations, evaluating the character of the variants in light of the documentary evidence and vice versa in order to obtain a balanced view ofthe matter and as a check on purely subjective tendencies.[49]

In place of this use of both internal and external evidence, or ‘reasoned eclectism’, Pickering and van Bruggen call for the adoption of a strictly numerical approach: that reading supported by a majority of Greek manuscripts is to be accepted as original.[50] Pickering attempts to set forth a system of ‘weighing and counting’ manuscripts, based on a restatement of Burgon’s seven ‘notes of truth’, but this is misleading, since he explicitly rejects the use of internal criteria. Thus the only way to ‘weigh’ a manuscript is in comparison with the original, which is determined by counting—a circular procedure. Fee’s evaluation of Pickering’s seven criteria as only seven different ways of counting seems correct.[51]

[43] Hodges, ‘Defense’, pp. 16-17; ‘Greek Text’, pp. 342-344; ‘Rationalism’, pp. 30-34; van Bruggen, *Ancient Text*, pp. 30-35, 38.
[44] Pickering, *Identity*, p. 88.
[45] See especially G. D. Fee, ‘Rigorous or Reasoned Eclecticism: Which?’ in J. K. Elliot (ed.) *Studies in New Testament Language and Text* [Kilpatrick festschrift] (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp. 174-197; E. J. Epp, ‘The Eclectic Method in New Testament Textual Criticism: Solution or Symptom?’, *HarvTheolRev* 69 (1976), pp. 211-257.
[46] J. R. Royse, ‘Scribal Habits in the Transmission of New Testament Texts’, in W. D. O’Flaherty (ed.), *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts* (Berkeley, CA: GTU, 1979), pp. 143-150.
[47] Fee, ‘Modern Textual Criticism’, pp. 31-33.
[48] Basically only G. D. Kilpatrick and J. K. Elliot rely completely on internal criteria. Pickering’s entire treatment of ‘eclecticism’ (*Identity*, pp. 21-30) is confused, as Fee (‘Critique’, pp. 400-404) has pointed out.
[49] The best introductory treatment of this approach is still that of Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: University Press, [2] 1968), pp. 207-246.
[50] Pickering, *Identity*, p. 138; van Bruggen, *Ancient Text*, p. 38.
[51] “Fee, ‘Critique’, p. 423.

Fee further points out that the proposal only to count manuscripts 'simply eliminates textual criticism altogether"[52]—a point explicitly acknowledged by van Bruggen:

> we do not exclude in advance every thought of an emendation of the Byzantine text. But that emendation may only take place if it can be demonstrated clearly to everyone that the Church had lost a good reading or exchanged it for a bad reading, and why. In principle such an argumentation on the ground of external evidence must remain possible, but in practice it is almost impossible in the present situation because we only have little and fragmentary textual and historical material from the first centuries.[53]

But this then means that one must accept a text with errors in it, since van Bruggen earlier acknowledged the presence of secondary readings in the Majority text.[54] Thus a method is urged for adoption which both guarantees the presence of corruption in the resulting text and disavows any attempt to remove it.

Hodges here differs sharply from the others since he clearly has no desire to abandon textual criticism and is currently engaged in editing a new edition of the Majority text.[55] A preliminary fascicle containing the text of the Apocalypse has already appeared.[56] The text has been constructed on the basis of a genealogical approach, variants being considered in light of a stemma of manuscripts that Hodges has constructed. It is interesting to notice that one so committed in principle to the concept of a majority text occasionally accepts as original the reading of a minority of manuscripts on the basis of genealogical considerations.[57] Since, however, he acknowledges the impossibility of reconstructing a stemma of manuscripts for the other books of the New Testament, and does not discuss in the fascicle how he proposes to edit them, further comments on his method must await the publication of the full volume.

Hodges deserves much credit for his efforts to publish a critical edition of the Majority text, which will differ considerably from the TR,[58] and should prove useful to all textual critics. One may hope that its appearance will lead to a more accurate assessment of the Byzantine text-type, whose dominance seems to be later and history more complex than many now realize.[59]

But while the appearance of a new Majority text will be welcome, one doubts that many will feel compelled to lay aside their critical texts in its favour. The case for the Majority text, particularly with regard to Patristic references and statistics, simply is not congruent with the known evidence.

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[52] *Ibid*.
[53] Van Bruggen, *Ancient Text*, p. 38.
[54] *Ibid*., p. 35.
[55] To be published by Thomas Nelson and Sons.
[56] Zane Hodges and A. L. Farstad (eds.), *The Apocalypse According to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Nelson, 1982).
[57] Hodges, *Apocalypse*, xviii.
[58] Estimates of the differences range from one to several thousand.
[59] E. C. Colwell, 'The Complex Character of the Late Byzantine Text of the Gospels', *JBL* 54 (1935), pp. 211-221; J. N. Birdsall, 'The Text of the Gospels in Photius: II', *JTS* n. s. 7 (1956), p. 198.

At the same time, it must be stated that the Majority text advocates have highlighted some of the real questions and issues facing contemporary New Testament textual criticism. Their criticisms serve as a salutary reminder of the provisional character of current critical texts. The fact that the UBS^3 and Nestle-Aland^{26} editions are identical does not mean that the 'original Greek' has been perfectly recovered! To treat what is printed in these editions as if it were the original is to commit the ironic

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mistake of substituting a 'new TR' for an old one.[60] In other words, much work towards the recovery of the original text yet remains to be done. Certainly a great deal of progress has been made in the century since the original 'TR debate', but this should not mislead anyone as to the scope of the tasks still to be accomplished. If the present TR debate should stimulate people to work in this area, it will have served a useful purpose.[61]

[60] Indeed, there is some concern that the now-identical UBS^3/NA^{26} text may be in the process of becoming a new 'TR'; *cf*. H.W. Bartsch, 'Ein neuer Textus Receptus für das griechische Neue Testament?', *NTS* 27 (1981), pp. 585-592, and the reply by K. Aland under the same title in *NTS* 28 (1982), pp. 145-153.

[61] Since writing this article, the author has received a copy of the complete *Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, ed. Hodges and Farstad (Nelson, 1982). Unfortunately there is here no further elucidation of Hodges' text critical method, inasmuch as the Introduction to the complete volume is identical to that of the preliminary fascicle. Hodges does express a clear commitment to the genealogical approach, claiming that it is the only logical method, but his stemmatic reconstructions seem to rest on the problematic assumption that the Majority text must be closer to the original. Thus apparently he still has not recognized the force of the point (discussed above) made by Hort and Colwell. It is difficult, however, to know if this is really the case, because he leaves so much unsaid in his preface.