

## THE MAJORITY-TEXT THEORY: HISTORY, METHODS AND CRITIQUE

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For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, NT textual critics could speak with one accord: The *textus receptus* (TR) had finally been laid to rest. In 1899 Marvin Vincent referred to it as an "historical monument" that "has been summarily rejected as a basis for a correct text."<sup>1</sup> A. T. Robertson in 1926 declared: "The Textus Receptus is as dead as Queen Anne."<sup>2</sup> Eight years later Leo Vaganay similarly pronounced last rites over the corpse.<sup>3</sup> And just three decades ago Bruce Metzger could justifiably dismiss the contemporary defense of the Byzantine text in a mere footnote.<sup>4</sup>

The situation today is disturbingly different. Gone is the era when KJV/TR advocates could be found only in the backwaters of anti-intellectual American fundamentalism. A small but growing number of students of the NT in North America and, to a lesser degree, in Europe (in particular the Netherlands and Great Britain) are embracing a view that was left for dead more than a century ago—namely, that the original text is to be found in a majority of mss.<sup>5</sup> The majority-text (MT)<sup>6</sup> theory is also making

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<sup>1</sup> M. R. Vincent, *A History of the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1899) 175

<sup>2</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Studies in the Text of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926) 53, citing C. H. Turner, *The Study of the New Testament* 49

<sup>3</sup> L. Vaganay, *Initiation à la critique textuelle néotestamentaire* (Paris, 1934), English translation, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London, 1937) 173

<sup>4</sup> B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford, 1964) 136 n. 1. Metzger merely speaks of "the anachronistic views of Burgon resuscitated recently by Edward F. Hills" without feeling the necessity of a critique. In the same year J. H. Greenlee could speak of the work of Burgon and Miller in the last decades of the nineteenth century as "the final defense of the Textus Receptus." He, too, found Hills' resurrection of Burgon's views "surprising," calling the work a "scholarly curiosity" (*Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964] 81-82)

<sup>5</sup> The Majority Text Society (established in 1988) after two years in existence could boast a membership of 160 in seventeen countries (W. N. Pickering, "State of the Union—Year Two" [unpublished paper circulated from the president to members of the Majority Text Society, January 1991]). A preliminary membership list of 121 sent to members of the society in 1989 (and to which I have access) included eight from Great Britain, three from the Netherlands, two from elsewhere in Europe (though none in Germany), and ten from third-world countries (principally Brazil). Membership required the signing of the following credo: "I believe that the best approach to the original wording of the New Testament is through the Majority Text, or I wish to cooperate in testing that hypothesis." Consequently not all the members embrace the MT theory. Besides the Majority Text Society there are two other societies that support the "traditional text." The Trinitarian Bible Society (Great Britain), in existence since 1831, has since

inroads into third-world missionary and translation endeavor.<sup>7</sup> As in the parallel case of Marcan priority, proponents of a minority view are trying to reopen an issue once thought to be settled. Significantly, in the third edition of *The Text of the New Testament* it was now necessary for Metzger to devote five pages to a discussion of the resuscitation of John Burgon's views.<sup>8</sup>

This resuscitation is so multifaceted that a mere critique would be overly simplistic. Consequently this paper will attempt three general objectives: (1) to survey the history of the resuscitation, (2) to examine briefly the various methods within the traditional-text camp, and (3) to offer a critique of the various strands, as well as of the unifying presuppositions, of the MT theory.

### I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MODERN MAJORITY-TEXT MOVEMENT

To understand the modern MT movement, one must begin with Burgon. Although there was a hiatus of almost seven decades between Burgon and the next scholarly defender of the traditional text, virtually all such defenders today rely on Burgon for impetus and articulation. Hence before looking at the modern period it is necessary to examine Burgon's views in some detail.

The MT movement (if I may speak a bit hyperbolically) began immediately after the epoch-making publication of B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort's

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1958 vigorously supported the TR under T. H. Brown's leadership (see D. D. Shields, *Recent Attempts to Defend the Byzantine Text of the Greek New Testament* [Ph.D. dissertation, Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985] 100-120). The Dean Burgon Society, founded in Philadelphia on November 3-4, 1978, by D. A. Waite, D. O. Fuller and E. L. Bynum, also staunchly defends the TR (see Shields, *Recent Attempts* 42-66). The name is a curiosity since Burgon's views would disqualify him from membership in the society named after him (see below).

<sup>6</sup> In this essay "majority text" (or MT) refers to the text found in the majority of extant Greek witnesses. *Majority Text* refers to the published text edited by Z. C. Hodges and A. L. Farstad (*The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* [2d ed., Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985]), *textus receptus* (TR), a name originating in an advertising blurb in the second edition (1633) of the Elzevir brothers' Greek NT, refers to any edition of the Greek NT that is based primarily on Erasmus' text, "traditional text," an intentionally ambiguous term, refers to that form of text that is found in either the TR or the *Majority Text* or a proximity of either of these—in other words, some form of the Byzantine text. Advocates of the traditional text, then, would include strict TR proponents as well as MT proponents.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. E. A. Nida, "The New Testament Greek Text in the Third World," *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis* (ed. E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee, Oxford: Clarendon, 1981) 375-380. Pickering, the first president of the Majority Text Society, may be partially responsible in that he is a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators to Brazil. Cf. also J. Callow, who, as a Wycliffe translator, asks his colleagues to have an open mind about the MT ("An Open Letter Regarding Textual Criticism," *Notes on Translation* 90 [1982] 33-35).

<sup>8</sup> B. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (3d, enlarged ed., New York: Oxford, 1992) 283-284, 290-293. Unless otherwise stated, all citations of Metzger's *Text* will be of this edition. Remarkably C. B. Amphoux's "thoroughly updated" 1991 revision of Vaganay's *Introduction* simply echoes Vaganay's opinion that "this notorious text is now dead, it is to be hoped for ever" (L. Vaganay, *Introduction* [2d ed., Cambridge, 1991] 152). None of the modern advocates of the Byzantine text is mentioned anywhere in the book.

*The New Testament in the Original Greek* and concomitantly the *Revised Version of the New Testament* (both in 1881). *Inter alia*, Westcott and Hort argued cogently for the inferiority and secondary nature of the Syrian (Byzantine) text-type.<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly, these volumes provided a catalyst for reaction by many ecclesiastics who favored the traditional text. Chief among them was John W. Burgon, dean of Chichester. With a vitriolic pen he marshaled several attacks against the dons of Cambridge.<sup>10</sup> The attacks consisted primarily of three elements: (1) a condemnation of Westcott and Hort's favorite MSS (X, B and, to a lesser degree, A, C and D), (2) a refutation of the excision/alteration of certain passages found in the KJV/TR (esp. Mark 16:9–20; John 7:53–8:11; 1 Tim 3:16), and (3) an articulation of his own method, which amounted to (with few exceptions) a defense of the readings found in the majority of MSS.<sup>11</sup>

The bedrock of Burgon's text-critical views was a belief in verbal, plenary inspiration and the doctrine he inferred from it—providential preservation. "It is chiefly from inattention to this circumstance that misconception prevails in that department of Sacred Science known as 'Textual Criticism.'"<sup>12</sup> He argued:

There exists no reason for supposing that the Divine Agent, who in the first instance thus gave to mankind the Scriptures of Truth, straightway abdicated His office, took no further care of His work, abandoned those precious writings to their fate. That a perpetual miracle was wrought for their preservation—that copyists were protected against the risk of error, or evil men prevented from

<sup>9</sup> B F Westcott and F J A Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, [ii,] *Introduction* [and] *Appendix* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1881) 93–119

<sup>10</sup> Burgon published three articles in the *Quarterly Review* that were later incorporated and slightly revised in a book, *The Revision Revised* (London: John Murray, 1883). This work has been reprinted in whole or in part several times by followers of Burgon. He also wrote several other volumes, including *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel according to St Mark Vindicated against Recent Critical Objectors and Established* (Oxford: James Parker, 1871) and two volumes completed by E. Miller: *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established* (London: George Bell, 1896) and *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (London: George Bell, 1896).

<sup>11</sup> Burgon articulated his method in "seven Tests of Truth": "1. Antiquity, or Primitiveness, 2. Consent of Witnesses, or Number, 3. Variety of Evidence, or Catholicity, 4. Respectability of Witnesses, or Weight, 5. Continuity, or Unbroken Tradition, 6. Evidence of the Entire Passage, or Context, 7. Internal Considerations, or Reasonableness" (*Traditional Text* 28–29). The net results of this approach is in reality a support of the MT almost all the time. G. R. Hudson notes that Burgon's resultant text differs little from the *Majority Text* ("Changes that Burgon Made in the TR" [unpublished paper circulated to members of the Majority Text Society, 1990]). Burgon was able to apply his text-critical principles toward the creation of his own NT text only to Matthew 1–14. But here, of the 52 variations between the TR and the *Majority Text*, Burgon sides with the *Majority Text* 47 times, with the TR twice (both where there is a significant split in the majority of MSS), and opts for three readings not shared by either the TR or the *Majority Text*. We may note further that Pickering tactfully equates Burgon's seven tests of truth with majority rule. In his concluding summary on Burgon's method he states: "I submit that due process requires us to receive as original that form of the text which is supported by the majority of those witnesses" (W. N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* [rev. ed., Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980] 148).

<sup>12</sup> Burgon, *Traditional Text* 9.

adulterating shamefully copies of the Deposit—no one, it is presumed, is so weak as to suppose But it is quite a different thing to claim that all down the ages the sacred writings must needs have been God's peculiar care, that the Church under Him has watched over them with intelligence and skill, has recognized which copies exhibit a fabricated, which an honestly transcribed text, has generally sanctioned the one, and generally disallowed the other I am utterly disinclined to believe—so grossly improbable does it seem—that at the end of 1800 years 995 copies out of every thousand, suppose, will prove untrustworthy, and that the one, two, three, four or five which remain, whose contents were till yesterday as good as unknown, will be found to have retained the secret of what the Holy Spirit originally inspired I am utterly unable to believe, in short, that God's promise has so entirely failed, that at the end of 1800 years much of the text of the Gospel had in point of fact to be picked by a German critic out of a wastepaper basket in the convent of St Catherine, and that the entire text had remained in neglect during fifteen centuries, and had probably owed their survival to that neglect, whilst hundreds of others had been thumbed to pieces, and had bequeathed their witness to copies made from them<sup>13</sup>

Here, in seed-plot, are the main arguments of the MT theory to this day (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 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 There is also a fifth point to be inferred from these four (5) 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

The dean's works have formed the basis for virtually every MT advocate's arguments in this century,<sup>14</sup> to the extent that almost nothing new has come from the MT quarters since Burgon Further, such heavy dependence on Burgon explains why so many MT advocates argue against the Westcott-Hort theory *per se* rather than against the reasoned eclecticism of today<sup>15</sup>

Surprisingly, as much energy as he expended on a defense of the Byzantine text, Burgon failed to distance himself from the TR Although his writings included brief sections such as "Traditional Text not identical with the

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* 11–12

<sup>14</sup> See Shields, *Recent Attempts*, for instance The first three chapters are entitled "The Popular Defenders of the Textus Receptus," "The Scholarly Defenders of the Textus Receptus," and "The Defenders of the Majority Text" In each chapter there is a section or two on Burgon and the impetus he provided for the various groups Today there is even a Dean Burgon Society which has virtually canonized his views D O Fuller, J P Green, Sr, D A Waite and others continue to reprint his works

<sup>15</sup> What was barely excusable in 1951 (cf A Martin, *A Critical Examination of the Westcott Hort Textual Theory* [Th D dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1951]) becomes intolerable in 1980 (Pickering, *Identity*, two chapters, comprising almost 70 pages of text, are dedicated to a critique of the Westcott Hort theory, the seventh chapter, "Determining the Identity of the Text," is merely a rehash of Burgon's seven tests of truth) So out of date are Pickering's arguments that G D Fee, in reviewing this work, could speak of Pickering's "neglect of literally scores of scholarly studies that contravene his assertions," adding that "the overlooked bibliography here is so large

Received Text,"<sup>16</sup> and rare statements disavowing the TR,<sup>17</sup> there is no discussion of Acts 8:37, the *Comma Johanneum*, or the last six verses of the Apocalypse—well-known and theologically significant passages where the MT parts company with the TR. In spite of Burgon's friends calling his critics' imprecision in this matter "scurrilous,"<sup>18</sup> the fault lay with him as much as with them. The far-reaching results of Burgon's failure have been two-pronged: (1) To this day TR advocates claim Burgon as their champion,<sup>19</sup> and (2) nontraditionalists confuse the TR with the MT.<sup>20</sup>

Recent MT proponents frequently claim that Burgon's arguments have never been answered.<sup>21</sup> Yet in part the reason for no point-for-point rebuttal is due to Burgon's acid pen.<sup>22</sup> Westcott once commented: "I cannot read Mr. Burgon yet. A glance at one or two sentences leads me to think that his violence answers himself."<sup>23</sup> Had Burgon tempered his arguments, perhaps the discussion would have proved more profitable for both sides. Unfortunately he generated more heat than light. Equally unfortunate, his attitude set the tone for later generations of MT advocates.<sup>24</sup>

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that it can hardly be given in a footnote. For example, I know of eleven different studies on Origen alone that contradict all of Pickering's discussion, and not one of them is even recognized to have existed" ("A Critique of W N Pickering's *The Identity of the New Testament Text* A Review Article," *WTJ* 41 [1978-79] 415)

<sup>16</sup> Burgon, *Traditional Text* 5 (so titled in the table of contents, though not in the text proper)

<sup>17</sup> His clearest statement to this effect is buried in a footnote, although he cites no specific references where the TR errs (Burgon, *Revision Revised* 21 n 2)

<sup>18</sup> Burgon "did not contend for acceptance of the 'Textus Receptus,' as has so often been scurrilously stated" (H C Hoskier, *Codex B and Its Allies A Study and an Indictment* [London Bernard Quaritch, 1914] 1 415)

<sup>19</sup> E.g., as mentioned in n 5 *supra*, Burgon's views would disqualify him from membership in the society named after him since that society staunchly defends the TR

<sup>20</sup> See later discussion

<sup>21</sup> Cf *True or False? The Westcott Hort Textual Theory Examined* (ed D O Fuller, Grand Rapids Grand Rapids International, 1973) 12, P Mauro, "Which Version?", *True or False?* 95, W N Pickering, "Contribution of John William Burgon to New Testament [Textual] Criticism," *True or False?* 304. The first to articulate that Burgon's views were unanswered and unanswerable was Burgon himself (*Revision Revised* 36). One is tempted to think that these later writers have simply taken Burgon's word on the matter without bothering to research the discussion in the last 100 years.

<sup>22</sup> Burgon's attitude can be seen in the Scripture quotation that introduces his *Revision Revised*: "It is happened unto them according to the true proverb, ΚΥΩΝ ἐπιτρῆρας ἐπὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις ἐξέρραμα" (2 Pet 2 22)—a text that Burgon here applies to Westcott and Hort. A perusal of the work will disclose a plethora of examples of inflammatory language aimed at the two Cambridge scholars. F G Kenyon, a contemporary of Burgon, pointed out that the "unquestionable learning of [the articles which became *Revision Revised*] was largely neutralised by the extravagance and intemperance of their tone" (*Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* [4th ed., London Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939] 242). Even A L Farstad, the current president of the Majority Text Society, concedes that Burgon's style is "caustic" ("Why I Became a Majority Text Advocate" [unpublished paper distributed to members of the Majority Text Society, n d ] 3). Cf also Martin, who admits that Burgon was "irascible," "smug," "dogmatic" and "rash" (*Westcott-Hort* 52, 69).

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Westcott to Hort, October 28, 1881 (*Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott* [ed A Westcott, London Macmillan, 1903] 1 404)

<sup>24</sup> The content of this invective usually involves charges of heresy. For example, D O Fuller speaks of "bastard Bibles" (*Counterfeit or Genuine Mark 16? John 8?* [2d ed., Grand Rapids Grand Rapids International, 1978] 10). He adds further that the devil is the mastermind behind

After Burgon's death in 1888 no scholar took up the cause of the traditional text until 1956. Traditionalists, however, frequently allege that F. H. A. Scrivener<sup>25</sup> and Herman C. Hoskier carried Burgon's torch through the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>26</sup> *Inter alia*, Scrivener was well known as Hort's staunchest critic on the *Revised Version* committee, and Hoskier wrote a thorough critique of codex B,<sup>27</sup> one of Hort's favored MSS. There is no question of either Scrivener's or Hoskier's scholarship. And although it is true that neither Scrivener nor Hoskier embraced the Westcott-Hort theory, it is equally true that neither of them embraced even the fundamentals of Burgon's views. Scrivener, for example, atheized several hallmark MT readings such as John 7:53-8:11 and *theos* in 1 Tim 3:16,<sup>28</sup> embraced standard internal criteria,<sup>29</sup> and explicitly stated that the Byzantine cursives on which the MT theory rests are without much value.<sup>30</sup> None of this is compatible with Burgon's views.

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this defection from the KJV and TR "Born-again Christians in this twentieth century are facing the most malicious and vicious attack upon God's inspired Holy Word since the Garden of Eden And this attack began in its modern form in the publication of the Revised Version of the Scriptures in 1881 in England" (p 9) D A Waite argues that Westcott and Hort were unregenerate, unsaved, apostate and heretical (*The Theological Heresies of Westcott and Hort* [Collingswood Bible for Today, 1979] 39-42) W N Pickering, whose master's thesis was on Burgon's value to NT textual criticism, declares that the most ancient MSS came from a "sewer pipe" (*An Evaluation of the Contribution of John William Burgon to New Testament Textual Criticism* [Th M thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968] 93) Elsewhere Pickering states that "Aleph and B have lied," that "Aleph is clearly a bigger liar than B," and that all the ancient MSS on which modern critical texts are based are "convicted liars all" (*Identity*<sup>1</sup> 126, 135) For multiplied illustrations of this kind of fulminatory language cf D B Wallace, "Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism," *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1992) 23-26<sup>25</sup> On Scrivener cf Martin, *Westcott Hort* 54-57, R Anderson, "The Bible and Modern Criticism," *Which Bible?* (5th ed, ed D O Fuller, Grand Rapids Grand Rapids International, 1975) 120, E F Hills, *The King James Version Defended!* (4th ed, Des Moines Christian Research, 1984) 192, D A Waite, *Defending the King James Bible* (Collingswood Bible for Today, 1992) 45-46, 139, 298, 307, on Hoskier cf Pickering, *Identity* 60, 145, A Martin, "Examination of the Westcott-Hort Textual Theory," *Which Bible?* (ed Fuller) 153, 164, 166

<sup>26</sup> Other names are also sometimes mentioned on behalf of the traditional text, though their impact was minimal Abbe P Martin became the defender of the TR in France, but he did little more than echo Burgon's voice, cf J-P P Martin, *Introduction a la critique textuelle du Nouveau Testament* (7 vols, Paris, 1883-86) Cf also B G Wilkinson, whose *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* (Washington n p, 1930) was reprinted in *Which Bible?* 176-318, A Ivanov, whose Russian Orthodox views are quite compatible with the traditional text Ivanov's essays from the *Zhurmal Moskovskoi Patriarchu* (1954-56) are summarized by R P Casey, "A Russian Orthodox View of New Testament Textual Criticism," *Theology* 60 (1957) 50-54 (mentioned by Metzger, *Text* 256)

<sup>27</sup> Hoskier, *Codex B*

<sup>28</sup> F H A Scrivener, *Six Lectures on the Text of the New Testament and the Ancient Manuscripts which Contain It* (Cambridge Bell, 1875) 118-209 Of the 53 passages discussed, NA<sup>26</sup> disagrees with *Majority Text* 33 times (not counting those places where Scrivener adopts a reading found in neither) Of these 33 instances, Scrivener adopts the NA<sup>26</sup> reading 22 times, the *Majority Text* reading 11 In *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (4th ed, 2 vols, London Bell, 1894) he discusses virtually the same passages with almost identical conclusions (2 321-412)

<sup>29</sup> Scrivener, *Plain Introduction* 2 244-256, cf his specific discussion in *Six Lectures* of 1 Cor 15 49 (pp 183-186), Col 2 2 (pp 187-189), Jas 2 18 (pp 198-199)

<sup>30</sup> Scrivener, *Six Lectures* 188 (in commenting on Col 2 2)

Hoskier, too, has been misread. His statement in 1914 that "Burgon's position remains absolutely unshaken,"<sup>31</sup> though a favorite among MT advocates,<sup>32</sup> has been stripped of its context and caveats.<sup>33</sup> In reality he disagreed with Burgon on several important points. For example, he embraced the internal canons of the harder and shorter reading,<sup>34</sup> adopted readings found in a small minority of MSS, especially of the Western strain,<sup>35</sup> and explicitly argued against the general value of the Byzantine cursives.<sup>36</sup> All of this is decidedly against the MT theory. Yet Hoskier has been hailed as "one of us" by MT advocates because he not only argued against  $\kappa$ B readings—especially against the backdrop of the TR—but because he also wanted to dump all twentieth-century heresies at Hort's doorstep.<sup>37</sup>

The use of Scrivener and Hoskier by modern-day traditional-text advocates reveals a disturbing twofold pattern. On the one hand, their perception of *results* determines allegiance. Questions of method rarely surface. All that matters is that the traditional text is affirmed. On the other hand, their *perception* of results is not based on an examination of a given scholar's writings. Typically, little more is known about his views than that he is theologically conservative, makes positive references to the TR, and criticizes Hort's preferred MSS. Because of such shibboleths MT proponents have been repeatedly misled into soliciting unwitting support from the dead voices of the past. Such is not only intellectually dishonest but also raises questions as to what drives this need for champions.

Through the first half of the twentieth century, then, the traditional text was supported unequivocally by only one *bona fide* scholar, John W. Burgon. Almost seven decades elapsed before the traditional text found another scholarly advocate. The first (and to date only) textual critic to defend the *textus receptus per se* in this century was Edward F. Hills.<sup>38</sup> Hills' credentials were unimpeachable: a bachelor's degree from Yale (1934) followed by a Th.D.

<sup>31</sup> Hoskier, *Codex B* 1 415

<sup>32</sup> Cf e.g. Martin, *Examination* 153

<sup>33</sup> He is here referring to Burgon's assessment of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Hoskier amended this remark with a footnote, arguing that "we must revise his position" in that Burgon incorrectly used patristic evidence and undervalued D.

<sup>34</sup> Cf H. C. Hoskier, *Concerning the Genesis of the Versions of the NT* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1910–11) 1 23–24, *Codex B* 1 460, 435 (though Hoskier quickly added the caveat "This does not commit me to the 'shorter' text theory in its fullest sense")

<sup>35</sup> Cf his general statements in *Codex B* 1 vi, 406, 414, 460 ("Bezae, being free from extraneous text influences, has a large value when used in connection with the Syriac documents"), 469. More specifically he adopts Western and/or minority readings for Luke 11 52 (*ibid.* 421), Acts 2 24 (*ibid.*), 21 14 (*ibid.*), Matt 17 20 (*ibid.* 435), 17 25 (*ibid.*), Luke 23 8 (*ibid.* 456–460, here Hoskier adopts the word order found only in  $\Psi$  241 six lectionaries and one other Greek witness)

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 1 434, 467

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 1 468–487 is a litany of "Hortian heresies"

<sup>38</sup> To be sure, others have defended the TR *per se*. But they are either not acknowledged textual critics (as in the case of T. P. Letis) or their works are not on a scholarly level (e.g. T. H. Brown of the Trinitarian Bible Society or D. A. Waite of the Dean Burgon Society). There have also been a few who have defended the MT but who again are not typically acknowledged as textual critics (e.g. Martin, *Westcott Hort*)

from Harvard with a dissertation on textual criticism (1946).<sup>39</sup> How was it possible for a man with such credentials ultimately to embrace the TR? Even though he ascribed no value to the Byzantine text in his dissertation,<sup>40</sup> in reality he had never left the TR. His protégé, Theodore P. Letis, writes:

At Chicago, Hills realized that unless one accepted the dogma that the Byzantine text type was of late date, and hence unimportant, one could never gain credibility within the text criticism guild. Whatever his compromises, by 1952, Hills was ready to return full circle to his historic Reformed roots and affirm with the Westminster Confession, the priority of the Textus Receptus. Only now he would do so from fully within the inner *sanctum sanctorum* of the text criticism citadel.<sup>41</sup>

Hills' first and major volume in defense of the TR was *The King James Version Defended!*, originally published in 1956.<sup>42</sup> He argued even more strongly than did Burgon from providential preservation,<sup>43</sup> for in his view the TR and the not the Byzantine MSS *per se* was the closest text to the autographa. In fact his dogmatic convictions about providential preservation led him to conclude that Erasmus was divinely guided when he introduced Vg readings into his Greek text.<sup>44</sup>

Letis claims that Hills "left behind a legacy. Historians will be forced to regard him as the father of what is now regarded as the revived ecclesiastical text."<sup>45</sup> But this is an exaggeration. Those who came after him, generally finding him too quirkish (via his strong attachment to the TR), derived their impetus elsewhere. Even after Hills' book had circulated for nine years G. D. Kilpatrick could say, "No theoretical [as opposed to theological] justification for the serious use of the *Textus Receptus* has been advanced."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Hills also received a Th B from Westminster Theological Seminary (1938) and a Th M from Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA (1940), and began a doctorate (unsuccessfully) at the University of Chicago before being admitted to Harvard Divinity School. For a detailed and unashamedly sympathetic biography of Hills see T. P. Letis, *Edward Freer Hills's Contribution to the Revival of the Ecclesiastical Text* (Th M thesis, Candler School of Theology, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> E. F. Hills, *The Caesarean Family of New Testament Manuscripts* (Th D dissertation, Harvard Divinity School, 1946). See especially the final chapter in which Westcott-Hort's view of the Byzantine text is explicitly affirmed.

<sup>41</sup> Letis, *Hills's Contribution* 150–151.

<sup>42</sup> His other well known work in this area was the popularly conceived *Believing Bible Study*. Cf. Letis, *Hills's Contribution* 198–200, for a nearly complete list of Hills' literary remains.

<sup>43</sup> Note the following quotation that links inspiration with preservation and both to accessibility: "If the doctrine of the Divine inspiration of the Old and New Testament scriptures is a true doctrine, the doctrine of providential preservation of the scriptures must also be a true doctrine. It must be that down through the centuries God has exercised a special providential control over the copying of the scriptures and the preservation and use of the copies, so that trustworthy representatives of the original text have been available to God's people in every age" (*King James Version Defended!* 2).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 199–202. He even argued for the authenticity of the *Comma Johanneum* (*King James Version Defended!* 209–213).

<sup>45</sup> Letis, *Hills's Contribution* 7.

<sup>46</sup> G. D. Kilpatrick, "The Greek New Testament Text of Today and the *Textus Receptus*," *The New Testament in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* (ed. H. Anderson and W. Barclay, Oxford: Blackwell, 1965) 189.



The situation changed, however, in 1970 because of an article written by Zane C. Hodges of Dallas Theological Seminary.<sup>47</sup> His essay was the only piece in Fuller's *Which Bible?* to interact with the data. In fact it alone made an impression on Gordon D. Fee sufficient for him to pen an article<sup>48</sup> that sparked a lively debate between Hodges and Fee within the pages of *JETS* and elsewhere.<sup>49</sup> Consequently most will regard Hodges, rather than Hills,<sup>50</sup> as the real Burgon *redivivus*.<sup>51</sup>

Hodges' article<sup>52</sup> and subsequent interaction with Fee was accompanied by two other significant works:<sup>53</sup> a slender volume by Jakob van Bruggen<sup>54</sup> that was considered "erudite" by one reviewer,<sup>55</sup> and Wilbur N. Pickering's *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, a book that gives the most systematic defense of the MT yet in print (even though it is tarished, *inter alia*, by a lack of interaction with the primary data).<sup>56</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Z C Hodges, "The Greek Text of the King James Version," *BSac* 125 (1968) 334-345. Though originally published in his school's journal in 1968 it gained a much wider audience when reprinted in the first edition of *Which Bible?* (1970). Unless otherwise noted, all references are to the original article.

<sup>48</sup> G D Fee, "Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the *Textus Receptus*," *JETS* 21 (1978) 19-33.

<sup>49</sup> Hodges responded to Fee's article with "Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text A Response," *JETS* 21 (1978) 143-155. Fee then countered with "Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text A Rejoinder," *JETS* 21 (1978) 157-160, to which Hodges responded with "Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text A Surrejoinder," *JETS* 21 (1978) 161-164. Fee and Hodges continued to interact with each other's views outside of *JETS* as well. Most notably, Hodges wrote "The Angel at Bethesda—John 5 4," *BSac* 136 (1979) 25-39, which Fee answered with "On the Inauthenticity of John 5 3b-4," *EvQ* 54 (1982) 207-218.

<sup>50</sup> This is not to say that Hills' influence has been nil. It has spawned at least one dissertation dedicated to a refutation of his views (R A Taylor, *The Modern Debate concerning the Greek Textus Receptus A Critical Examination of the Textual Views of Edward F Hills* [Ph D dissertation, Greenville: Bob Jones University, 1973]) as well as one thesis in his defense (Letis, *Hills's Contribution*).

<sup>51</sup> Indeed, even Letis conceded Hodges' influence to the point that he erroneously assumed Dallas Theological Seminary's confessional stance to include a belief in the traditional text (*Hills's Contribution* 167-168).

<sup>52</sup> Hodges has written other important essays in defense of the MT as well: "The Critical Text and the Alexandrian Family of Revelation," *BSac* 119 (1962) 129-138, *A Defense of the Majority Text* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Book Store, n d), "The Ecclesiastical Text of Revelation—Does it Exist?," *BSac* 118 (1961) 113-122, "Rationalism and Contemporary New Testament Textual Criticism," *BSac* 128 (1971) 27-35, "The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7 53-8 11) The Text," *BSac* 136 (1979) 318-332.

<sup>53</sup> We are not here including as "significant" the three volumes edited by D O Fuller (*Which Bible?* [1970], *True or False?* [1973], and *Counterfeit or Genuine, Mark 16? John 8?* [1978]) as these are, for the most part, either reprints of older works (such as Burgon's) or they do not deal with the data.

<sup>54</sup> J van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament* (Winnipeg: Premier, 1976).

<sup>55</sup> D A Carson, *King James Version Debate A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 40 n 3.

<sup>56</sup> "What is most noticeable in this book of 179 pages is the paucity of *examples* of the method at work. The few that are given (e.g., 1 Tim 3 16, p. 112) are fine examples of *how not* to do textual criticism, since Pickering simply ignores all the data (versional and patristic evidence, not to mention internal) that shoot down his theory" (Fee, "Critique" 423 n. 43).

If the 1970s marked the rebirth of the MT theory, the 1980s were the decade of its rapid growth. Pickering's book was followed by a second edition in 1980 and the epoch-making *Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text*, edited by Zane C. Hodges, Arthur L. Farstad, *et al.*, in 1982.<sup>57</sup> Though marred by its entire reliance on printed editions of the Greek NT (primarily von Soden's) rather than on first-hand collations, this text was the first Greek NT based on the majority of Greek witnesses. Preliminary estimates on the textual differences between the TR and the *Majority Text* had been as low as five hundred.<sup>58</sup> The final text, however, ended up with nearly quadruple that amount.<sup>59</sup> Thus the *Majority Text* both revealed concretely that the Byzantine text-type had been poorly represented by the TR<sup>60</sup> and, because of this, became a catalyst for debates among traditional-text proponents. But perhaps the most surprising feature of the *Majority Text* is the stemmatic reconstructions for John 7:53–8:11 and the entire book of Revelation, for in these places there are several minority readings, contrary to the title and wishes<sup>61</sup> of the editors.

Two years later one of the coeditors of the *Majority Text*, Harry A. Sturz, published a volume<sup>62</sup> that was significant for two reasons. (1) It offered evidence from the papyri that the Byzantine text was early.<sup>63</sup> (2) Though Sturz was an editor of the *Majority Text* (in spite of not embracing the MT theory), he was quite critical of both the methods and results of his coeditors. In particular he felt that their linking of preservation to inspiration

<sup>57</sup> A second, corrected edition appeared in 1985

<sup>58</sup> Pickering, "Burgon" 120

<sup>59</sup> By my count, 1838 differences

<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless some reviewers ignored these differences, assuming that the *Majority Text* was merely another TR. H. Otten argues against this text because it allegedly contains the TR's *Comma Johanneum* (*Christian News* [September 13, 1982] 14). If the reviewer had bothered to look at 1 John 5:7–8 in the *Majority Text* or even read the introduction he would have seen his mistake. Much less excusable are the rather careless statements found in K. Aland and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, 2d, rev. and enlarged ed., 1989). Even in their second edition they failed to distinguish the TR from the *Majority Text*: "The title clearly reveals the intention of the edition: it offers the *Textus Receptus*" (p. 223). The Alands apparently did not examine the *Majority Text* even in a cursory manner, for their section that purportedly compares the NA<sup>26</sup> text with the *Majority Text* (pp. 297–305) includes four passages (Luke 17:36, Acts 8:37, 15:34, 24:6b–8a) that are found in the TR but athetized by both NA<sup>26</sup> and the *Majority Text*. Ironically, their request that MT advocates "consider the following examples without prejudice" (p. 297) reveals their own

<sup>61</sup> In 1978 I had the privilege of taking the course "New Testament Textual Criticism" from Hodges at Dallas Seminary. In that course he indicated more than once his confident hope that his yet-to-be-completed stemmatic reconstructions would fully vindicate MT readings.

<sup>62</sup> H. A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), originally a doctoral dissertation done at Grace Theological Seminary (Winona Lake, 1967).

<sup>63</sup> 150 distinctively Byzantine readings found in the papyri. This claim (viz. that the Byzantine text is early because it is found in the papyri), Sturz's central thesis, has become the basis for hyperbolic claims by MT advocates. For a balanced review of Sturz see M. W. Holmes in *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985) 225–228. See also the critique below.

was wrongheaded<sup>64</sup> and that the Byzantine text was *primus inter pares* among the three main text-types, not the sole keeper of the autographa.<sup>65</sup>

Sturz's work set a precedent for a volume edited by Theodore P. Letis in 1987.<sup>66</sup> In spite of its title—which suggests interaction with mainstream textual critics—the authors all hold to the traditional text. Nevertheless this “one-sided symposium”<sup>67</sup> is significant in that it is the first tome from the traditional-text camp to engage in in-house debate (though this too is one-sided). The first part is an *apologia* for the MT, written by others. Parts two and three are defenses of the KJV and TR respectively, almost entirely written by Letis and in reaction to the MT theory. As such, Letis' work marks a departure from David Otis Fuller's volumes, for in the latter MT and TR advocates were presented side by side without a hint of quarrel among themselves.<sup>68</sup> The impression given by Fuller's volumes was that MT and TR advocates were only interested in results, that such results could be distinguished only minimally, and that methodological questions were irrelevant so long as they ended up with virtually the same text. Letis' work altered this impression. In spite of his own views cloning those of Hills, Letis can be credited with introducing into the traditional-text camp some measure of critical self-examination. This is a refreshing development, though it is still motivated by results rather than by questions of method. That is, Letis condemns MT advocates precisely because their resultant text is not the TR.<sup>69</sup>

The year after Letis' volume was published, the Majority Text Society was formed with Pickering as its first president. At the present time there are over 160 members, though not all espouse the MT position.<sup>70</sup> Two significant

<sup>64</sup> Sturz, *Byzantine Text-Type* 37–46

<sup>65</sup> Though Sturz's resultant text looked very much like the *Majority Text*, the method that produced it was different in several important points. He believed that all the text-types found their origins in second-century recensions. When a majority of text-types (not MSS) agreed he adopted the reading. Since there is greater homogeneity in the Byzantine text than in either the Alexandrian or Western, such a block vote often became the deciding factor. Cf. Sturz, *Byzantine Text Type* 53–131, *The Second Century Greek New Testament Matthew* (La Mirada Biola College Book Store, 1973)

<sup>66</sup> *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate* (ed. T. P. Letis, Fort Wayne, 1987). The publisher is either the Institute for Biblical Textual Studies (as mentioned on the cover) or the Institute for Reformation Biblical Studies (hand-stamped on the title page). The volume includes articles by Pickering, J. A. Borland, *et al.*—all of which had been published elsewhere. In addition Letis wrote four chapters and the introduction (none of which had been previously published).

<sup>67</sup> Metzger, *Text* 291 n. 1

<sup>68</sup> The impression in fact was so strong in the direction of unanimity that before the *Majority Text* was published no less a scholar than G. Fee apparently thought Hodges was resurrecting the TR *in toto* (cf. Fee, “Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the *Textus Receptus*” 23).

<sup>69</sup> See especially the introduction to *Continuing Debate* (ed. Letis) 1–24.

<sup>70</sup> Nor do all members have formal Biblical training or a knowledge of Greek. In a brochure distributed by the Majority Text Society intended to solicit new members, the question is asked “Are all our members scholars?” The answer “No. Some members can sight read the Gr. NT, many can use the original with study helps, others have never studied Gr.” The size of the organization, then, is not indicative of the minimal scholarly support behind it.

developments have occurred via the Majority Text Society: (1) a substantial increase in intra-MT debates,<sup>71</sup> and (2) a concomitant decrease in contact with non-MT advocates. This second development is as unhealthy as the first is healthy, for at the very time in which traditional-text proponents are demonstrating that they are not "in lockstep together and virtual clones of . . . Zane C. Hodges,"<sup>72</sup> few on the outside realize this. The dialogue with outsiders has been largely cut off<sup>73</sup> apparently because the theological presuppositions of these traditional-text advocates tends toward precluding dialogue.<sup>74</sup>

While American traditional-text advocates were engaged in debate, a Dutch scholar quietly produced what is probably the finest volume in defense of the MT position to date. Willem Franciscus Wisselink's Th.D. dissertation<sup>75</sup> under the supervision of Jakob van Bruggen deals with data in a sustained fashion without resorting to theological invectives. In contrast to most MT defenses—which are comprised of quotations from modern-day authors, evidence of the numerical superiority of the Byzantine text, and a theological *a priori* that the majority must be right—Wisselink's

<sup>71</sup> As evidenced by the papers written for the Majority Text Society by its members and distributed periodically. For example, Pickering takes on his former mentor, Hodges, in an essay entitled "The Name of [MT Theory] is Blasphemed among the [Reviewers]" (unpublished paper circulated to members of the Majority Text Society, September 1988). It is to be noted that the methodological critiques are still motivated and dictated by results.

<sup>72</sup> Anon, "Under the 'Big Top,'" *Majority Text News* 2/2 (Fall 1992) 1. The essay quotes Z. Hodges as saying, "Let the reader simply observe that this article illustrates the vitality of the Majority Text movement, which is a big tent that can accommodate more than one perspective on NT textual criticism."

<sup>73</sup> But in the Netherlands there is still dialogue between MT proponents and others. J. van Bruggen and H. J. de Jonge are the major adversaries. Cf. their exchange in *Met andere Woorden Kwartaalblad van het Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap* 7-8 (1988-89); de Jonge, "De tekstvorm in een oecumenisch kerkbijbel," *Met andere Woorden* 7 (1988) 3-5; van Bruggen, "De mondige bijbeltekst en de tekst van het Nieuwe Testament," *Met andere Woorden* 7 (1988) 6-10; de Jonge, "Reactie op het artikel van prof. Van Bruggen," *Met andere Woorden* 7 (1988) 11; van Bruggen, "Reactie op het artikel van prof. De Jonge," *Met andere Woorden* 7 (1988) 12; van Bruggen, "De vertroosting der Schriften," *Met andere Woorden* 8 (1989) 17-18. These debates were followed up by T. van Lopik who argued that liturgical influences helped to shape the Byzantine text form ("Tekskritiek telt het wegen of weegt het tellen?", *NedTTs* 45 [1991] 101-106). I want to thank Timothy J. Ralston of Dallas Seminary for bringing these references to my attention.

<sup>74</sup> Inerrancy and preservation are increasingly held in front of the members of the Majority Text Society as vital to the view. Is it mere coincidence that, after fighting several battles in the arena of evidence (cf. e.g. the debates between Hodges and Fee in *JETS*), MT proponents have stopped the dialogue and reasserted their faith stance? Cf. W. N. Pickering, "Mark 16:9-20 and the Doctrine of Inspiration" (unpublished paper circulated to members of Majority Text Society, 1988), where the sole argument is theological. Majority Text Society brochure entitled "What is the Majority Text Society?" (n.d.), in which the basic pitch for potential members is theological. J. A. Borland, "Re-examining New Testament Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy," *JETS* 25 (1982) 499-506. T. Letis makes a similar observation, complaining that the argument from statistics used in the 1970s was a poor substitute for theological conviction and that Hodges really does have a "hidden agenda" (*Continuing Debate* 192 n. 3).

<sup>75</sup> W. F. Wisselink, *Assimilation as a Criterion for the Establishment of the Text: A Comparative Study on the Basis of Passages from Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1989).

tome takes on a major internal criterion used by eclectics: harmonization in the gospels. He demonstrates that harmonizations occur in the Alexandrian text<sup>76</sup> as well as the Byzantine and goes so far as to suggest that there are more harmonizations, at times, in some Alexandrian MSS than there are in the MT. Wisselink parts company with the rest of the MT camp, however, in that he apparently allows for a Lucianic recension<sup>77</sup> and concedes that there are secondary readings within the Byzantine text.<sup>78</sup>

One other significant volume from MT quarters concludes my historical survey.<sup>79</sup> Growing out of the in-house debates, a new MT NT was published in 1991. By William G. Pierpont and Maurice A. Robinson,<sup>80</sup> it is a conscious reaction to the Hodges-Farstad text, for it denies the validity of stemmatics on a large scale and thus reinstates majority readings in the *pericope adulterae* and in Revelation.<sup>81</sup> The work is in reality a piece of nostalgia in that it canonizes Burgonian principles in reaction to the few advances made in MT quarters in this century.<sup>82</sup>

This brief historical survey reveals at least three important factors to consider in assessing the MT movement. (1) The movement is extremely conservative—both theologically (all subscribers are evangelicals or fundamentalists) and methodologically (few substantive advances have been made since Burgon). (2) The overarching concern of traditional-text advocates has been to maintain the concept of providential preservation. The bulk of the intratraditional discussions has focused on whether the resultant text (i.e. the various forms of the traditional text produced by those within the camp) affirms this doctrine. There has been almost no critique of method for method's sake. (3) There have been only a handful of *bona fide* textual critics within the traditional camp. Burgon deserves this accolade because of his collation efforts.<sup>83</sup> Hodges, Wisselink, and perhaps van Bruggen also belong here. Hills is the only TR advocate who qualifies as a member in the club. Thus the MT movement is not a movement among textual critics but a popular movement within conservative circles bolstered by an occasional scholar.

<sup>76</sup> Though he commits the same error as that of other MT advocates of comparing individual Alexandrian MSS with the Byzantine text-type as a whole

<sup>77</sup> Wisselink, *Assimilation* 43–52 So also his mentor, van Bruggen, who goes so far as to say that “we can establish that Lucian added to the New Testament” (*Ancient Text* 18 n 36)

<sup>78</sup> Wisselink, *Assimilation*, 87–90 and passim Cf also van Bruggen's similar concession (*Ancient Text* 38) Unfortunately no particulars are given

<sup>79</sup> The most recent volume by D A Waite (*Defending the King James Bible*) cannot be considered “significant” It is 339 pages of anecdotes, guilt-by-association arguments, and theological invectives The author, who is the current president of the Dean Burgon Society, argues as strongly for the KJV as he does for the TR, making him even more extreme than was Hills

<sup>80</sup> W G Pierpont and M A Robinson, *The New Testament in the Original Greek according to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* (Atlanta Original Word, 1991)

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid* xiv–xvi

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid* xiv At the same time the editors explicitly disagree with some of Burgon's arguments, especially those of a more theological nature (pp xl–xli)

<sup>83</sup> Hoskier would belong here if it were not for his quirkish views

## II. PRESENT-DAY MAJORITY-TEXT METHODS

Modern-day traditional-text advocates are agreed on three premises. (1) Textual criticism must begin with a theological *a priori*—verbal inspiration—with its corollary, providential preservation. (2) Westcott and Hort have done the Church a great disservice by emphasizing subjective elements in textual criticism (viz. internal criteria) to the neglect of the “objective” data (viz. the Greek MSS). (3) The true text is to be found in the majority of MSS/Byzantine text-type.

Where they disagree with one another is in the extent to which the above points are affirmed. Two broad groups can be distinguished among traditionalists today: TR advocates and MT advocates. These two groups divide especially over the first (though rarely on a conscious level) and third premises. Many MT defenders argue for preservation just as strongly as do TR advocates without noticing that to grant to preservation the same doctrinal status as verbal inspiration is to deny their own claims for the MT and to affirm the TR.<sup>84</sup> As Ehrman has articulated:

Any claim that God preserved the New Testament text intact, giving His church actual, not theoretical, possession of it, must mean one of three things—either 1) God preserved it in all the extant manuscripts so that none of them contain any textual corruptions, or 2) He preserved it in a group of manuscripts, none of which contain any corruptions, or 3) He preserved it in a solitary manuscript which alone contains no corruptions.<sup>85</sup>

TR advocates (Hills, Letis) are the only ones who can claim any kind of consistency in this regard, for they do, at least, advocate one printed text. For them textual criticism does not exist. Rather, all of their energy is expended in *apologia*, not *investigatio*. MT advocates are unwilling to make quite such a fideistic leap, recognizing (perhaps subconsciously) to one degree or another that a wholesale defense of the TR is stripped naked at the bar of logic and empiricism. What is at stake, too, is results: There are 1838 differences between the TR and the MT.<sup>86</sup> Consequently the MT and the TR groups differ in the degree to which they affirm the third premise: MT proponents are much more consistent in assigning value to the majority of MSS.<sup>87</sup>

The MT group has at present three subgroups. First, Hodges and Farstad hold to the two-edged method of statistics (probability of majority being right) presumably confirmed, at least in theory, by stemmatics: “(1)

<sup>84</sup> Cf J J Ray “The writing of the Word of God by inspiration is no greater miracle than the miracle of its preservation” (*God Wrote Only One Bible* [Junction City Eye Opener, 1955] 104), R Hills, *A Defense of the Majority Text* (Ph D dissertation, California Graduate School of Theology, 1985) 88, 89, 114, 124, Pickering, “Mark 16 9–20” 1–2

<sup>85</sup> B D Ehrman, *New Testament Textual Criticism. Quest for Methodology* (M Div thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1981) 44

<sup>86</sup> Specifically between the *Majority Text*<sup>1</sup> and the 1825 Oxford edition of the TR

<sup>87</sup> For a discussion of the differences between the TR and MT and the implications such has for testing textual consanguinity see D B Wallace, “The *Majority Text* A New Collating Base?,” *NTS* 35 (1989) 609–618

Any reading overwhelmingly attested by the manuscript tradition is more likely to be original than its rival(s). . . . (2) Final decisions about the readings ought to be made on the basis of a reconstruction of their history in the manuscript tradition."<sup>88</sup> In practice, however, the two legs of the method stand in tension. In the two portions of their text established on the basis of stemmatics the resultant text has a significant number of minority readings. This phenomenon is very much at odds with their first theoretical presupposition and has been somewhat embarrassing to the editors, especially in view of the title of their edition.<sup>89</sup> Stemmatics were applied only in the *pericope adulterae* and the Apocalypse, and in both places several minority readings were produced (half of the readings in the *pericope adulterae* and over 150 in Revelation).

Second, the pure Burgonians (Pickering, Pierpont, Robinson) follow the majority of MSS virtually at all costs (apparently because any other view would be an affront to their theological presumption).<sup>90</sup> Their efforts are in conscious reaction to Hodges and Farstad. Their quarrel has to do with the stemmatic reconstructions done by the latter two. Pickering's essay, "The Name of [MT Theory] is Blasphemed among the [Reviewers]," is targeted at Hodges, his mentor. He reworks the stemmatics for the *pericope adulterae* with a staunchly embraced premise that "the true reading should have majority attestation at all levels,"<sup>91</sup> concluding the paper with the not-surprising verdict that "the original text is attested by a clear majority of MSS."<sup>92</sup> Pierpont and Robinson explicitly apply Burgonian principles in their volume.<sup>93</sup> They, too, fault Hodges and Farstad for employing stemmatics. In fact the only major differences between the two texts are in the passages for which Hodges and Farstad have worked up family trees.<sup>94</sup> Both Pickering

<sup>88</sup> Hodges and Farstad, *Majority Text* xi-xii

<sup>89</sup> The editors did not actually do primary stemmatic research themselves. Rather, they relied on and manipulated the findings of H. von Soden for the *pericope adulterae* (*Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments in ihrer ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt* [Teil 1, Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1902-1910, Teil 2, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1913] 1, 1: 486-524, 1, 2: 717-765) and J. Schmid for the Apocalypse (*Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes* [3 vols., Munich: Karl Zink, 1955-56]). Stemmatics were applied only in the *pericope adulterae* and the Apocalypse. The result was that half of the readings in the *pericope adulterae* and over 150 in Revelation were minority readings.

<sup>90</sup> This theological presumption is far more explicit in Pickering's writings than in Pierpont and Robinson. Indeed the latter admit that "the underlying theological factors take a secondary role in the realm of textual criticism" and that the Alexandrian and Western MSS are neither heretical nor useless (*Original Greek* xlii). They quickly add, however, that an inerrant text cannot be produced on the basis of the Alexandrian and Western witnesses (p. xliii). It may be added here that Robinson-Pierpont also explicitly argue against a majority reading in the *pericope adulterae* "in one and only one instance (Jn 8:8, end)," arguing that the "comment appears to be a patent gloss from later tradition, and historically has been rejected by all editors of the Greek New Testament" (p. 495). One is tempted to think that the second reason given is the only one that counts with the editors, for otherwise John 5:3b-4, *et al.*, should also be athetized.

<sup>91</sup> Pickering, "Blasphemed" 8

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Pierpont and Robinson, *Original Greek* ix, xiv, xvi

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* xiv, 494-495. Their argument against stemmatics is simply that it tends to mitigate the majority (p. 495).

and Pierpont-Robinson are addressing those already committed to the MT theory, without serious intention to engage in dialogue with outsiders.<sup>95</sup>

Third, van Bruggen and Wisselink would hold to MT priority but not MT exclusivity. Theirs is the most nuanced MT position. Although they do not explicitly argue against particular majority readings, they allow—at least in theory—for Byzantine harmonizations and corruptions. This last group has exhibited more desire to engage in irenic scholarly debate and has presented more of substance in defense of the MT theory than either of the first two. In particular Wisselink has produced the only sustained defense of the Byzantine text on internal grounds.

### III. A CRITIQUE OF THE MAJORITY-TEXT THEORY<sup>96</sup>

My critique of the MT theory will focus on three general points: (1) the doctrine of preservation as the theological presupposition behind the theory, (2) the value of the numerical superiority of the Byzantine MSS over the Alexandrian or Western, and (3) the alleged subjectivity of internal criteria in determining the text of the NT (which, again, results in falling back on the “objectivity” of numbers).

<sup>95</sup> Pickering's essay was circulated only to Majority Text Society members. The Pierpont-Robinson text, produced by an unknown publisher (Original Word), includes on the jacket blurb “This significant new edition is the closest approximation yet produced to an authentic Byzantine/Majority Text edition of the New Testament” and “[This text] is a valuable and long-awaited contribution”—comments largely irrelevant to those not already predisposed toward the MT.

<sup>96</sup> In recent years a rather extensive literature has been produced against the MT theory, both in its general tenets and in many particulars (addressing e.g. various target passages, patristic and versional usage, individual MSS, reviews of MT works). Among the more general treatments are the following: Taylor, *Modern Debate* (1973), “Queen Anne Resurrected? A Review Article,” *JETS* 20 (1977) 377–381, Fee, “Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the *Textus Receptus*” (1978), “Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text A Rejoinder” (1978), Taylor, “Queen Anne’ Revisited A Rejoinder,” *JETS* 21 (1978) 169–171, Fee, “A Critique of W N Pickering’s *The Identity of the New Testament Text* A Review Article,” *WTJ* 41 (1978–79) 397–423, Carson, *King James Version Debate* (1979), Ehrman, *New Testament Textual Criticism* (1981), M W Holmes, “The ‘Majority text debate’ new form of an old issue,” *Themelios* 8 (1983) 13–19, R L Omanson, “A Perspective on the Study of the New Testament Text,” *BT* 34 (1983) 107–122, J P Lewis, “The Text of the New Testament,” *ResQ* 27 (1984) 65–74, H P Scanlin, “The Majority Text Debate Recent Developments,” *BT* 36 (1985) 136–140, Shields, *Recent Attempts* (1985), K Aland, “The Text of the Church?,” *Trinity Journal* 8 (1987) 131–144, D B Wallace, “Some Second Thoughts on the *Majority Text*,” *BSac* 146 (1989) 271–290, “The Majority Text and the Original Text Are They Identical?,” *BSac* 148 (1991) 151–169, T J Ralston, “The ‘Majority Text’ and Byzantine Origins,” *NTS* 38 (1992) 122–137, Wallace, “Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism,” *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1992) 21–50. My intention in this section is to rehearse only the main critiques. Also, there will be almost no treatment of the TR view since it is, as Greenlee asserted, “a scholarly curiosity” and because there are no textual critics alive today to defend it. For detailed interaction with Hills’ views *per se* and/or his theological presumption of Taylor, *Modern Debate*, Fee, “Revival” 21–24, Sturz, *Byzantine Text-Type*, 37–46, Wallace, “Preservation”.



1. *The doctrinal underpinnings of the traditional-text theory.* First, and most importantly, I must speak to the theological *a priori*. MT advocates need the dogma of preservation<sup>97</sup> at all points where the evidence will not easily yield to their interpretation. As one traditional-text advocate admitted:

When reviewing the defenses of the Majority Text, one dominating consideration emerges: a prior commitment to what the Bible has to say concerning itself with regard to inspiration and preservation. For the Majority Text apologists, this is an all-consuming consideration to which everything else must be subordinated. Their arguments, therefore, are not directed to some neutral bar of determination (as if such a thing existed) but are consciously directed to those who also have the same priority.<sup>98</sup>

To them, verbal inspiration necessitates preservation. Pickering tells us that "the doctrine of Divine Preservation of the New Testament Text depends upon the interpretation of the evidence which recognizes the Traditional Text to be the continuation of the autographa."<sup>99</sup>

In order to make preservation support the MT it must infer accessibility: "God *has* preserved the text of the New Testament in a very pure form and it has been readily available to His followers in every age throughout 1900 years."<sup>100</sup> Hence the MT position is based on a corollary (accessibility) of a corollary (preservation) of a particular dogmatic stance (verbal inspiration).

I mention five observations in response. (1) The driving force behind this theological formulation is an undifferentiated need for certainty. The traditional-text literature is filled with assertions that "without a methodology that has for its agenda the determination of a continuous, obviously providentially preserved text . . . we are, in principle, left with maximum uncertainty . . . versus the maximum certainty afforded by the methodology that seeks a providentially preserved text."<sup>101</sup> Since historical inquiry is not black or white the only way to achieve absolute certainty is through doctrinal certitude. (2) Ironically, as much effort as MT advocates expend against subjectivity and the use of human reason<sup>102</sup> their entire doctrinal

<sup>97</sup> Most recently Wisselink denied the necessity of this conviction "Some defenders of the Byzantine text-type are prejudiced in theological respect The same reproach cannot be directed at all defenders of that text For there are textual critics who defend the priority of the Byzantine text-type on the basis of textual-critical arguments Their arguments must therefore be tested" (*Assimilation* 17) Although he alleges that Hodges, Pickering and van Bruggen have no theological agenda, their own writings suggest otherwise, cf Hodges, *Defense* 18, "Rationalism" 29-30, Pickering, "Burgon" 86-91, "Mark 16 9-20" 1, *Identity* 154, van Bruggen, *Ancient Text* 40 Besides, Wisselink tacitly admits that the MT theory is only found among conservatives (*Assimilation* 15) If so, then there must be more than mere text-critical arguments that have swayed them Why no nonconservatives? The theological *a priori*, whether stated or not, is there

<sup>98</sup> Letis, *Continuing Debate* 192

<sup>99</sup> Pickering, "Burgon" 91

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid* 90

<sup>101</sup> Letis, *Continuing Debate* 200 Cf also Pickering, "Burgon" 88, "Mark 16 9-20" 1, van Bruggen, *Ancient Text* 9-16

<sup>102</sup> Cf Hodges, "Rationalism" 27-35, van Bruggen, *Ancient Text* 13, 40, Pickering, *Identity* 77-93, R Hills, *Defense* 83, 88-89, 113 Cf my discussion on internal evidence for MT advocates' reticence to use human reason

basis is founded on what they think God must have done. Burgon set this in motion when he stated: "There exists no reason for supposing that the Divine Agent, who in the first instance thus gave to mankind the Scriptures of Truth, straightway abdicated His office; took no further care of His work; abandoned those precious writings to their fate."<sup>103</sup> Hills demanded that "God must have done this"<sup>104</sup>—not because the Bible says so, but because logic dictates that this must be the case. Such a stance is urged in the face of empirical and exegetical evidence to the contrary. (3) This fideistic formula violates all known historical data. Such a dogmatic affirmation results in a procrusteanizing of the data on a massive scale in the name of orthodoxy. For example, the Byzantine text did not become a majority until the ninth century<sup>105</sup>—and even then "majority" must be qualified: There are almost twice as many Latin MSS as there are Greek and, to my knowledge, none of them belongs to the Byzantine text.<sup>106</sup> (4) This doctrinal stance also lacks a sound exegetical basis. To traditional-text advocates, if empirical data do not naturally fit the theory there is still a haven in the anchor of dogma. But if that anchor is loosed from its exegetical moorings the entire doctrinal foundation collapses. In light of this, there are two rather surprising lacunae from traditional-text apologists: any exegesis of the relevant Biblical texts on which they base their creedal convictions, and any discussion of how the doctrine squares with the OT text in its current state. Regarding the first point, five passages are typically adduced in support of the doctrine of preservation: Ps 119:89; Isa 40:8; Matt 5:17–18; John 10:35; 1 Pet 1:23–25.<sup>107</sup> The discussions of these passages are remarkably laconic—usually no more than a mere listing of the references,<sup>108</sup> or a quotation of one of them somewhere in the introduction or at a prominent location.<sup>109</sup> Traditionalists make the rather facile assumption that when "God's word" is mentioned the reference must be to the written text—specifically, the text of the NT. Yet neither the written text nor the NT *per se* is in view in these passages. The most satisfactory exegesis of all such passages is that they are statements concerning either divine ethical principles (i.e. moral laws that cannot be

<sup>103</sup> Burgon, *Traditional Text* 11

<sup>104</sup> Hills, *King James Version Defended* 8

<sup>105</sup> See later discussion for evidence that the MT was in a minority in the first several centuries AD

<sup>106</sup> Cf B M Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations* (Oxford Clarendon, 1977) 359, for a discussion of the textual affinities of the Latin MSS

<sup>107</sup> The only study of any length, in fact, of which I am aware is D L Brake, "The Preservation of the Scriptures," *Counterfeit or Genuine* (ed Fuller) 175–218 This essay is a modification of Brake, *The Doctrine of the Preservation of the Scriptures* (Th M thesis, Dallas Seminary, 1970) Unfortunately the entire work traffics in eisegesis

<sup>108</sup> E g Pickering, *Identity* 153 Waite provides an interesting exception He devotes ten pages of discussion (pp 6–15) to the relevant passages under the section heading "God Promised Bible Preservation" in *Defending the King James Bible* But as much material as Waite devotes to this subject, there is no exegesis, only assumption and homily

<sup>109</sup> E g Hodges and Farstad, *Majority Text* xliv

violated without some kind of consequences) or the promise of fulfilled prophecy.<sup>110</sup> Further, even if these proof texts referred to the written text it would be to the OT text, not the NT.<sup>111</sup> Regarding the second point, in spite of the fact that even though many conservative opponents of the MT/TR view embrace some doctrine of preservation<sup>112</sup> (no doubt influenced by the Westminster Confession)<sup>113</sup> this doctrine cannot be applied to the OT. It is demonstrable that the OT text does not meet the criteria of preservation by majority rule—nor, in fact, of preservation at all in some places. A number of readings that only occur in versions or are found only in one or two early Qumran MSS have indisputable claim to authenticity over against the errant majority.<sup>114</sup> Moreover in many places all the extant witnesses are so corrupt that conjectural emendation has to be employed.<sup>115</sup> Significantly, many (but not all) such conjectures have been vindicated by the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls.<sup>116</sup> Hence because of the

<sup>110</sup> "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10 35), in its context, means "all will be fulfilled" or "all of it is true" rather than "we must have every word preserved" "Not one jot or tittle from the law will pass away until all is fulfilled" (Matt 5 18) plainly refers either to the ethical principles of the law, or the fulfillment of prophecy, or both. Either way, the idea of preservation of the written text is quite foreign to the context. For a more extensive treatment of these passages see Wallace, "Preservation" 42–43.

<sup>111</sup> Brake, "Preservation," lists Ps 119 89, Isa 40 8, Matt 5 17–18, John 10 35, 1 Pet 1 23–25. Occasionally Matt 24 35 is used to support preservation. Even though this text has the advantage of referring to Jesus' words (as opposed to the OT), the context is clearly eschatological, and thus the words of Jesus have certainty of fulfillment. That the text does not mean that his words will all be preserved in written form is obvious from two facts: (1) Such a view not only is foreign to the context but also implies that the written gospels were conceived at this stage in *Heilsgeschichte*, decades before a need for them was apparently felt, (2) we certainly do not have all of Jesus' words recorded—even on a most conservative interpretation of the data—either in Scripture or elsewhere (cf. John 20 30, 21 35).

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Taylor, *Modern Debate* 148, 154, 163; Sturz, *Byzantine Text Type* 37–49.

<sup>113</sup> The Westminster Confession (1646) was the first creedal statement to include the doctrine of preservation, followed shortly by the Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675). Both were intended apparently to canonize the TR in the face of Roman Catholic hostility. The doctrine was promoted heavily by John Owen. Cf. Letis, *Hills's Contribution* 22–24, 35–70 (esp. 36, 47–51, 63).

<sup>114</sup> Cf. the demonstrations to this effect in D. Barthelemy, *Critique Textuelle de l'Ancien Testament 2. Isaie, Jeremie, Lamentations* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1986) 361–362 (Isa 49 12), 403–407 (53 11), E. Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 106–110, J. A. Sanders, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1967) 17, E. Tov, *The Text Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1981) 70–72, 288–306, W. H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: Oxford University, 1964) 216–235, G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Qumran in Perspective* (rev. ed., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 203–209, F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958) 169, 189, 191.

<sup>115</sup> E. G. Kennedy, a conservative who nevertheless could write an entire book on the faults of the Masoretic Text (*An Aid to the Textual Amendment of the Old Testament* [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1928]), Brownlee, *Meaning* 231 (on Isa 53 11), R. W. Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament: The Septuagint after Qumran* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 76 (on 1 Sam 14 47), Würthwein, *Text* 108 (on Jer 2 21), D. M. Fouts, "A Suggestion for Isaiah XXVI 16," *VT* 41 (1991) 472–474, E. C. Ulrich, *The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus* (Missoula: Scholars, 1978) 193–221.

<sup>116</sup> Ulrich, *Samuel 2*, Cross, *Library* 189 (on 2 Sam 24 16), Würthwein, *Text* 142 (On Isa 40 6, 17), Barthelemy, *Critique* 361–362 (on 49 12, 53 11), Brownlee, *Meaning* 218–219 (on 11 6, 21 8), 225–226 (on 49 12), 226–233 (on 53 11).

necessity of conjectural emendation the doctrine of preservation is inapplicable for the OT—a fact that, ironically, illustrates even more boldly the illegitimacy of the proof texts used for this doctrine, for they all refer to the OT. (5) In light of the empirical and exegetical evidence, traditional-text champions and other evangelicals who affirm providential preservation need to reexamine their beliefs, for at present they are guilty of a bibliological double standard founded on an improbable exegesis of the relevant passages.<sup>117</sup>

In sum, a theological *a priori* has no place in textual criticism. Since this is the case it is necessary to lay aside fideism in dealing with the evidence. The question, since we are dealing fundamentally with historical inquiry, is not what is possible but what is probable. With the faith stance of the traditionalists in place, textual criticism becomes so intertwined with orthodoxy that the evidence cannot be objectively interpreted. But once dogma is evacuated from the discussion, no position can be comfortable merely with what is possible. Hence I now turn to two strands of evidence by which we must examine the MT theory—strands that, I believe, render the theory improbable.

2. *External evidence.* Traditionally, the strongest argument in the MT theory, as its name implies, is the case from numbers. In the words of Hodges and Farstad: “Any reading overwhelmingly attested by the manuscript tradition is more likely to be original than its rival(s).”<sup>118</sup> In other words, the reading supported by a majority of MSS is the original.<sup>119</sup> Hort is even brought to the witness stand in support of this contention: “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

<sup>117</sup> For a more complete analysis of this doctrine as well as of the use MT proponents are making of inspiration and inerrancy see Wallace, “Preservation” 21–50

<sup>118</sup> Hodges and Farstad, *Majority Text* xi

<sup>119</sup> Pickering has recently charged me with misunderstanding the MT theory. First, he asserted that the method was much “more complex than merely counting noses” (lecture given at Dallas Seminary, February 21, 1990). Second, he points out that “the word ‘overwhelming’ is crucial” when speaking of majority (Pickering, “More ‘Second Thoughts on the Majority Text’ A Review Article” [unpublished paper circulated to members of the Majority Text Society, n d ] 3). In other words, the MT theory does not rest on a mere majority but on an overwhelming majority (ibid 7). In response, (1) MT advocates constantly appeal to numbers as the primary evidential (as opposed to theological) basis for their view (cf Pickering, *Identity*, “Appendix C” 159–169, which is essentially a duplication of Hodges, *Defense* 4–9, van Bruggen, *Ancient Text*, chap 2 “The Value of the Number of Manuscripts” [pp 17–21], Pierpont and Robinson, *Original Greek* xvii–xix, Borland, “Re-examining” 504, 506). In particular, if this is not Pickering’s basic approach, why does he fault Hodges and Farstad in their stemmatic reconstructions precisely because the resultant text is not found in the majority of MSS (Pickering, “More ‘Second Thoughts’” 2, 4, “Blasphemed” 1)? Thus, it seems, Pickering has confused method with rationale. The rationale for the MT may be complex, but the method (for most MT defenders) is quite simple: Count noses. (2) To defend the MT theory on the basis of overwhelming majority puts the theory on even shakier ground, for where there is not an overwhelming majority—as is true hundreds of times in the NT (cf e.g. Pickering, “More ‘Second Thoughts’” 2, Aland, “Text of the Church?” 136–137, commenting on 2 Cor 1 6–7a notes that the MT splits 52 times)—MT defenders must resort to internal evidence. Yet by their own admission internal evidence is wholly subjective.

transmission than *vice versa*.”<sup>120</sup> This line is a favorite of MT advocates. Hodges, for example, quotes it often,<sup>121</sup> with the comment that “even this great opponent of the majority form had to admit” the presumption of the majority being right.<sup>122</sup> What Hodges fails to mention, however, is that Hort immediately adds “But the presumption is too minute to weigh against the smallest tangible evidence of other kinds”<sup>123</sup> and that Burgon conceded the opposite presumption: “That indeed of two ancient documents the more ancient might not unreasonably have been expected to prove the more trustworthy, I am not concerned to dispute, and will not here discuss such a question; but the probabilities of the case at all events are not axiomatic.”<sup>124</sup> When Burgon made this statement only one NT papyrus was known to exist. Now, almost one hundred NT papyri have been discovered—none of which follow the Byzantine text form. In light of such evidence, if one were to argue for antecedent probability one would have to say that dismissal of these early witnesses “constitutes nothing less than a wholesale rejection of probabilities on a sweeping scale.”<sup>125</sup>

In short, in historical investigation statistical probability is almost always worthless, especially when based on flawed assumptions.<sup>126</sup> An ounce of evidence is worth a pound of presumption. If the MT view is to be entertained, the Byzantine text should be widely diffused in the earliest Greek MSS, versions and Church fathers. But the opposite situation obtains, as the following considerations make clear.

First, among the Greek MSS, what is today the majority did not become a majority until the ninth century. In fact, as far as the extant witnesses reveal, the MT did not exist in the first four centuries. The evidence is portrayed in the chart on page 206.

The monotonously typical response to this by traditional-text advocates is that the early Byzantine MSS must have been recognized for their value and worn out—an argument that goes back to Burgon.<sup>127</sup> They insist on this because there seems to be no other way to explain how eighty percent

<sup>120</sup> Westcott and Hort, *Introduction* 45

<sup>121</sup> Hodges, *Defense* 4, “Response” 146, “Surrejoinder” 161 Cf also Wisselink, *Assimilation* 18–19, Pierpont and Robinson, *Original Greek* xx

<sup>122</sup> Hodges, “Surrejoinder” 161

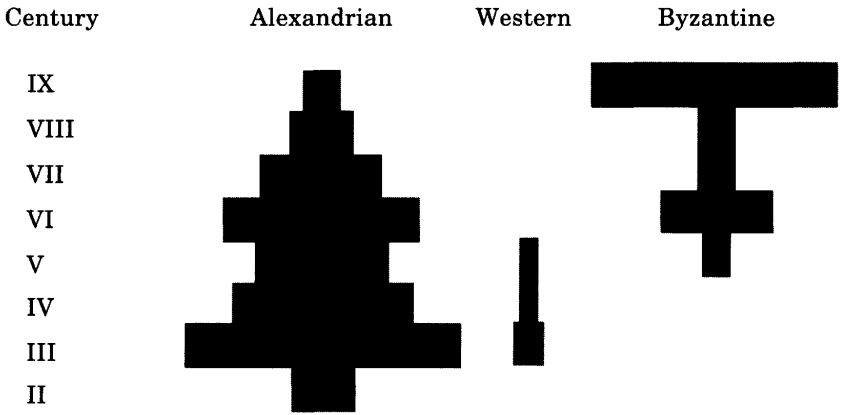
<sup>123</sup> Westcott and Hort, *Introduction* 45 This fact was forcefully pointed out by Fee, “Rejoinder” 157–158

<sup>124</sup> Burgon, *Traditional Text* 8, cf also 40–41

<sup>125</sup> Quoting Hodges, *Defense* 9, who uses this argument on behalf of the MT My point is that statistical probabilities tend to cancel each other out and are thus hardly an appropriate method of historical investigation

<sup>126</sup> One of the assumptions of the statistical model is that a good reading is just as likely to come from a bad reading as the reverse (Hodges, *Defense* 5–7) If this is not the case, then the entire statistical model “does not apply” (statistician D Hodges in *ibid* 7) But the realities of a theologico-literary document are fundamentally opposed to the process flowing in both directions Cf B M Metzger, “Trends in the Textual Criticism of the *Iliad* and the *Mahabharata*,” *Chapters in the History of New Testament Textual Criticism* (NTTS 4, Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1963) 142–154

<sup>127</sup> Burgon, *Traditional Text* 12, Hodges, *Defense* 14–15, Pickering, *Identity* 129–134, Wisselink, *Assimilation* 35–36

*Distribution of Greek MSS by Century and Text-Type*

of the extant MSS could derive from the autographs and yet leave behind no tangible evidence among the surviving witnesses of the first four centuries. But this argument raises several questions. If the Byzantine MSS wore out, what is to explain how they became the majority from the ninth century on? On MT reckoning, the real majority should never be found as an extant majority. Further, what is to explain their complete nonexistence before the late fourth century? Are we to suppose that every single “good” NT somehow wasted away—that no historical accident could have preserved even one from the first 350 years? The quaint analogy that a used Bible gets worn out might work in individual cases. But to argue this on a grand scale stretches the credibility of the theory far beyond the breaking point. Further, how is it possible that a worked-over MS with many corrections such as Sinaiticus substantiates the “vanishing” theory? This was obviously a used MS, yet Pickering argues that “to demand that a MS survive for 1,500 years is in effect to require . . . that it have remained unused.”<sup>128</sup> Why is nothing mentioned about the myriad of Byzantine MSS that, although they have obviously deviated from their archetype, go uncorrected? Many such medieval Byzantine MSS were evidently not used.<sup>129</sup> And would we not expect to see at least some early papyri (let alone a majority of them) with a distinctively Byzantine text form?<sup>130</sup> It will not do to say that all the early

<sup>128</sup> Pickering, *Identity* 129

<sup>129</sup> This is evident to anyone who has examined these MSS firsthand or via facsimile, for not only are non-Byzantine readings frequently found in them but also numerous and substantial nonsense readings are left intact. The force of my argument is multifaceted. On the one hand, it makes Pickering’s implicit connection between an unused MS and a corrupt MS backfire. On the other hand, if numerous Byzantine MSS were unused in later centuries then their nonexistence in the early centuries is all the more called into question. In light of this, one wonders how many of the Byzantine MSS the MT advocates have really examined.

<sup>130</sup> Traditional-text advocates frequently make hyperbolic claims about Byzantine readings found in the papyri, basing such statements on Sturz’s work (cf. Hodges, *Defense* 14, Pickering,

papyri represent the local text of Egypt, because every text-type is apparently found in the papyri—except the Byzantine.<sup>131</sup> This “vanishing” hypothesis is clearly a case of *petitio principii* and as such unmasks the fact that the MT theory is at bottom theologically motivated.<sup>132</sup>

The entire argument from statistical probability not only fails in the early centuries. When the actual Byzantine MSS are examined—not just counted—some disturbing facts surface. In a recent study of several Byzantine MSS in Luke, for example, Timothy J. Ralston concluded:

Hodges' statistical model which lies at the heart of the *Majority Text* theory demands that a texttype becomes less homogeneous over time as the cumulative effect of scribal errors and emendations are transmitted in subsequent generations of manuscripts. This effect is observed among the Alexandrian manuscripts of this study. However, the case is reversed for the Byzantine manuscripts, which grow more homogeneous over time, denying Hodges' statistical presupposition. In addition, Hodges' argument from stemmatics is damaged by this confirmation of Fee's long-held hypothesis that the later Byzantine witnesses bear a closer resemblance to each other than to the original Byzantine archetype.<sup>133</sup>

*Identity* 76–77, Wisselink, *Assimilation* 32–34, Pierpont and Robinson, *Original Greek* xxiv–xxvii) Hodges argues, for example, that “if the present rate of discovery continues, we may reasonably anticipate the eventual attestation of nearly every Majority reading in manuscripts written long before Aleph and B were even copied” (*Defense* 14). Actually, at the “present rate” this would take almost three millennia—assuming that all Byzantine readings could be found in the papyri. Furthermore the evidence that Sturz presents is subject to three criticisms: (1) Many of his readings have substantial support from other text-types and are thus not distinctively Byzantine, (2) the existence of a Byzantine reading in early papyri does not prove the existence of the Byzantine text-type in early papyri, (3) whether the agreements are genetically significant or accidental is overlooked (even Wisselink admits that a number of them are merely accidental [*Assimilation* 33]). In my examination of Sturz's list I found only eight Byzantine-papyrus alignments that seemed to be genetically significant. Of these, six were not distinctively Byzantine (Luke 10 21, 14 3, 34, 15 21, John 10 38, 19 11). Sturz's best case was in Phil 1 14 (the omission of *tu theou*)—a reading adopted in NA<sup>26</sup>/UBS<sup>NT</sup>3<sup>4</sup>. When these factors are taken into account, the papyrus-Byzantine agreements become an insufficient base for the conclusions that either Sturz or the MT advocates build from it.

<sup>131</sup> MT advocates repeatedly confuse geography with textual affinities, assuming that a MS found in Egypt must be Alexandrian in character (cf. Hodges and Farstad, *Majority Text* ix–x). This bait-and-switch maneuver conceals the palpable weakness in the argument. The argument suffers at other levels too: (1) If the early papyri represent one text-type, then why do they lack homogeneity (a point that MT proponents camp on)? One cannot have it both ways. Their lack of homogeneity implies that they are praeconsonal. On the MT theory, a praeconsonal papyrus could not be consciously anti-Byzantine. Why then does the Byzantine text-type not show up in them? (2) If the Byzantine text is lacking representation in the Egyptian witnesses, how can MT champions argue that “God has preserved the text of the New Testament in a very pure form and it has been readily available to His followers in every age” and at the same time claim that the Egyptian witnesses were borne in a “sewer pipe” (Pickering, *Burton* 90, 93)?

<sup>132</sup> Cf. e.g. Wisselink's rather weak defense of this (*Assimilation* 36).

<sup>133</sup> Ralston, “The ‘Majority Text’” 133–134. According to Ralston, in work done toward his Ph.D. dissertation (provisionally with the same title as the article and to be completed c. 1994 at Dallas Seminary), codices 2322 (12th century) and 83 (11th century) are the earliest MSS in Luke to have a high agreement (98%) with the two printed editions of the MT. Significantly both are K' MSS which, among other things, is a highly edited group and “clearly produced for a specific lectionary purpose” (Ralston, correspondence, July 11, 1993). (Cf. also D. O. Voss, “Is von Soden's K' a Distinct Type of Text?”, *JBL* 57 [1938] 311–318, F. Wisse, *The Profile Method for Classifying and Evaluating Manuscript Evidence* [SD 44, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982] 92.)

Ralston's and other studies strongly suggest that the Hodges-Farstad and Pierpont-Robinson texts not only do not represent the original but do not even represent the Byzantine text of the first millennium. Indeed there is evidence that the specific text form found in these printed editions was not in a majority of Greek MSS until the fifteenth century.<sup>134</sup>

Second, if the Greek MSS do not attest to the MT, what about the versions? The evidence amassed to date is that there are no versions of the Byzantine text-type until the Gothic at the end of the fourth century.<sup>135</sup> This needs to be balanced by the fact that the Coptic, Ethiopic, Latin and Syriac versions all antedate the fourth century and come from various regions around the Mediterranean. Neither their texts nor their locales are strictly Egyptian. And even if one of these early versions had been based on the Byzantine text, this would only prove that this text existed before the fourth century. It is quite another thing to assume that it was in the majority before the fourth century.

Third, the evidence is similar in the Church fathers.<sup>136</sup> Three brief points are in order regarding the patristic evidence. (1) So far as I am aware, in the last eighty years every critical study on patristic usage has concluded that the MT was never the text used by the Church fathers in the first three centuries. Fee, recognized as one of the leading patristic authorities today, wrote:

Over the past eight years I have been collecting the Greek patristic evidence for Luke and John for the International Greek New Testament Project. In all of this material I have found one invariable—a good critical edition of a father's text, or the discovery of early MSS, *always* moves the father's text of the NT away from the TR and *closer* to the text of our modern critical editions.<sup>137</sup>

(2) Though some of the fathers from the first three centuries had isolated Byzantine readings the earliest Church father to use the Byzantine text was the heretic Asterius, a fourth-century writer<sup>138</sup> from Antioch and one

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Yet the statistical argument of the MT theory assumes increased randomness, not increased uniformity. In Ralston's study, no distinctive readings are found in this group. It assimilates other readings, apparently through a conscious editorial and liturgical process. Further, von Soden notes that the K<sup>r</sup> group, which was a minority among the Byzantine MSS in the twelfth century, predominated by the fifteenth. "Denn in s XIII mit 304 die Evv enthaltenden Handschriften bilden die K<sup>r</sup>-Codd nur eben 1/10, in s XIV mit 265 schon beinahe 1/3, in s XV mit 126 beinahe 1/2 der Gesamtproduktion. In s XII sind es nur 19 unter 306 Handschriften" (*Schriften* 1, 2 763).

<sup>134</sup> See previous note and the comment by von Soden. I wish to give credit to Ralston for pointing me to von Soden's comment as well as making the connection between the K<sup>r</sup> group and the *Majority Text*.

<sup>135</sup> For a discussion of the versional evidence see Wallace, "Majority Text and Original Text" 160–162.

<sup>136</sup> For an extended discussion of the patristic evidence see *ibid.* 162–166.

<sup>137</sup> Fee, "Revival" 26. Fee's opinion has not changed in fifteen years, as is evident by his repeating the statement in the revision of this article (G. D. Fee, "The Majority Text and the Original Text of the New Testament," *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* [ed. E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993] 186 n. 8).

<sup>138</sup> See Aland, "Text of the Church?"



of Lucian's students.<sup>139</sup> (3) The patristic evidence is also valuable in another way. On several occasions patristic writers do more than quote the text. They also discuss textual variants. Holmes points out that

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." Similarly, at Matthew 5:22 he notes that "most of the ancient copies" do not contain the qualification "without cause" . . . which, however, is found in the great majority today.<sup>140</sup>

The combined testimony of the external evidence—the only evidence that the MT defenders consider—is that the Byzantine text apparently did not exist in the first three centuries. The Greek MSS, versions and Church fathers provide a threefold cord not easily broken. To be sure, isolated Byzantine readings have been located—but not the Byzantine text.<sup>141</sup> There is simply no shred of evidence that the Byzantine text-type existed prior to the fourth century.<sup>142</sup>

Our discussion of the external evidence would not be complete without a word on the potential value of the Byzantine witnesses. Even within the framework of reasoned eclecticism it is theoretically possible to embrace a

<sup>139</sup> Although MT advocates doubt that the orthodox Chrysostom would have used the text of Lucian, a heretic (cf Pickering, *Identity* 95–96), this is no more surprising than that Martin Luther would use the text of Erasmus

<sup>140</sup> Holmes, "The 'Majority text debate'" 17 For examples of B M Metzger, "Patristic Evidence and the Textual Criticism of the New Testament," *NTS* 18 (1972) 379–400, "Explicit References in the Works of Origen to Variant Readings in the New Testament Manuscripts," *Historical and Literary Studies, Pagan, Jewish, and Christian* (Leiden Brill, 1968) 88–103, "St Jerome's Explicit References to Variant Readings in Manuscripts of the New Testament," *New Testament Studies Philological, Versional, and Patristic* (Leiden Brill, 1980) 199–210

<sup>141</sup> The difference between a reading and a text-type is the difference between a particular variant and a pattern of variation For example, although both the NIV and KJV have identical wording in John 1:1, the pattern of variation of the NIV found over a whole paragraph will differ from the KJV No one would argue that a handwritten copy of John 1:1 from c AD 1775 was taken from the NIV—even though its wording would be identical with the wording of the NIV for that verse Yet this is the same kind of argument that MT defenders use for the primitiveness of the Byzantine text Simply because isolated Byzantine readings are found before the fourth century is no argument that the Byzantine text existed before the fourth century They have confused reading with text

<sup>142</sup> The compelling nature of this evidence has caused some MT advocates to recognize that the Byzantine text-type was produced in a corner As Holmes points out, "while it is true that about 90% of extant [Greek] 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" ("The 'Majority text debate'" 17, see pp 16–17 for a succinct summary of the transmissional history that brought about the MT) Pierpont and Robinson, *Original Greek xxx–xxxii*, agree with this assessment, as does Wisselink, *Assimilation* 22, and R Hills, *Defense* 85–86 But all this is to deny normal transmission as well as accessibility—two pillars of the MT theory This recent concession also betrays an affinity these MT champions have with the TR view But instead of Erasmus as the restorer of the original text they have Constantine

small number of distinctively Byzantine readings as authentic. This door is open because no airtight argument against every Byzantine reading has been produced. To be able to disregard completely all Byzantine readings requires proof of at least one of the following: (1) that only extant non-Byzantine MSS stand behind the origins of the Byzantine text form; (2) that the best representatives of the early text-types are still extant; or (3) that the internal evidence against Byzantine readings, in every case, is quite conclusive. But none of these three points has yet been proved. First, it is well known that Hort's famous genealogical argument that demonstrated that the Byzantine text was secondary was not based on actual MSS.<sup>143</sup> Since Hort did not show specifically that extant Alexandrian and Western witnesses were the only MSS employed in the production of the Byzantine text he could not legitimately make the claim that the Byzantine text may be completely set aside.<sup>144</sup> Second, it is an obvious fact that the best extant representatives of the various text-types are not identical with the best representatives of all time. Codex Cantabrigiensis, for example, though it is the best extant representative of the Western text, is highly idiosyncratic. Even Codex Sinaiticus, one of the two best representatives of the Alexandrian text, is Western in the first eight chapters of John.<sup>145</sup> Hence Hort's demonstration that the Byzantine text is secondary is not an adequate basis to disregard every Byzantine reading, since the Byzantine archetype(s) could have been based in part on better Alexandrian and Western MSS than are now extant. Third, a few of the distinctively Byzantine readings have sufficient internal credentials to be considered authentic, as even one of the editors of the *UBSGNT*<sup>4</sup> has argued.<sup>146</sup>

If the Byzantine text is an edited text in the direction of harmonizations, conflation, and smoother and longer readings, then we must ask why it is not always this way. The *Majority Text*, for example, has 657 shorter readings than the *NA*<sup>26</sup>. Not all of these can be easily discounted on the basis of internal criteria. *Ex hypothesi* some may well be due to the use of better Alexandrian and Western MSS in the Byzantine region than are extant today. Nevertheless in light of the poor credentials of the Byzantine text on demonstrable external grounds (viz. no evidence for its existence in the first three centuries), to argue for the authenticity of a Byzantine reading in any given instance needs compelling internal evidence on its side.

<sup>143</sup> Cf E C Colwell, "Genealogical Method Its Achievements and Its Limitations," *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Leiden Brill, 1969) 63-83

<sup>144</sup> This also could not be demonstrated today for the simple reason that there are not enough pre-fourth-century MSS extant even to cover the whole NT

<sup>145</sup> Cf G D Fee, "Codex Sinaiticus in the Gospel of John A Contribution to Methodology in Establishing Textual Relationships," *NTS* 15 (1968-69) 23-44

<sup>146</sup> Cf J Karavidopoulos, "Μερικες Συντομες Γραφες του Εκκλησιαστικου Κειμενου της Καινης Διαθηκης," *Δελτιον Βιβλικον Μελετων* 13 (1984) 36-40 He calls such readings "Eastern Non-Interpolations" It is perhaps Karavidopoulos' influence that has changed the rating of the Byzantine shorter reading in Phil 1 14 from a "D" to a "B" in *UBSGNT*<sup>4</sup>

3. *Internal evidence.*<sup>147</sup> MT defenders are usually adamant about the wholesale subjectivity of internal evidence. They argue that "all such generalizations [of scribal habits] tend to cancel each other out."<sup>148</sup> To say that internal criteria are subjective has a flip side: External evidence is allegedly objective. But in reality all MSS are corrupt—although they are not equally so. And that internal evidence can be subjective does not mean that it is all equally subjective. Reasoned eclecticism maintains that several canons of internal evidence are "objectively verifiable,"<sup>149</sup> or virtually so. And where they are, the MT almost always has an inferior reading.<sup>150</sup>

Traditionalists appeal to external evidence—specifically numbers—because this is the only basis on which they can find certainty. Many of them deny the legitimacy of internal criteria because such a method simultaneously elevates human reason and denies their doctrinal position.<sup>151</sup> The author of a recent dissertation defending the MT triumphantly and repeatedly asserts that "this view requires far fewer textual decisions on the part of the individual critic and thus less subjectivity and less dependence upon human reason."<sup>152</sup> Against this, with Gunther Zuntz every reasoned eclectic recognizes that "at every stage the critic has to use his brains. Were it different, we could put a critical slide rule into the hands of any fool and leave it to him to settle the problems of the New Testament text."<sup>153</sup> Zuntz's point places in bold relief a number of (sometimes unstated) assumptions behind the MT theory—namely, (1) that the books of the NT were revered as Scripture as soon as they were penned and, hence,

<sup>147</sup> For a more extended discussion see Wallace, "Majority Text and Original Text" 166–169

<sup>148</sup> Hodges, *Defense* 16 Cf also Pickering "The basic deficiency, both fundamental and serious, of any characterization based upon subjective criteria is that the result is only opinion, it is not objectively verifiable" (*Identity* 93)

<sup>149</sup> See Holmes, "The 'Majority text debate'" 17

<sup>150</sup> Wisselink set out to prove that the Byzantine text-type had just as good credentials as the Alexandrian In the end he conceded "The degree of assimilations in B and P45 is strikingly small" (*Assimilation* 87) "The number of dissimilations in P75 is proportionately somewhat greater than the number of dissimilations in the Byzantine manuscripts" (p 89 n 2) And although Wisselink admits the frequent harmonizations in the Byzantine text, he still insists that "the phenomenon of assimilation cannot be used to dismiss the Byzantine manuscripts as secondary" (p 91) One of the weaknesses in the study is the comparison of individual Alexandrian MSS with the Byzantine text (as displayed in the Hodges-Farstad text) All textual critics would admit that assimilation occurs across the board, but it occurs in the Byzantine MSS as a whole far more frequently than it does in the Alexandrian MSS as a whole Further, it occurs in individual Byzantine MSS far more frequently than in individual Alexandrian MSS

<sup>151</sup> To be applauded are two recent works in which internal criteria are employed on behalf of the MT text Wisselink, *Assimilation* (see our critique in the previous note and passim), and J P Heil, "The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress (John 7,53–8,11) Reconsidered," *Bib* 72 (1991) 182–191 (see my critique, "Reconsidering 'The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress Reconsidered,'" *NTS* 39 [1993] 290–296) Although it is unclear whether Heil is a MT advocate, the only external "argument" he gives is an appeal to the MT ("Story" 191)

<sup>152</sup> R Hills, *Defense* 113, cf also 83, 125 and passim So entrenched is Hills in his fideistic stance that he embraces the MT theory even though this view "imposes impossible strains on our imagination" (*Defense* 89)

<sup>153</sup> G Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum* (London Oxford University, 1953) 12

must have been copied carefully;<sup>154</sup> (2) that the sole motive of most scribes in copying the NT was to preserve what was originally written;<sup>155</sup> and (3) that, in order for statistical probabilities to work (and in order for internal evidence to be worthless), a good reading is just as likely to come from a bad reading as *vice versa*.<sup>156</sup> All such assumptions are demonstrably untrue,<sup>157</sup> making internal evidence a necessary part of responsible textual criticism.

Ironically, although MT theorists want objectivity and certainty, even they cannot avoid making decisions on internal grounds, for there are hundreds of splits in the Byzantine text where no clear majority emerges. Aland found 52 variants within the MT in the space of two verses.<sup>158</sup> In such cases how are MT advocates to decide what is original? It will not do to say that these splits are not exegetically significant. The Byzantine fracture over *echomen/echōmen* in Rom 5:1 is a case in point. If the canons of internal evidence are "demonstrably fallacious,"<sup>159</sup> then in several hundred places—many of them significant—this theory is without a solution and without certainty.

How do MT defenders proceed in such a case? "Where a majority reading does not exist we are obliged to use a minority reading, and defend our choice as best we may."<sup>160</sup> But without any kind of guidelines the effort becomes "wearisome and frustrating."<sup>161</sup> MT proponents' frustration in such cases is especially compounded both because they have rejected the standard canons of internal criticism and because whatever canons they use are, by their own admission, wholly subjective. That they have not developed anything that resembles internal canons is a tacit admission that they have not contemplated their own views beyond the horizon of a fideistic apologetic.<sup>162</sup>

Furthermore, if internal criteria are wholly subjective, then MT advocates should be able easily to defend MT readings and give plausible reasons for such readings *seriatim*. To be sure, they do defend an occasional reading here or there. But there is no large-scale effort to interact with the intrinsic and transcriptional evidence. This too is a tacit admission that the traditional text really is indefensible on internal grounds, which in turn is a concession that internal evidence is not altogether subjective.

<sup>154</sup> Pickering, *Identity* 99–110

<sup>155</sup> This is urged in spite of the evidence that liturgical and other influences were at work

<sup>156</sup> Hodges, *Defense* 6

<sup>157</sup> Cf e.g. Fee, "Critique", Wallace, "Second Thoughts" 280–282

<sup>158</sup> Aland, "Text of the Church" 136–137, commenting on 2 Cor 1 6–7a Even Pickering admits the problem ("More 'Second Thoughts'" 2, *Identity* 150)

<sup>159</sup> Pickering, *Identity* 137

<sup>160</sup> Pickering, "Blasphemed" 1

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid* 8

<sup>162</sup> Hodges and Farstad are of course exceptions to this indictment. But, as we have seen, their applications of internal canons resulted in scores of minority readings

In sum, the MT theory's tenet that internal criteria are wholly subjective not only makes unwarranted assumptions about the objectivity of external evidence but also backfires in those places where there is no majority text. That there is little written from MT quarters on textual problems involving a split in the Byzantine text unmasks the fundamentally dogmatic nature of their theory, for they have not grappled with the issues where doctrine is silent.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In historical investigation one looks for a probable reconstruction on the basis of available evidence—both external and internal. There is always a degree of doubt, an element of subjectivity. But this does not give us the right to replace the probable with the possible. Any approach that does so is operating within the constraints of an *a priori*. Yet, as we have seen, the doctrinal *a priori* of the traditionalists is both bibliologically schizophrenic (for it does not work for the OT) and without a decent exegetical basis. Stripped of this fideistic stance, the traditional-text theory is just barely within the realm of historical possibility.

#### V. EPILOGUE

I conclude this essay with a fourfold challenge to my former mentors, Arthur L. Farstad and Zane C. Hodges, as well as to my fellow evangelicals who embrace the traditional text. First, in order to gain credibility in NT scholarship at large you must demonstrate that the traditional-text hypothesis is not based, in its present iteration, on an *a priori* assumption. As much evidence as you produce on behalf of your view, the nagging question that refuses to go away is: Is the MT theory probable? Does it have a reasonable, historical basis? Can the data really be explained adequately on this theory? That there are, to my knowledge, no nonconservatives who embrace the MT is a tacit indication that the nontheological arguments on behalf of the theory fail to convince. At bottom—whether stated or not—persuasion to the view seems ultimately to depend on a prior doctrinal conviction. But if a theological *a priori* has no place in textual criticism, or if you claim that the theory can stand without adherence to one, then why are all MT defenders conservative? Further, why do you constantly solicit support among conservatives by the use of theological “scare tactics”?<sup>163</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Inerrancy and preservation are increasingly held in front of the members of the Majority Text Society as vital to the view. Cf. Pickering “Mark 16 9–20” (where the sole argument is theological), Majority Text Society brochure entitled “What is the Majority Text Society” (n d), in which the basic pitch for potential members is theological, Borland, who essentially argues that the text-critical theory that best affirms an inerrant text is the one to follow (“Re-examining”) Farstad recently took the doctrinal appeal to a large lay audience, arguing that most modern translations are theologically corrupt, even to the point of omitting the resurrection in Mark 16

Second, defend the internal plausibility of MT readings with scores of significant examples. Show that such readings have at least a modicum of compelling force. Indeed, the major desideratum for the MT theory is the production of a textual commentary where readings are defended both externally and internally—a desideratum called for by one of your own.<sup>164</sup>

Third, publish in the trade journals. Dialogue with the rest of us, not just with yourselves. There are two aspects to this request. (1) Make a substantive contribution to our field without harping on your theoretical agenda. There is much work to be done in the Byzantine minuscules. Produce studies on various Byzantine MSS (there has been enough  $\kappa$ B bashing), for only in this way can you see the Byzantine text in its proper light. Arguments that compare individual Alexandrian MSS with the Byzantine text as a whole<sup>165</sup> are as irrelevant and illogical as the question, "Is it hotter in Arizona or in the summer?" Only by collating individual Byzantine MSS can you rid yourselves of seeing the Byzantine text in a glowingly composite light. MT champions, of all people, should be most interested in this work. Yet, surprisingly, few if any MT advocates worked on the International Greek New Testament Project for Luke. It is not too late to lend a hand on John. (2) Once you have completed this apprenticeship then you might gain a hearing for your views. Only then should you promote your views in the standard academic forums.

Finally, do not allow the intended results to be your ultimate guide. Do not be so staunchly defensive of majority readings. Even on a statistical basis, it is impossible for the majority always to be right. To argue this way—or at least to be rather vague about MT corruptions—prejudices you from the start and gives your entire endeavor an amateurish hue. One is reminded of an analogous comment made by Herbert Youtie, the eminent papyrologist:

It was William James "who defined the difference between the professional and the amateur by saying that the latter interests himself especially in the result obtained, the former in the way in which he obtains it" It is a wise papyrologist who decides to take the professional alternative, for there are many who can use results once they have been obtained, but only a few who know how to obtain them<sup>166</sup>

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(a claim that does not, strictly speaking, square with the facts of the passage, there is no resurrection *appearance* to the disciples if Mark's gospel ends at 16:8, but the resurrection is still there)

<sup>164</sup> Van Bruggen called for such a textual commentary in 1976 to accompany the *Majority Text* (*Ancient Text* 39), but to my knowledge none is, almost twenty years later, forthcoming. Hodges went so far as to claim that "there is no Majority reading (including so-called conflate ones!) which cannot be strongly defended on internal or transcriptional grounds or both" (*Defense* 16). But when Fee challenged him to do this very thing, there was silence ("Rejoinder" 159–160).

<sup>165</sup> Cf. e.g. Wisselink's discussion of harmonizations (*Assimilation*) or Pickering's discussion of conflations (*Identity* 171–202).

<sup>166</sup> H. C. Youtie, *The Textual Criticism of Documentary Papyri: Prolegomena* (Institute of Classical Studies (Bulletin Supplement 33, 2d ed., London: University of London, 1974) 16).

The traditionalists distinguish themselves from all other textual critics in that their theory is controlled by results, not method. This, I maintain, is both amateurish and hence—for many MT advocates—betrays a profound ignorance<sup>167</sup> of the entire field.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Cf e.g. Fee's comments about Pickering's deep misunderstanding of our discipline in "Review Article" passim. Note also Pierpont and Robinson's confusion in their attempt to use quantitative analysis (*Original Greek* xv–xvi, 495). Quantitative analysis has to do with the percentage of variation agreement between at least two MSS (in general, scores of variants are in view and only a few MSS), whereas Pierpont and Robinson think it refers to the number of MSS that agree on a given variant (thus only a handful of variants are in view, coupled with a great number of MSS). Quantitative analysis, legitimately applied, can help to indicate which MSS stand in close textual proximity to one another via their shared pattern of readings. But it cannot be used to deny family groupings on the basis of one variant (contra Pierpont-Robinson, *Original Greek* 495). Pierpont and Robinson apparently try to use quantitative analysis to determine whether a particular Byzantine reading has an overwhelming majority of MSS behind it (70% or higher). Indeed in their misapplication of this famous method first articulated by E. C. Colwell, "Method in Establishing Quantitative Relationships between Text-Types of New Testament Manuscripts," *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament* 56–62, only the Byzantine MSS would qualify as a text-type since the Byzantine MSS constitute over 70% of all NT Greek MSS. Obviously if Colwell had meant this he could not have considered the Alexandrian to be a legitimate text-type. Ironically, in Pierpont and Robinson's application, in any given textual problem, if the Alexandrian and/or Western MSS agree with the Byzantine, they would be regarded as belonging to the same text-type. Their explicitly heavy dependence on Colwell in their reconstruction of the text of the Apocalypse calls into question their whole endeavor (*Original Greek* xv–xvi). The worst case of benightedness on a purportedly scholarly level is surely to be found in R. Hills, *Defense*. Although this tome earned the author a doctor of philosophy degree it is filled with every imaginable error. The wholesale lack of working with primary (or even secondary) data, acontextual quotations, misapplied methods, illogic, grammatical solecisms, and typographical errors, if tabulated, would number over one thousand. Such a cavalier attitude toward the topic is attributable to the author's overbearing fideism. No better is G. A. Ripplinger, *New Age Bible Versions* (Munroe Falls, A. V., 1993). The book was not written from a scholarly perspective, but it would be no exaggeration to say that there are thousands of mistakes in it.

<sup>168</sup> This article is a longer version of an essay that originally appeared in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (SD 46, ed. B. D. Ehrman and M. W. Holmes, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). Thanks are due especially to Holmes for his detailed and thorough editing of this paper.