

METHODOLOGY IN NEW TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM¹

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The primary purpose of New Testament (hereafter NT) textual criticism is to restore the original text of the NT. It is necessary because none of the autographs are extant and the copies differ at thousands of places. Crucial is the methodology employed to determine the original reading. In the past many different methods have been employed.² Today there are only three, and it is the purpose of this paper to survey and evaluate them.

The Majority-Text Method

The majority-text method is a scholarly refinement of the theory that the *Textus Receptus* (hereafter *TR*) is the original text.

The *TR* is the Greek NT produced by Erasmus, more specifically his third edition of 1522, which during the following century was so often reprinted that it became “the text received by all.”³

The Majority Text (hereafter *MT*) is the Greek NT which at each place of variation adopts the reading of the majority of extant manuscripts (hereafter *mss.*).⁴ It is virtually identical with the Byzantine text-type, one of four large groups of Greek *mss.*, versions, and patristic quotations scholars have identified. It is quite similar to the *TR*, differing in 300+ relatively insignificant places.

The primary defense of the *TR* is dogmatic. God gave to the Greek church the task of preserving the original text, which it did in all but a few instances. God guided Erasmus to print the text of the Greek church--*with a few necessary corrections from the Latin Vulgate which alone occasionally preserved the original reading!* The logic of faith requires that the NT of the Reformation *must* be the original and that the text translated by the King James Version (hereafter *KJV*) *must* be the original because God so greatly blessed the Reformation and the *KJV*. Inasmuch as God verbally inspired the Bible he *must* have verbally preserved it. Modern textual criticism is naturalistic, modernistic, and unbelieving.⁵

¹Presented originally to the Ph.D. Colloquium at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary on May 5, 1987. Used by permission.

²Conveniently surveyed in E. J. Epp, “Eclectic Method in New Testament Textual Criticism: Solution or Symptom?,” *HTR* 69 (1976): 217-44.

³Thus the boast in the third Elzevir edition of 1633: “Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum: in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus.” Cited by B. M. Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 106, who also describes and evaluates (pp. 98-103) Erasmus’ editions. On the one hand Erasmus did not have access to early, good-quality manuscripts and could not have produced a good-quality text. On the other he did a poor job with what he had so that his Greek NT is one of the least creditable of his many works.

⁴Z. C. Hodges and A. L. Farstad (eds.), *Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985).

⁵These are some of the arguments of E. F. Hills, *King James Version Defended*, 3rd ed. (Des Moines: Christian Research Press, 1979). See especially pp. 1-3, 62-67, 86, 106-107, 111-113, and 191-202. One might also note the presence in Hills’ book of chapters on “A Short History of Unbelief” and “A

The defense of the MT also occasionally resorts to dogmatic assertion, but for the most part it employs rational arguments and is therefore worthy of serious consideration by the scholarly world. The most important proponents of this position are Wilbur Pickering,⁶ his teacher Zane Hodges,⁷ and Jakob van Bruggen.⁸ Their most important argument is that the Byzantine type of text which is found in 80-90% of extant mss. could never have become the dominant text unless it was the original. The following quotation will show the drift of their argument.

It ought to be taken for granted that, barring some radical dislocation in the history of transmission, a majority of texts will be far more likely to represent correctly the character of the original than a small minority of texts. This is especially true when the ratio is an overwhelming 8:2. Under any reasonably normal transmissional conditions, it would be for all practical purposes quite impossible for a latter text-form to secure so one-sided a preponderance of extant witness. . . .

Short History of Modernism.” Despite his heavy reliance upon dogmatic arguments, Hills is probably the best educated (Th.D. Harvard) and most competent recent defender of the TR/KJV. Others include: Andrew Brown, Traditional Text of the New Testament (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1980); D. O. Fuller (ed.), Which Bible?, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International, 1975); R. V. Paulson, Eeny-Meeny-Miny Mo (Grand Rapids: Which Bible? Society, 1977); J. J. Ray, God Wrote Only One Bible, rev. ed. (Eugene, Or: Eye Opener, 1980); P. S. Ruckman, Bible Babel, rev. ed. (Pensacola: Pensacola Bible Inst., 1981); and D. A. Waite, Case for the Received Text of Hebrew and Greek Underlying the King James Version (Collingswood, N.J.: Bible for Today, 1971).

The New King James Version (1982; hereafter NKJV) is also based upon the TR, but so far there has been no movement among those who have defended the TR to switch to it despite its obvious superiority to the KJV. This fact increases suspicion that the ultimate reason for preferring the TR is not merely preference for the KJV but the notion that it is the only authoritative Bible by which all else must be judged. But what is sacrosanct about the events of 1522 (the date of Erasmus' 3rd ed. which became the basis for the TR) or 1611 (the date of the KJV)? Certainly among conservative Christians no decision at those times in the areas of doctrine, polity, or morals would be allowed to be determinative now. Why should an accident of history be made determinative in the textual field?

There is, however, one very valuable feature of the NKJV. The footnotes indicate the significant places of variation not only between the TR and the most widely used critical text but also between the TR and the MT. Virtually all of the differences among these three may be observed in the apparatus of The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text.

⁶Identity of the New Testament Text, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980).

⁷“A Defense of the Majority-Text” (xeroxed; offered for public sale by the Dalls Theological Seminary Book Store; no date); “Greek Text of the King James Version,” Bib. Sac. 125 (1968): 334-45; “Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Response” [to Gordon Fee--see below], J. Ev. Theol. Soc. 21 (1978): 143-55; “Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Surrejoinder,” J. Ev. Theol. Soc. 21 (1978): 161-64.

⁸The Ancient Text of the New Testament (Winnipeg: Premier, 1970).

This argument is not simply pulled out of thin air. What is involved can be variously stated in terms of mathematical probabilities. . . .⁹

The concept of majority rule certainly has emotional appeal,¹¹ especially in the contemporary Western world, but it is doubtful that it has much relevance to the transmission of texts. To the best of the writer's knowledge no other branch of textual criticism employs it. The principle of genealogy, which to a greater or

⁹Hodges, "Defense," p. 4. At this point Zane Hodges avails himself of the expertise of his brother David, a statistician with the U.S. Army. After presenting much statistical data David Hodges concludes: "Given about 500 manuscripts of which 70% show one reading and 25% another, given a one-third probability of introducing an error, given the same probability of correcting an error, and given that each manuscript is copied twice, the probability that the majority reading originated from an error is less than one in ten. If the probability of introducing an error is less than one-third, the probability that the erroneous reading occurs 75% of the time is even less. The same applies if three, rather than two copies are made from each manuscript. Consequently, the conclusion is that, given the conditions described, it is highly unlikely that the erroneous reading would predominate to the extent that the majority text predominates" (p. 8). He adds one qualification: "This discussion applies to an individual reading and should not be construed as a statement of probability that copied manuscripts will be error free" (p. 9). Then Zane Hodges attempts to show the significance of mathematical probability: "If, for example, in a certain book of the New Testament we find (let us say) 100 readings where the manuscripts divide 80% to 20%, are we to suppose in every one of these cases, or even in most of them, that this reversal of probabilities has occurred? Yet this is what, *in effect*, contemporary textual criticism is saying. For the Majority-text is repeatedly rejected in favor of minority readings. It is evident, therefore, that what modern textual critics are *really* affirming . . . constitutes nothing less than a wholesale rejection of probabilities on a sweeping scale!" (p. 9; emphasis his). Hodges' paper is reproduced in Appendix C of Pickering's *Identity*, pp. 159-169.

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¹¹van Bruggen, "Ancient Text," p. 10, points out that the Bible Societies' text, the one which appears in the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* 3rd ed., and in the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* 26th ed., was determined by majority vote of the members of the committee!

lesser degree is used in all branches of textual criticism, refutes it.¹² Even if it has some validity the crucial question is whether the transmission of the NT text was “reasonably normal” or whether there was “some radical dislocation.” Pickering tries to show that transmission was normal.¹³ To do so he must assume that the books of the NT were recognized as Scripture as soon as they were written, that because they realized they were dealing with sacred texts orthodox scribes copied carefully and made no deliberate changes, that there was a great demand for NT mss. from the beginning, that the autographs survived until at least the third century and were frequently used to make corrections,¹⁴ that the above factors quickly produced a MT, and that minority-text forms were produced by heretical and careless scribes.

None of these assumptions is likely. A study of the canonization of the NT reveals that none of the books now in the NT was recognized as Scripture *in orthodox circles* until the second half of the second century and that some were not so recognized until the fourth century. None of the Apostolic Fathers (ca. 100-150) or Apologists (ca. 150-180) had a concept of a NT or often quote a Christian writing as Scripture. The first to quote extensively NT books as Scripture were Irenaeus (ca. 180), Clement of Alexandria (ca. 190), and Tertullian (ca. 200)--and none of these employed what later became the MT! The fact that so much variation emerged in the second and third centuries (cf. footnote 12) shows that early scribes did not copy carefully and that there was no MT at that time. This seems to have been due to economic and political factors necessitating the use of amateur scribes rather than to orthodoxy or heresy. No text-type is heretical. It is doubtful whether any extant manuscript was substantially altered by a heretic. There are few variant readings which certainly can be labeled as heretical; there are more which appear to be more orthodox than the original!

¹²It is true that B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1881), who employed genealogy to discredit the TR did not construct a stemma. They could not. Too many mss. have perished, and there has been too much mixing of mss. The principle remains valid, however. It clearly shows that numerical preponderance is insignificant.

¹³*Identity*, pp. 110-116.

¹⁴Pickering, *Identity*, p. 111, also makes the point that Asia Minor and Greece, where the Byzantine/MT clearly emerged in the fourth and fifth centuries and then flourished during the Middle Ages, received at least eighteen of the twenty-seven autographs and therefore was in the best position to preserve the original text. Egypt on the other hand received none and was in the worst position. This claim, however, ignores two things. First, if the autographs perished at an early date, Asia Minor and Greece would have no advantage. The likelihood of an early demise of the autographs can be seen from the fact that there is no reference in the whole of patristic literature to the existence of one. Second, there was in Alexandria during the several centuries before and after the writing of the NT a school of textual criticism of the classics. It seems likely that Christian scribes in Alexandria would also possess ability in textual criticism and be in the best position to restore the original text of the NT. It is generally agreed that most of the variant readings known today were produced in the second century and that already in the second century there was a need for scholarly restoration. This is what the Alexandrian type of text appears to be--not an unedited (“neutral”) survival of the original as Westcott and Hort claimed. Most contemporary textual critics believe that the Alexandrian text is nearest to the original but by no means identical with the original. In other words the Alexandrian scribes appear to have done a good but imperfect job of restoration. Most contemporary textual critics would claim no more than this for their own work. By the nature of the case textual criticism produces probabilities, not certainties. The fundamentalist, however, walks by sight and not by faith and craves certainty. The TR and/or MT best provide(s) that.

The claim that the transmission of the Greek NT was “normal” ignores certain historical factors. It ignores the shattering effects of persecution, which was a major factor in the multiplication of variant readings in the second and third centuries. It ignores the decline in the use of Greek in the western portion of the Roman Empire during the third century and following. It ignores the making of translations, the impossibility of always translating literally, and the retranslation into Greek of imprecise translations once the version became more authoritative than the Greek. It ignores the subjugation of the western Empire by the barbarians in the fourth and fifth centuries and the devastating effects of this upon the use of the Greek NT in that area. It ignores the Islamic invasions of the seventh and later centuries and the resulting decline of the Greek NT in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and parts of Asia Minor. In fact the only place where extensive use of the Greek NT survived during the Middle Ages was the Byzantine Empire. It was only natural that Byzantine scribes would use what appears to have had its origin as their local text and that this would become the MT. Prior to the destruction of Constantinople in 1453 Byzantine scribes migrated to Western Europe, where the Renaissance was taking place. They brought with them their Greek NT and introduced the Byzantine text in Europe. It was the only type in use at the time of the invention of printing, and it was inevitable that it would be captured in print.

The MT theorists also ignore or try to explain away the fact that the earliest extant Byzantine mss. is Codex Alexandrinus (A) of the fifth century, that the earliest Byzantine version is possibly the Gothic of the fourth century,¹⁵ and that the earliest Byzantine quotations are found in the writings of Chrysostom (d. 407),¹⁶ or Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394),¹⁷ or Basil the Great (d. 379),¹⁸ or Asterius the Sophist (d. 341).¹⁹ Van Bruggen replies that there were no Christian writers from Asia Minor until the fourth century and that only in Egypt did the dry climate permit the survival of early mss.²⁰ The claim is true, but it does not prove that there were earlier Byzantine/MT witnesses. Pickering claims that “scholars now generally recognize that the ‘Byzantine text-type’ must date back at least into the second century.”²¹ This simply is not true. What is true is that a number of readings previously thought to have only Byzantine attestation have been found in recently discovered papyri dating from the second and third centuries. The fact remains, however, that there is no textual witness prior to the fourth century which has the *pattern of readings* which constitutes the Byzantine or MT.

¹⁵Its textual relationships are not certain, but what is certain is that there is no earlier Byzantine version.

¹⁶The traditional view and that of Westcott and Hort.

¹⁷The conclusion of my forthcoming book.

¹⁸The conclusion of H. H. Oliver, “The Text of the Four Gospels as Quoted in the *Moralia* of Basil the Great,” dissertation Emory Univ., 1961, published on demand by University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

¹⁹The conclusion of a forthcoming work of Gordon Fee.

²⁰*Ancient Text*, pp. 24-25.

²¹*Identity*, p. 119. The best account of the early appearance of Byzantine readings is in Harry Sturz, *Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), pp. 55-69, 145-208. Sturz does not claim originality for the MT, only that Byzantine readings should receive equal consideration with Alexandrian ones.

Pickering further argues that the early “good” (=MT) mss. were read so often that they were worn out, then copied, and then destroyed. The “bad” (=Alexandrian) mss. were rarely used and therefore were enabled to survive.²² This is another assumption for which there is no evidence.²³

It is not surprising therefore that so few contemporary scholars favor the MT. Although the MT advocates, as opposed to their *TR* relatives, attempt to argue rationally and avoid dogmatism, it is nevertheless noteworthy that all of them are of a conservative persuasion. Theology, however, cannot be made a determining factor. It is most significant that a *majority* of the avowedly conservative versions translate a critical text most closely related to the Alexandrian text. These are the New American Standard Bible, the Berkeley/Modern Language Bible, the Living Bible, and the New International Version. Among twentieth century translations only the NKJV stands in the *TR/MT* tradition.²⁴

The Method of Rigorous Eclecticism

Both of the other contemporary methods of NT textual criticism are encompassed by the name ‘eclecticism’. Eclectic methods are not bound to any one ms., or group of mss. (i.e. a text-type), or any one or more principles of textual criticism. The eclectic is free to choose from among the various principles of textual criticism the one or ones she or he believes is or are the most relevant in each instance and then to choose the reading which is favored by that principle or those principles. At this point the majority-text theorist charges subjectivism. Eclecticism is not subjective, however, if in each instance its practitioners provide a rational explanation for their choice of principle(s) and variant reading--one which commends itself to a majority of competent and unbiased scholars.²⁵ Most contemporary NT textual criticism is eclectic because of the realization that no ms. or text-type always contains the original reading and the recognition that no principle of textual criticism is applicable in every instance. Therefore, unless one takes the majority-text route, textual criticism must employ some kind of eclecticism. But what kind?

During the last half century two quite different eclectic methods have emerged. One is called rigorous or thoroughgoing or consistent or impartial or special eclecticism. Its leading proponents, and quite possibly its only committed adherents, are G. D. Kilpatrick, professor emeritus at Oxford University, and his pupil J. K.

²²Identity, pp. 129-130.

²³Of course it is impossible to engage in textual criticism--or any other kind of study--without making assumptions or formulating theories, and no claim is made that this paper is without assumptions. Assumptions and theories must be evaluated in terms of probabilities, which in turn must be determined from the available evidence. Each reader must decide the probabilities of each theory described in this paper.

²⁴One could add the King James II of Jay Green if disposed to treat it as a legitimate translation.

²⁵Because of its technical nature textual criticism must be done by scholars. Informed lay persons, however, can and should evaluate scholarly arguments, and when they have done so they are entitled to an opinion. The same is true of translation, the significance of archaeological findings, historical reconstruction, etc.

Elliott, senior lecturer at the University of Leeds.²⁶ Unfortunately Prof. Kilpatrick and Dr. Elliott have provided neither a systematic description of their methodology nor an edition of the Greek NT. Their textual theory must be dug out of dozens of articles in scholarly journals and *Festschriften*. The only portion of the NT for which there is a rigorously eclectic text is the Pastoral Epistles.²⁷ Prof. Kilpatrick has been working for at least fifteen years on an edition of the NT, but it has not progressed very far and will not be finished during his lifetime. Whether Dr. Elliott will complete it remains to be seen. Whether another disciple will be made or the method will die with Kilpatrick and Elliott also remains to be seen.

The most important principle of rigorous eclecticism is that textual decisions are to be made on the basis of internal evidence alone. The only value of the Greek mss., versions, and Fathers is to identify the variant readings. On several occasions the present writer has heard Prof. Kilpatrick say, "Thou shalt be no respecter of manuscripts!" Note the following published statements.

The decision (about the original text) rests ultimately with the criteria as distinct from the manuscripts, and . . . our evaluation of the manuscripts, must be determined by the criteria. Accordingly as the value of the witness is subject to the textual criteria, wherever these last speak with certain voice, the text must be constituted as the voice indicates and not as general opinion about the value of manuscripts as textual types suggest.²⁸

Decisions about readings must precede decisions about the value or weight of manuscripts.²⁹

The age and number of manuscripts supporting that reading are not usually considered in this method; no particular manuscript is favored nor is there any predilection for any specific text.³⁰

The eclectic method . . . tries to arrive at the true reading, untrammelled by discussion about the weight of manuscript support.³¹

²⁶The writer of this paper also studied under Prof. Kilpatrick, but unlike Dr. Elliott he came away unconvinced. One could argue that this writer's earlier studies with Dr. Bruce Metzger (see p. 6) biased him against Prof. Kilpatrick's methodology. He himself would claim that, inasmuch as he is the only person who has studied under both these scholars, he is in a unique position to evaluate their theories.

²⁷J. K. Elliott, The Greek Text of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, vol. 36 of Studies and Documents (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 1968). Of course this volume also describes methodology. Prof. Kilpatrick produced a Greek-English Diglot for the Use of Translators (printed for private circulation by the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1958-64) for about half the books of the NT, but he insists that this does not reflect his own textual ideas.

²⁸Kilpatrick, "Western Text and Original Text in the Gospels and Acts," JTS 44 (1943): 25-26.

²⁹Kilpatrick, "Greek New Testament Text of Today and the Textus Receptus," in New Testament in Historical and Contemporary Perspective: Essays in Memory of G. H. C. Macgregor, ed. Hugh Anderson and William Barclay (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 206.

³⁰J. K. Elliott, "In Defence of Thoroughgoing Eclecticism in New Testament Textual Criticism," Restoration Q. 21:2 (1978): 96.

³¹Elliott, Greek Text of Timothy and Titus, p. 11.

The primary reason for this total disregard of ms. evidence is the claim that there was such an extensive deliberate correction of the text of the NT in the second century that the possibility of direct and orderly transmission was forever destroyed. The main culprits were Atticizing scribes. It is generally known that the NT was written in Hellenistic or Koine (common) Greek, the language of the common people in the first century. What is not so commonly known is that during the second century there was a revival of Attic (classical) Greek in learned and pseudo learned circles. According to Prof. Kilpatrick there was a rewriting of the text of the NT to make it conform to Attic standards. Because of the progression of canonization, such deliberate changes could no longer be made after the early third century.³²

In addition to leading to the disregard of external (ms.) evidence, the above theory of the history of the text has led to three concrete principles of textual criticism, all in the category of internal evidence. First, the reading most in accord with each author's style is to be preferred.³³ A word or construction he does not use elsewhere is rejected. Lexicons, concordances, and grammars are used to determine such matters. There is nothing unique about this principle, however. It is used, less rigorously perhaps, by the other school of eclecticism. Second, a semitic as opposed to Hellenistic reading is to be preferred on the assumption that the Jewish writers of the NT would naturally have produced such readings but that Hellenistic and Byzantine scribes would just as naturally have altered them.³⁴ And third, following from the preceding paragraph, a Hellenistic reading is to be chosen over an Attic one.

Still another principle which has nothing to do with any of the above is that the longer reading is more likely to be the original³⁵--just the opposite of the opinion of most textual scholars. Here the rigorous electics have been influenced by A. C. Clark who claimed that the omission of whole lines due to homoeoteleuton (similar endings of words) was a significant factor in copying mss.³⁶

As a result of the application of their principles Kilpatrick and Elliott have chosen many readings which have never before appeared in *any* edition of the Greek NT and which have only the most meager ms. support. In several instances they have adopted a reading which is found in only one late Byzantine minuscule ms.³⁷ Thus far they have refused to resort to conjecture, which, however, some of their critics insist is the next logical step.

³²The material in this paragraph is taken from Kilpatrick's "Atticism and the Text of the Greek New Testament," in Neutestamentliche Aufsätze, Festschrift für Josef Schmid, ed. J. Blinzler, O. Kuss, and F. Mussner (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1963), pp. 125-137.

³³Elliott, Greek Text of Timothy and Titus, pp. 7-8.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 7-10. For some examples see Kilpatrick, "Greek NT Text of Today," pp. 194-5.

³⁵Elliott, Greek Text of Timothy and Titus, pp. 6-7 and Kilpatrick, "Greek NT Text of Today," pp. 195-6.

³⁶Descent of Manuscripts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918). It is interesting to note that in Acts of the Apostles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), Clark virtually abandoned the claim.

³⁷In reviewing Elliott's Greek Text of Timothy and Titus, G. D. Fee has written: "He not only differs 141 times from the TR . . . but also 121 times from the [United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament] . . . Sixty-seven of Elliott's readings occur for the first time in any critical text (twenty-two are supported by only one or two witnesses); on the other hand, he agrees forty-four times with the TR against the UGT." JBL 89 (1970): 505. Emphasis his.

The rigorous eclectics claim that a great virtue of their approach is that it gives a reasoned explanation of every choice of a variant reading.³⁸ This is true. The implication that the other type of eclecticism fails to do this is false. It is not without significance that the other type has produced the only textual commentary.³⁹ Rigorous eclecticism should be further commended for presenting concrete examples to support its claims rather than dealing in theoretical possibilities. The other kind of eclecticism needs to do more of this. Nevertheless rigorous eclecticism has the following weaknesses.

First, it has an erroneous view of the history of the text of the NT. To claim that all deliberate changes took place before 200 is most unlikely. All but a handful of the extant mss. were produced after that date, and in these mss. there are a host of singular readings⁴⁰ which are best explained as deliberate changes. To claim that there was a wholesale Atticizing of the NT before 200 is preposterous. It is unlikely that very many of those who copied Christian writings in the second century were scholars who were interested in or able to produce Attic Greek. A better explanation for the proliferation of variant readings in the second century is that for reasons of political and economic necessity Christians were forced to employ amateur scribes. Until the books of the NT attained canonical status there would have been little incentive to improve their text, and there is no evidence for such status before 150-180. Therefore there was neither the time nor the necessary conditions for the thorough Atticizing of the NT which rigorous eclecticism envisions.

Second, it is too optimistic in its claim to be able to judge variant readings on the basis of an author's style. Good authors vary their style and vocabulary. Just because an author does not elsewhere use a certain word or construction does not mean that he could not in the instance under consideration. Style is the most tenuous of all the criteria.

Third, Kilpatrick and Elliott ignore the fact that Atticism was only one factor among many which were at work in the ms. tradition. It seems as likely that scribes would have replaced an unfamiliar Attic term with a familiar Hellenistic one as vice versa. Scribes immersed in the LXX may have been more likely to produce a semitism than to eliminate one.

Fourth, rigorous eclecticism has failed to appreciate the value of individual mss. and text-types. It is true that none preserves the original text in *every* instance, but this fact by no means implies that all are *equally* corrupt. Even Elliott's text of the Pastorals agrees more often with the Alexandrian reading than any other.⁴¹ It is important to know which mss. are most often right because in many instances internal considerations are not decisive.

Fifth, the method under discussion is applicable only to a limited number of places of variation and to a comparatively unimportant kind of variation. At least most of the variant readings thus far discussed by Prof. Kilpatrick and Dr. Elliott consist of such things as the use of synonyms, which tense the author used, variation in particles and conjunctions, whether to read the compounded form of the verb--most of which may be looked upon as stylistic variations which do not greatly affect the meaning of the text.

³⁸Elliott, "In Defence of Thoroughgoing Eclecticism," p. 98.

³⁹B. M. Metzger, Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, corr. ed. (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1975).

⁴⁰Most singular readings (i.e. ones which appear in no other ms.) are presumed to be the result of an error in copying or the deliberate change of the scribe of the ms. in which they appear rather than transmission from previous mss.

⁴¹Greek Text of Timothy and Titus, pp. 241-4.

Sixth, rigorous eclecticism gives much more weight to the Byzantine type of text than the usual reconstruction of the history of the text allows. On the basis of this theory the Byzantine reading is as likely to be the original as any other despite the late date and internal inferiority of that text.⁴²

In conclusion, rigorous eclecticism may be eclectic in the sense of freedom to choose any variant reading, but it is not eclectic in terms of freedom to apply any and all of the generally recognized principles of textual criticism. It has chosen to limit itself to internal evidence and within that area primarily to intrinsic probabilities (what the author likely write). In the opinion of the present writer it ought to be referred to as stylistic criticism and the term 'eclecticism' reserved for the other kind of eclecticism to which attention is now given.

Rational Eclecticism

In terms of the number of adherents and the influence upon Greek texts and translations thereof, rational or reasoned or moderate or general eclecticism is by far the most important of the three methodologies. The text which is set forth in both the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* (3rd cor. ed. 1983) and the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed. 1979) is the product of this theory. So also are the texts translated by the RSV, NASB, NEB, NIV, GNB, JB, NJB, and NAB. Perhaps the leading proponents of this methodology are Bruce Metzger⁴³ and Kurt Aland.⁴⁴ Others include E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee.

The basic principle of rational eclecticism is that equal weight should be given to external and internal evidence. The particular principles of textual criticism included in each of these may be seen on the attached guide entitled "Evaluation of Variant Readings according to the Theory of Rational Eclecticism," which the writer of this paper uses in his textual criticism classes.

The virtue of rational eclecticism is that it considers *all* the evidence. It considers every principle which has commended itself to most textual critics. Of course not all principles are valid in every instance, and it is necessary to determine which ones are valid and which of these are the most important. In every instance rational justification is required.

The validity of the method depends in part--but only in part--upon the claim that the Alexandrian type of text most often contains the original reading. It is not possible to justify that claim here, except to say that most of the earliest manuscripts are Alexandrian and that internal evidence often supports the Alexandrian readings.

Conclusion

⁴²For elaboration upon some of the above criticisms and for additional ones see G. D. Fee, "Rigorous or Reasoned Eclecticism--Which?" in *Studies in New Testament Language and Text. Essays in Honour of George D. Kilpatrick*, ed. J. K. Elliott, vol. 44 of Supplements to Novum Testamentum (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), pp. 174-97; E. J. Epp, "Eclectic Method," pp. 211-57; and Dowell Flatt, "Thoroughgoing Eclecticism as a Method of Textual Criticism," *Restoration Q.* 18:2 (1975): 102-114.

⁴³*Text of the New Testament*, especially pp. 207-46; and *Textual Commentary*, pp. xxiv-xxviii.

⁴⁴Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, trans. E. F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans and Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), especially pp. 275-311.

Textual criticism has never been, is not now, and will not likely ever be an exact science. Mathematical, scientific-type certainly is not possible. The textual critic deals in terms of probability. The majority-text method and that of rigorous eclecticism do not offer a high degree of probability. Rational eclecticism does. Nevertheless some of those who practice it are not satisfied with it and look upon it as an interim method.⁴⁵ On the other hand openness to new evidence and new ways of employing evidence is commendable and the essence of responsible scholarship. On the other scholars are too prone to conclude that unless they keep bringing forth radically new theories they are failing in their calling. Rational eclecticism is the product of a century of scholarly endeavor. There will always be room for difference of opinion about the choice of a variant reading here or there, but it appears unlikely that there will be a major change in textual theory in the foreseeable future--or that there should be.

⁴⁵K. W. Clark, "Effect of Recent Textual Criticism upon New Testament Studies," in Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology, eds. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1956), p. 404: "It [rational eclecticism] is the only procedure available to us at this stage, but . . . it is a secondary and tentative method. It is not a new method or a permanent one. . . . The eclectic method, by its very nature, belongs . . . to a day like ours in which we know only that the traditional theory of the text is faulty but cannot yet see clearly to correct the fault." The same idea is inherent in E. J. Epp's "Twentieth Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism," JBL 93 (1974): 386-414, especially 403-4.