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## The Chief Principles of New Testament Textual Criticism

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## The Chief Principles of New Testament Textual Criticism.

In making the somewhat ambitious attempt of presenting in a brief article an account of the fundamental principles of textual criticism with respect to the New Testament, I am aware that many a reader will find some things not touched on which he would like to see treated; but considerations of space simply make it unavoidable that some material be omitted. All who would like to give this matter further study will find excellent guides in the following books: *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Vol. II. Introduction and Appendix by B. F. Westcott and J. F. O. Hort); *Einfuehrung in das griechische Neue Testament*, by E. Nestle, rewritten by von Dobschuetz; *Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, by B. Warfield; *Textkritik des Neuen Testaments*, by C. R. Gregory; *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, by A. T. Robertson; and *The Four Gospels*, by B. H. Streeter.

If we had the autographs of the apostles and evangelists, this article would be as superfluous as a dissertation on the topic that man is a living being. Again, if there were only one manuscript extant in which the text has come to us, textual criticism would play a very unimportant rôle, if it would be called for at all. We should merely carefully print this one manuscript and the task would be finished. Both conditions do not obtain. The autographs are lost; most likely they consisted of papyrus, which is fragile, and were, as has been said, literally "read to pieces" by their possessors. But we have thousands of manuscripts, written before the age of printing, in which the text of the New Testament has come down to us. How different is the situation for the New Testament if we compare it, *e. g.*, with that of the works of the Greek poet Aeschylus. The oldest manuscript of his works which we have dates from the tenth century of our era (the Medicean at Florence). There are other manuscripts containing his extant works, but they are much later, and, what must be carefully

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noted, they are simply copies of said tenth-century manuscript (although some critics are willing to give them a more independent status). Aeschylus is held to have died about 450 B. C. Think of the vast span of time from his death to the copying of the oldest manuscript which we have of his tragedies. In the New Testament field we meet not only a truly amazing number of manuscripts, but we find that some of them are very old, separated from the age of the apostles by less than a century. I have here in mind especially the so-called Beatty Collection of papyri, which was lately brought to England and is said to contain manuscripts written in the third century, while one of them, we are told, was written as early as the first half of the second century, that is, only a few decades after the death of John the Apostle. The great number and the great variety of manuscripts of the New Testament, together with the versions in other tongues than the Greek and the quotations of the sacred text by early writers, have placed us in a very happy position, but constitute also our problem.

The old copies differ from each other in some respects, as is simply unavoidable, unless God performed a miracle every time the text of the New Testament was transcribed. What is surprising is not that there are many different readings, but that most of them are merely due to faulty copying, introducing errors which can at once be detected as such, and that but very few of these variant readings have any bearing on doctrine. It has been well said that we should have all the doctrines of the New Testament left intact even if we had to follow the most imperfectly written manuscript. In general, we must remember that this discussion has nothing to do with the doctrine of inspiration, because it was only the original autographs that were inspired and covered by the divine promise of infallibility. The copies present the inspired text to the extent to which they reproduce the original.

Naturally it is very important that, as we read our Greek New Testament and notice that the manuscripts differ in a number of passages, we should be able to determine which is the original reading. In most cases we shall be able to reach definite conclusions. Here and there, owing to human weakness, to lack of acumen and insight, we shall have to be satisfied with probabilities. When we engage in studies of this nature, we have to thank a small group of scholars for putting at our disposal the material enabling us to reach positive decisions. These men are chiefly Tischendorf, Gregory (an American who, however, became professor at Leipzig), Weiss, and von Soden, of Germany, and Tregelles, Scrivener, and Westcott and Hort, of England. The labors of the textual critics are not invested with the glamor attaching to works in which interesting new theories are propounded and defended. These scholars carefully list the readings of the various manuscripts and then endeavor to decide which are the

correct ones; and when they have finished and put the New Testament on our desk, we hardly notice the tremendous amount of patient labor which they spent on their task. But they, and not the higher critics with their often fantastic suggestions, arrived at not so much by dint of hard work as through enticing flights of the imagination, are the real benefactors of the theologian, anxious, as he is, to obtain the genuine text of the New Testament.

When we come to view the principles which must guide us in choosing between several variant readings, the first thing to do is to see in which manuscripts the respective readings are found. The principle which has to do with this point can be worded thus, "That reading is likely to be correct which is found in the best manuscripts." The question at once presents itself, Which are the best manuscripts? By common consent Codex Vaticanus (B) is one of them. It is, for one thing, a very carefully written manuscript, containing fewer errors due to neglect and haste than most other manuscripts. Again, it is the oldest one of the so-called great uncials which we possess. Uncial manuscripts are those which are written in capital letters, often called "majuscules." While the exact date of its writing is not known, experts hold that it originated around 330. There is no manuscript of the New Testament which commands our respect quite in the same degree as this famous codex. It is, however, not correct in every detail. Here and there a palpable error occurs, and hence it would be wrong for us simply to follow this codex. But in determining which reading to adopt, we at once ascertain the reading of B.

A close second to B in value is Codex Sinaiticus, discovered by Tischendorf in 1859. Its siglum is  $\aleph$ . As to its precise date, opinions differ somewhat. Some critics think it was written at the same time as B, although by a different scribe; others would date its origin half a century or more later. But at any rate it is a carefully written manuscript, and its readings must be given great weight.

Critics nowadays give special prominence to Codex Bezae (D) for the Gospels and Acts (these are the only books it contains), saying that it represents the readings of the so-called Western text, which, it is held, is the text that obtained quite universally in the second century. For the sake of simplicity I am here leaving other great MSS., such as Codex Ephraemi (C) and Codex Washington (W), out of consideration.

This, then, should be our first concern in making our choice as to the correct reading, to find what the three great manuscripts mentioned say on the passage in question. If they agree, there is one good piece of evidence that the reading they present is the right one. If they do not agree, it may be difficult for us to apply the principle under consideration. The peculiar circumstances of the case will have to decide. Naturally if B and D oppose  $\aleph$ , the preference lies

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with their reading; if  $\aleph$  and D oppose B, we may likewise let the majority rule. But if B and  $\aleph$  are ranged together against D, we are in a quandary and had better leave the point undecided. The same advice holds for the situation where each one of the three has a reading differing from that of the others.

The second principle to be applied has to do with the territory or territories in which a certain reading is found. It has long been recognized that the extant MSS. must be grouped in classes. Westcott and Hort assumed four of them, the Neutral, the Alexandrian, the Syrian, and the Western. They gave most weight to the Neutral and least to the Syrian, or Byzantine, class. A more scientific and helpful rule has been submitted by Streeter in his book *The Four Gospels*. He tells us that we must think of five centers or territories from which manuscripts have come, namely, Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea, Italy and Gaul (taken together), and Carthage. Having determined in which of these localities the various readings were circulated and adopted, we shall be able to decide which one of them was most universally followed in the ancient Church. The rule can be worded thus, "That reading which was most wide-spread is entitled to our approval." This of course does not apply to the so-called *Textus Receptus*, which was the almost universally accepted text during the Middle Ages. It really represents the text as it was found in Byzantium in the fifth century, and because Byzantium was the capital of the Roman Empire at the time, the text there in vogue came to be the generally accepted one. We must, says Dr. Streeter, go back to the time before the Byzantium text overran the Christian world and see what the situation was in the early centuries. But how are we to determine which readings obtained in the given localities? Streeter mentions the authorities. For Alexandria our best witness is B; for Antioch the Sinaitic Syriac; for Caesarea the Koridethi manuscript ( $\Theta$ ); for Italy and Gaul D, and for Carthage the old Latin manuscripts (*Vetus Latina*, often called *Itala*). Here I have given the manuscripts which Streeter calls "primary authority." His list next submits manuscripts that are a "secondary authority"; then such as are tertiary; furthermore, such as are supplementary; and, finally, the patristic evidence for the readings in the various localities. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 108. I have to add that the table of Streeter from which I have quoted pertains to the texts of our gospels. The Acts and the Epistles are not included in that particular study. It may interest my readers to know which manuscripts Streeter regards as possessing secondary authority: for Alexandria they are Codices  $\aleph$  and L and the early Egyptian translations (Sahidic and Bohairic); for Antioch, the Curetonian Syriac; for Caesarea, a number of minuscule (cursive) manuscripts: 1 and its family, 13 and its family, 28, 565, and 700; for Italy and Gaul, the old Latin manuscripts which are desig-

nated b and a; and for Carthage, the old Latin manuscript e, and Codex W in the Gospel according to St. Mark. The readings of the Beatty Papyri are not yet available for us. Experts who have examined them declare that the form of the text is that of Caesarea, which Professor Sanders of the University of Michigan calls one of the varieties of the Western text. Cf. *Zeitschrift fuer die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1933, Heft 4. It should be added that the papyri of the collection are fragments giving us only a small part of the New Testament. Cf. P. E. Kretzmann, *The New Testament in the Light of a Believer's Research* (1934), p. 47 ff.

In the third place, a principle must be considered which has to do with transcription, that is, with the copying itself. When we have to choose between variant readings, it is important that we attempt to see the situation from the point of view of the scribe or copyist. The third principle, then, which I submit is, "That reading is likely to be correct which cannot easily be traced back to the unintentional alteration of a copyist." Most of our variant readings, as was mentioned before, were due to an oversight on the part of the scribe, who was not careful enough or for some reason was not sufficiently well qualified for the important work he was doing. In comparing the various readings, I ask myself, Which one has all the earmarks of being due to a mere slip of the scribe? Naturally I conclude that such a reading is not the genuine one.

The fourth principle likewise has to do with transcriptional evidence. We know that scribes often were anxious to improve the text, correcting what they thought were evident errors of their predecessors. Having the good intention of preserving the Word of God unimpaired, they introduced changes, thinking that they were actually restoring the text to its pristine purity. That their course, whenever they made changes, was usually a mistaken one we can well see; but this tendency of theirs to correct what they considered erroneous is a factor with which we have to reckon. It would have been far better if they had followed the system of the editors of the Hebrew text, who carefully distinguished between *ketib* and *qere*, *scriptum et legendum*, putting the latter on the margin. But the early Greek copyists had no such system, and if they thought a change was necessary, they at once introduced it in the text. Thus in Matt. 13, 22, where the best manuscripts read: "the care of the world," some scribe felt that the expression was not clear enough and that undoubtedly Jesus had employed greater perspicuity, and so he added a pronoun, making the expression read: "the care of *this* world." A harmless addition, of course, it is, but he altered the text, and, moreover, altered it unnecessarily, the original being perfectly clear. The principle which we arrive at on the basis of this observation is, "That reading is likely to be the correct one of which it seems clear that it has not arisen

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through the intentional alteration of a copyist." Since in making alterations the scribes thought they were improving the text, making it more easy to understand and to interpret, removing difficulties, apparent harshnesses, seeming contradictions, or doctrinal errors, this principle has been expressed thus, "The harder reading is likely to be the correct one" (*lectio difficilior praeferatur vulgatiore* or *proclivi scriptioni praestat ardua*).

There is a fifth principle which can be employed. It may be expressed thus, "That reading is likely to be the correct one which best agrees with the style and diction and other characteristics of the author in question." This point has to do with what is called intrinsic evidence. It is but fair to assume that an author is consistent in his use of idioms and of striking expressions and that *ceteris paribus* he will not without special reason deviate from his accustomed terminology. If we, then, are confronted with variant readings between which we have to choose, we try to determine which one of them agrees best with the usual mode of thought and speech of the author, and the one which can thus qualify will receive our vote. A simple example to illustrate this rule can be taken from Luke 1, 25, where the question is whether the word *Kyrios* (Lord) should be given the article or not. Some manuscripts have it, others omit it. A careful reading of Luke's Gospel will reveal that, when he is speaking of God (without the distinction of Persons), he often uses *Kyrios* without the article, while the article is invariably present when he refers to our Lord Jesus Christ. (Cf. Luke 10, 1; 19, 34, etc.) We shall conclude therefore that the reading without the article is to be preferred in this case. The example is interesting because here we have an instance in which we shall not accept the reading of B, but rather follow that of  $\aleph$  and D. Quite naturally, however, this fifth rule is one which we shall invoke with great moderation and hesitancy, because of the difficulty of saying in a given instance whether or not a certain expression is in keeping with the writer's accustomed habits of expression.

We have now stated five principles which may guide us in choosing between variant readings. They are not all of equal importance, nor can we say that in all cases that come before us we should give the same weight to one particular rule. It may be that at times the second rule will be stressed more by us than the first, and in another case the situation may be just the reverse. Everything depends on the circumstances of the individual case. There may be instances where merely the third or the fourth of the rules given can be employed. In such a case we shall simply ignore the others, although it will be done regretfully. But it is quite safe to say that by careful application of the rules given it will be possible to determine which reading should be adopted.

In conclusion, it may be serviceable if I present an example show-

ing how I conceive of the application of the principles submitted above. Let the reader, if he please, open his New Testament at Luke 10, 1. The question here is whether St. Luke wrote "seventy" or "seventy-two" when he gave the number of the other disciples whom our Lord sent out to prepare the people for His coming. The Nestle text, following Westcott and Hort, puts "two" in brackets. We shall now apply our five principles as far as we can. The first question is, What do the best manuscripts say? A glance at the critical apparatus in Nestle's text tells us that B and D contain the numeral two; hence from the point of view of the best manuscripts "seventy-two" is the right reading. In the second place, we ask, Which reading was the more wide-spread? By means of the critical apparatus we can state that the reading "seventy" was found in Egypt (Codex B here occupies an isolated position among the Alexandrian, or Egyptian, MSS.), in Carthage, and apparently in Caesarea, while the reading "seventy-two" is quite definitely established for Rome and Antioch. This rule favors the reading "seventy." Applying our third principle, which has to do with unintentional alterations, it seems that it was more easy for the scribe, being not overcareful, to omit the "two" than to add it; hence this rule rather speaks for "seventy-two." When we apply the fourth rule, we are confronted with a real difficulty. Was the scribe more inclined to change the "seventy" to "seventy-two" or *vice versa*? It is difficult to see why any one should have intentionally here made a change. Some critics have thought the number 70 would appeal to scribes and appear correct to them because in Gen. 10 seventy nations are mentioned. Others again have held that the number 72 would have special attraction because that would mean six messengers for each one of the twelve tribes of Israel. We shall be compelled to admit that it is impossible for us to apply rule number four in this case. Th. Zahn is of a different opinion. "*Entscheidend fuer die Urspruenglichkeit von 72 duerfte sein, dass eine Abrundung der Zahl 72 auf 70 ebenso begreiflich, wie die Veraenderung der solennen Zahl 70 in 72 befremdlich waere.*" (*Das Ev. des Lukas*, p. 408.) Now how about the fifth rule? Very clearly, the style of the author cannot have any bearing on this question at all. Luke could just as well have written "seventy" as "seventy-two." Some commentators hold that Luke, as a pupil of St. Paul and an eloquent exponent of the doctrine of universal grace, must have written "seventy," because this number represents all the nations of the world according to Gen. 10; but this view we have to reject because it attributes to the holy writer motives in telling the story of the life of Jesus which are not in keeping with historical truthfulness. We have to say, then, that this fifth principle likewise does not yield any results for us. See, then, what we have. Rules one and three favor seventy-two, rule two seventy, while application of the others has merely yielded negative results. On the



basis of the evidence we shall, so it seems to me, have to give the preference to the reading "seventy-two." This example, chosen altogether at random, undoubtedly is not the best one that could have been presented, but I trust that the application of the rules as I have attempted it will give an idea of how the principles of textual criticism can be used.

The above technique, as I intimated before, really applies only to the gospels. For the other books of the New Testament a different classification of manuscripts would have to be drawn up, which I shall not attempt in this article. Everybody can see that this subject is beset with some difficulties, but it should be apparent, too, that it is well possible for us to reach certainty as to the right reading in the various passages of the New Testament where we meet *variae lectiones* and that the grand promise stands secure: *Verbum Dei manet in aeternum*.

W. ARNDT.

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## Zur Lehre von der Reue.

### IV.

Gehört der Vorsatz, von der Sünde abzustehen und Gott zu leben, zu der dem Glauben vorhergehenden Reue? Viele lutherische Lehrbücher bejahen diese Frage. Bei Luthardt heißt es: „Der von Gott gewirkte innere Vorgang der Bekehrung beginnt mit dem Selbstgericht der Buße, welche in der Sinnesänderung besteht, die sich vollzieht in Sündenkenntnis, Sündenschmerz und im ernstlichen Willen, mit der Sünde zu brechen, um Gott zu leben.“ (Luthardt-Zelle, Komp. der Dog., 394.) Luthardt redet hier von der Reue. Er hatte kurz vorher gesagt: „Die Zeichen einer wahren Reue sind (die inneren): Unterlassen des Bösen und Verlangen nach Heiligung.“ Rohnert vertritt dieselbe Ansicht: „Das Mittel aber, durch welches der Heilige Geist die Bekehrung zuwege bringt, ist . . . das Wort Gottes, und zwar zunächst das des Gesetzes, sodann das des Evangeliums. Durch die Predigt des Gesetzes wird dem Menschen die Größe seiner Schuld, sein ganzes sündliches Verderben aufgedeckt und Gottes Zorn über die Sünde, so daß er sie mit innerem Entsetzen erkennt, in seinem Gewissen darüber erschrickt und schmerzliche Reue empfindet (contritio cordis, terrores incussi conscientiae). Er fühlt jetzt seine ganze Fluchwürdigkeit, fühlt die Todes Schmerzen der Sünde, fühlt das Unvermögen, sich selbst zu ändern und vor Gott zu existieren. Da ist sein Herz voll Angst und Leid, voll Gram und Scham, voll göttlicher Traurigkeit (λύπη τοῦ θεοῦ), 2 Kor. 7, 10, voll Abscheu und Haß gegen die Sünde (Ps. 97, 10; 6, 9), die ihn in ein solches Elend gebracht hat. Darum wendet er sich von ihr ab, sagt sich von ihr los. Fern von aller Selbstentschuldigung bekennt er reumütig seine Schuld (Ps. 32, 3, 5; Spr. 28, 13; 1 Hohel.